

From: "Amrolia, Armin" <Armin.Amrolia@vancouver.ca>

To: "[Direct to Mayor and Council - DL](#)"

Date: 4/13/2026 10:01:09 AM

Subject: REFM ACCS - Memo to Mayor and Council - Firehall Arts Theatre Report Back (2026-04-13)

Attachments: REFM ACCS - Memo to Mayor and Council - Firehall Arts Theatre Report Back - 2026-04-13.pdf

Dear Mayor and Council,

The attached memo reports on progress toward the renewal and expansion of the City-owned Firehall Theatre, aimed at improving accessibility and addressing health and safety requirements for performers and staff.

Following Council direction, staff have completed a feasibility study and are working to procure a design team to advance the project design. Staff now anticipate seeking \$15 million in the 2027–2030 Capital Plan, with construction expected to begin in early 2028, subject to Council approval.

Regards,
Armin

Armin Amrolia - Deputy City Manager (she/her)
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x m k y m/Musqueam, S wxwú7mesh/Squamish and s lilw ta /Tsleil-Waututh nations

MEMORANDUM

April 13, 2026

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Donny van Dyk, City Manager
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager
Chris Freek, Director of Civic Engagement & Communications
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Teresa Jong, Administrative Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy, Mayor's Office
Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office

FROM: Armin Amrolia: General Manager, Real Estate, Environment and Facilities Management
Margaret Wittgens: General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Report back on Council Motion directing staff to seek to allocate funding in the 2027-2030 Capital Plan for the renewal and expansion of the Firehall Theatre

PURPOSE

In 2024, a Council [motion](#) directed staff to seek to allocate up to \$10 million in the 2027-2030 Capital Plan for the renewal and expansion of the City-owned Firehall Theatre (also known as the Firehall Arts Centre, identified herein as the "Firehall Theatre").

This memo provides an update on work to date and next steps, prior to recommending project funding via the 2027-2030 Capital Plan.

BACKGROUND

Facility & Society Background

Located at 280 East Cordova Street, the Firehall Theatre is a City-owned facility originally constructed in 1906 as Vancouver's first fire hall and later renovated (1975–1982) and repurposed as a community theatre. Operated by the Society since 1983, the building is listed as a Class B (Significant) heritage site on the City of Vancouver Heritage Registry.

The facility is approximately 1,150 sq. m over three storeys, including a mezzanine and partial basement, and produces and presents theatre, dance, interdisciplinary performances and visual arts exhibitions; hosting more than two hundred performances annually. The Society has been a leader in disability, equity, and Indigenous arts programming for more than forty years.

Accessibility Issues

The facility presents significant operational and accessibility barriers for staff, the public and performers. The building lacks an accessible path of travel to the auditorium, washrooms, and public spaces, as well as barriers to access performance areas and dressing rooms. There is no elevator access to the mezzanine bar, concession, second-floor washrooms, dressing rooms, rehearsal hall, or offices. There are ongoing public complaints about lack of accessibility and state of the building. The facility also does not meet Canadian Theatre Agreement requirements, including the need for separate and conveniently located sanitary facilities for performers, adequate heating and cooling in dressing rooms, and suitable bathing facilities for performers using body make-up.

Council Direction

The Council-approved *Making Space for Arts and Culture Plan (2019)* identified the Firehall Theatre as a key city and Downtown Eastside (DTES) serving venue. With a goal to secure, enhance, and develop vibrant, affordable and accessible arts and culture spaces, the plan sets a city-wide target of securing 800,000 sq. ft. of new, expanded and renewed cultural space. It identifies the Firehall Theatre as a venue requiring urgent renewal to improve its functionality and address serious accessibility issues.

On June 29, 2022 Council approved the 2023-2026 Capital Plan ([RTS 14879](#)), with \$700,000 approved for detailed design of the Firehall Theatre renewal and expansion project, and to advocate for senior government and partner funding, for the priority renovation work, with final funding strategy to be considered as part of the Mid-term Capital Plan Update.

On July 23, 2024, Council approved adjustments to the 2023-2026 Capital Plan as summarized in the July 9, 2024 report: “2023-2026 Capital Plan Mid-Term Update” ([RTS: 16185](#)). The associated motion affirmed the important role of the Firehall Theatre in Vancouver’s arts scene and its value as a community asset, recognized that the Firehall Theatre is in need of renewal and upgrading to enable accessibility, and to ensure its use for generations to come.

Council directed staff to seek to allocate up to \$10 million in the 2027-2030 Capital Plan for the renewal and expansion of the Firehall Theatre, contingent on the submission of a fully costed and completed feasibility study and building assessment that considers both accessibility needs and required upgrades to the building as a whole, and for these to be brought to Council for its consideration prior to final approval of the 2027-2030 Capital Plan in 2026.

Council also encouraged the Firehall Theatre Society (the “Society”) to continue pursuing additional funding commitments from senior levels of government, and directed staff to continue to work diligently to identify funding to begin work as quickly as possible on upgrading the Firehall Theatre for accessibility.

DISCUSSION

Feasibility Study, Costing & Associated Work

Staff has completed a feasibility study, including costing and a building condition assessment, that explores options for upgrading the facility to improve accessibility and to meet the Canadian Theatre Agreement Terms for working environment health and safety. The study included engagement with the Society to better understand facility needs and program requirements. This study, and ongoing consultation with the Society, forms the basis of the planned improvements.

The project is proposed to incorporate a roof replacement planned and funded by Capital Maintenance and provide a means to tie into a future boiler replacement, which is in the planning stages for the co-located Police Museum facility.

Opportunities for incorporation of Musqueam, Squamish or Tsleil-Waututh public art and/or local Indigenous design elements will be explored for the project.

Based on the Feasibility Study, staff anticipate recommending \$15M in project funding to be requested as part of the 2027-2030 Capital Plan. Staff recommend to increase the budget from \$10M to \$15M based on the further design work and to address functional improvements, including extending an existing stairwell and structural upgrade to the mezzanine and to account for cost escalation and heritage-related contingencies. As a City-owned facility that has long been recommended for renewal, there is reputational risk if the City does not pursue a fulsome renewal as well as risk of closure due to its poor condition, lack of accessibility and inability to meet professional theatre standards.

Additional Fundraising

As guided by the 2024 motion, the Society, in coordination with City staff, is actively pursuing senior government and other funding opportunities to offset, supplement and enhance the City's investment in the Firehall Theatre renovation. This includes the City of Vancouver's application to the Government of Canada's Green and Inclusive Community Buildings (GICB) program¹ and the Society's application to the Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund (\$1.5M). Additional applications are underway, including to the Province of B.C.'s Gaming and Arts Council Infrastructure Program (\$500K), alongside targeted approaches to several foundations and major donors, including sponsorship opportunities. The Society is fundraising facility upgrades that will further complement the City's scope, including the addition of accessibility upgrades within the auditorium, seating, lighting, sound and projection equipment.

NEXT STEPS

Staff has issued a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFEOI), prior to issuing a Request for Proposals (RFPs) for a Construction Manager and a Consultant team to lead the renovation.

¹ The \$9.6M project was deemed ineligible due to program restrictions on shared building systems (shared with neighbouring Vancouver Police Museum).

Final project costing will be determined following RFP awards and development of a detailed schematic design. In the interim, staff anticipate recommending \$15M in project funding to be requested as part of the 2027-2030 Capital Plan.

Subject to funding approval through the 2027-2030 Capital Plan, the project is anticipated to commence construction in Q1 2028. Advancing this work responds directly to Council direction and supports a core *Making Space for Arts and Culture* objective by renewing and enhancing a City-owned cultural facility to ensure equitable access and overall accessibility, adherence to professional standards, and long-term public benefit for the Downtown Eastside and Vancouver's broader arts and culture ecosystem.

FINAL REMARKS

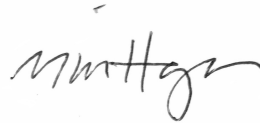
If Council has any questions, please feel free to email either of us and we will work to ensure a response through the weekly Q&A.

Sincerely,



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General Manager, REFM

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