

## City Council

### Notice of Motion

MM14.15	ACTION			Ward: All
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**Protecting and Promoting Independent Live Theatre in Toronto and the Downtown West - by Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Gary Crawford**

*\* Notice of this Motion has been given.*

*\* This Motion is subject to referral to the Economic and Community Development Committee. A two-thirds vote is required to waive referral.*

### Recommendations

Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Gary Crawford, recommends that:

1. City Council request the General Manager, Economic Development and Culture to identify and explore short and long-term actions to support the sustainability and continued viability of independent theatrical spaces in the Downtown West, in consultation with the independent live theatre sector, including but not limited to: the Canadian Actors Equity Association; the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees; the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres; the Toronto Arts Council; the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts; and other interested parties.

### Summary

Toronto is an artistic City. From film, to live music, to the visual arts, to theatre, our City is a hub for artistic creation and expression. Live theatre is an essential part of this cultural makeup, promoting deeply held societal values like freedom of expression, tolerance, and communal experience. From large downtown theatres to small and independent cultural incubators, our theatres are multi-disciplinary spaces, promoting the work of actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, and other performances, and making Toronto a cultural destination. In addition, our theatres are an essential part of our economy, particularly our nighttime economy, intersecting as they do with hotels, restaurants, bars, and other performance venues.

Due to changes affecting our City, especially the rising price of land and rent, our artists and theatres are facing new challenges that require a comprehensive strategy on the part of our municipal government. On the part of artists, low wages and high rents, as well as high levels of student debt for the new generation, have made it difficult to develop a sustainable artistic practice. Exciting start up theatres, storefront spaces, incubators, and rehearsal rooms have closed not just in the downtown, but across the City due to high commercial rents and a lack of supports for emerging artists and spaces.

At the same time, our existing institutions are facing a unique set of challenges. Over the last past number of years, we have lost many independent theatres across our City due to increased cost pressures. For many theatres in the Downtown West, stagnating operating grants on the provincial level limit the amount that theatres can spend on attracting top talent for administration, marketing, and fundraising. High commercial rents are making auxiliary spaces – offices, carpentry shops, rehearsal rooms – increasingly out of reach. And the heritage buildings they inhabit require increasing maintenance and modernization for heating, water, lights, and accessibility standards. As these venerable institutions are helmed by a new generation of artists, we have an opportunity to create a culture that is more inclusive, more diverse, and reflects the City that we have become – but only if we support them in this transition.

Live theatre is an essential part of our City, our economy, and our culture. As we do with many other cultural industries, like film and live-music, it is essential that the City work to support new theatrical spaces, and preserve our existing theatres.

### **Background Information (City Council)**

Member Motion MM14.15