

**Needs Assessment of Accessible
Performance Spaces in the City of
Vancouver and Accessibility Audit:
Final Report**

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Submitted to:

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) was hired by Realwheels and Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture in April 2016 to conduct a *Needs Assessment of Accessible Performance Spaces in the City of Vancouver and Accessibility Audit*.

Project Goals: The overall goals of the project were to:

- Review best practices in accessible and inclusive performance space design;
- Engage key stakeholders in a discussion about the characteristics of fully accessible performance spaces that meet the needs of theatre patrons, performers and technicians with disabilities;
- Identify what is currently working well in the City? What are some of the gaps?
- Develop an accessibility audit checklist which outlines some key considerations that theatre owners and operators should consider when assessing their current level of accessibility, making plans for renovations to an existing facility and/or designing a new performance space.

Research Method: A multi-disability accessibility team was formed and consisted of a SPARC BC staff member, an accessibility sub-consultant who uses a wheelchair, an accessibility sub-consultant who is Hard of Hearing, an accessibility sub-consultant who is partially sighted and an accessibility sub-consultant who is blind. The founding Artistic Director of Realwheels (who also uses a wheelchair) was also recruited to serve as an advisor for the research team. As part of this project we:

- reviewed leading practices around performance space design that consider the accessibility needs of performers and technicians with disabilities as well as patrons with disabilities;
- designed and implemented a community engagement process with key stakeholders from the disability arts and cultural community in Vancouver as well as venue operators;
- updated SPARC BC's accessibility audit tool to incorporate findings from the best practices review and engagement process to develop an accessibility audit checklist specific to performance spaces;
- piloted the accessibility audit checklist during a site visit of the Firehall Arts Centre.

Analysis of Findings: This report summarizes some of the key findings from the best practices review and community engagement process which informed the development of the accessibility audit checklist. The accessibility audit checklist is organized under the following categories:

1. Arriving at the theatre – Drop off/pick up area; public transit; parking; exterior pathways; main entrance; exterior box office.

2. Theatre Patron Areas – Coat check; concession areas; washrooms; wayfinding and lighting; emergency wayfinding; accessible pathways and circulation; ramps; stairs; elevators; seating options; adapted technology and other accessibility supports.
3. Backstage Areas for Performers – Backstage areas; wayfinding and circulation and access to the stage; dressing rooms and washrooms.
4. Technician Areas – Accessible pathways leading to the fly rail, suspension grid, tech booths; accessible control booths.
5. Administrative offices – Back office areas used by staff for overall administration, operations of theatre.

Conclusion: Through piloting the accessibility audit checklist, we found that it presents a comprehensive list of considerations to take into account when designing or retrofitting a performance space with accessibility in mind for patrons, performers, and technicians with disabilities. However, we also identified that there are some other considerations that may need to be considered in conjunction with the checklist that would impact how the checklist is applied to a particular context:

1. The scale of the facility.
2. The age of the building.
3. The role of staff training and innovation.
4. Evolving building standards and technologies.

We would also like to emphasize the key role that willing and engaged theatre venue staff can play in this process. We have found that where there is a will, there is often a way. A recurring theme throughout the project is how significant infrastructure challenges can often be overcome with some minor upgrades and temporary adjustments coupled with eagerness and creative thinking from venue operators.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Project Goals

The Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) was hired by Realwheels and Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture in April 2016 to complete a *Needs Assessment of Accessible Performance Spaces in the City of Vancouver and Accessibility Audit*. The overall goals of the projects were to:

- Review best practices in accessible and inclusive performance space design;
- Engage key stakeholders in a discussion about the characteristics of a fully accessible performance space that meets the needs of theatre patrons, performers and theatre technicians with disabilities;
- Identify what is currently working well in the City? What are some of the gaps?
- Develop an accessibility audit checklist which outlines key considerations that theatre owners and operators should consider when assessing their current level of accessibility, making plans for renovations to an existing performance space and/or designing a new performance space.

Structure of the Report

This introductory section is followed by a description of the research method used during this project. The findings section describes the key findings of the best practices review, community engagement process as well as the pilot audit with the accessibility audit checklist. Our conclusion outlines some overall lessons learned through this project and provides the detailed accessibility audit checklist. The Appendix summarizes the specific audit findings for the Firehall Arts Centre.

3.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Realwheels and Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture for the opportunity to work with them to further their goals of improving access and inclusion for artists and technicians with disabilities. In particular, we would like to thank: Rena Cohen, Managing Artistic Director, Realwheels; Yuri Arajs, Executive Director, Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture; and Lindsey Adams, Communications Director, Realwheels for their guidance and support during this project.

Throughout the project, SPARC BC has engaged with a number of key stakeholders in the process of identifying best practices and current accessibility gaps which informed the development of the checklist. In particular, SPARC BC would like to thank our sub-consulting team for their invaluable contribution throughout this project:

- Marco Chiamonte, Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing;
- Rita Dilek, Alliance for Equality for Blind Canadians;
- Susan Gallagher, Alliance for Equality for Blind Canadians;
- Vince Miele, Accessibility Sub-consultant;
- James Sanders, founding Artistic Director of Realwheels;

We would also like to thank the individuals who participated in the community engagement process by attending a focus group, completing a survey and/or participating in a key informant interview. Your valuable input contributed greatly to the success of this project. In particular, we would like to thank: Bryce Alexander, Naomi Brand, Cathy Browne, Caroline Dagg, Lois Dawson, Landon Krentz, Monica Gartner, Simran Gill, Ju Gosling, Robert Hamilton, Jack Holmes, Dr. Kirsty Johnston, Art Jonker, Sarah Lapregent, Miles Lavkulich, Andrew McCaw, Jayson McLean, Sylvi MacCormac, Kelly MacDonald, Heather Redfern, Donna Spencer, Dave Symington, Susanna Uchatius, Andrew Vallance.

This project would not have been possible without the support of the Firehall Arts Centre staff who kindly and bravely allowed us to do an accessibility audit of their heritage building, the Firehall Arts Centre. In particular, we would like to thank Donna Spencer, Laura Efron and Jamie Burns for sharing their time and providing input to this project.

We would also like to thank our funders for making this project possible. In particular, we would like to thank the City of Vancouver's Cultural Infrastructure Grants Program and the Canada Council for the Arts Leadership for Change Initiative for their generous support of this project.

4.0 RESEARCH METHOD

At the beginning of this project, SPARC BC formed a project team comprised of SPARC BC's multi-disability accessibility audit team as well as key advisors from the disability arts and culture community. SPARC BC's accessibility audit team consisted of a SPARC BC staff member, an accessibility sub-consultant who uses a wheelchair, an accessibility sub-consultant who is Hard of Hearing, an accessibility sub-consultant who is partially sighted, and an accessibility sub-consultant who is blind. The founding Artistic Director of Realwheels (who also uses a wheelchair) was also recruited to serve as an advisor for the research team.

Review of Best Practices

As an initial step, SPARC BC conducted an online review of leading practices around performance space design that considers the needs of performers and technicians with disabilities, as well as patrons with disabilities. This included key informant interviews, online research and outreach to disability arts and cultural organizations from other jurisdictions to learn more about leading practices around performance space design.

Community Engagement and Outreach

As part of this project, we held two focus groups with key stakeholders from the disability arts and cultural community on June 8th and 15th, 2016 as well as supplemental key informant interviews and an online survey for those who were unable to attend the focus groups. To gather the perspective of performance space operators, we also conducted interviews with individuals involved in operating or managing performance space venues in the City of Vancouver.

Development of the Accessibility Audit Checklist

SPARC BC used the findings of the best practices review and community engagement and outreach process to develop an accessibility audit checklist for theatres. This checklist is not only informed by the findings of this project, but also is based on best practices outlined in the Vancouver Building Code/BC Building Code as well as leading practices from other jurisdictions such as the United States, province of Ontario and the United Kingdom. The accessibility audit checklist that has been developed for this project is intended to be shared as a resource that can be used when developing new performance venues and retrofitting existing spaces.

Piloting the Accessibility Audit Checklist

The accessibility audit checklist was piloted during an audit of the Firehall Arts Centre which took place on October 7th, 2016. As part of this audit, the SPARC BC consulting team along with staff members from Realwheels, Kickstart Disability Arts and Culture, and the Firehall Arts Centre used the checklist to inform an accessibility audit of the Arts Centre. The purpose was to test the checklist and to identify if there were any gaps to be addressed.

5.0 ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Best Practices Review

The best practices review consisted of researching standards around theatre design in the BC Building Code, Vancouver Building Code as well as standards from other leading jurisdictions such as other provinces and the United States. Our review identified that much of the available standards focused on providing access for theatre patrons with disabilities, but does not fully address the needs of artists and technicians who would require access in backstage areas of performance spaces. For instance, the revised 2010 *Americans with Disabilities Act* requirements refer mostly to requirements around wheelchair seating, lines of sight, and assistive listening systems.

To complement the existing standards, we researched information available through groups such as Disability Arts International to find out if we could learn more about leading examples of accessible and inclusive performance space design from other jurisdictions such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Through our research, we also identified a list of disability arts and cultural organizations from other jurisdictions that may be encountering similar issues finding accessible inclusive performance spaces.

To complement the information available online, we did outreach to disability arts and cultural organizations and asked them to identify the characteristics of a fully accessible and inclusive performance space, to provide an example of one of the most accessible performance space venues they have ever worked in, and to identify other accessible theatre checklists that may have been produced in other jurisdictions.¹ We received a limited response from his group. We also complemented this research through key informant interviews with people who work for local disability arts groups as well as an interview with a local theatre designer who was interested in issues of accessibility.

Through the review, we identified that one of the best resources is *Design for Accessibility: A Cultural Administrator's Handbook* which was produced in the United States by the National Endowment for the Arts and Humanities, National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, the Kennedy Center and the Metlife Foundation. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts also regularly produces Accessibility TipSheets which provide information on new and emerging accessibility issues in the performing arts world that are useful for disability arts organizations, theatre owners and operators. They include a diverse range of topics from online accessible ticketing, staff training materials, service animals, producing and distributing large print and Braille programs, assistive listening devices, audio description. We also learned of innovative

¹ The specific groups contacted included: Back to Back Theatre and Restless Dance Theatre in Australia; Theatre Sycorax in Germany, PHAMALY in the United States, Tyst Theatre in Sweden. Across Canada, we reached out to Workman Arts, Glenvale Players, Picasso Pro, Friendly Spike Theatre Band, MoMo Mixed Ability Dance Theatre, Stage Left, Inside Out Integrated Theatre and Out of Sight Productions.

theatres such as the International Communication Centre for People with Disabilities in Osaka Japan, which provides seating for up to 300 people using mobility aids in a 1,000 person theatre.²

Here are some highlights of the leading practices that were identified through the best practices review and are organized under the following categories: patron areas; technician areas; performer areas.

Leading practices – Accessibility for patrons with disabilities

Inclusive seating options:

- Offer choice in wheelchair seating (close, far, balcony) as well as companion seats
- Provide flexible/removable seating at the front that can be used for wheelchair seating as needed
- Provide raised seating areas in the back of the theatre which provide excellent sight lines to the stage
- When designing a theatre, provide more multifunctional space at the front of the theatre (this could be used as additional wheelchair seating and/or a filming position for video cameras with tripods. Planning for this protects sight lines for people sitting behind this area)
- Provide seating that can accommodate people of different sizes/weights
- Provide more flex space at the back of the orchestra that can serve as additional wheelchair seating or an additional control position for technicians when needed
- Offer a cry rooms/low sensory room for patrons (can also be a VIP room)
- Provide seating that does not require patrons to use stairs
- As needed, reserve seats for sign language interpreters and ensure they are well lit

People with visual disabilities:

- Allow guide dogs in all areas of the theatre
- Provide audio description services

Signage and wayfinding:

- Provide an embossed touch signboard at the main entrance of the facility with tactile information
- Install a voice guide system which uses small transmitters to guide people throughout the facility
- Incorporate Braille, raised lettering and pictograms/diagrams on signage

Pathways for people using mobility devices:

- Provide freight sized elevators for patrons
- Include foot pedals in elevators (e.g. an emergency foot pedal switch)
- Provide wide aisles that can accommodate larger mobility devices

Accessible lighting:

- Use LED lighting to reduce seizure disorder issues
- Avoid fluorescent lighting

Emergency preparedness:

- Install evacuation guide lights that direct people with disabilities to an accessible emergency exit
- Use TV monitors in an emergency to provide visual information to people who are Hard of Hearing as well as auditory information for people with sight loss
- Incorporate visual strobe lights in emergency alarms for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

² Another local example of a leading practice is the Radical Access Mapping Project checklist; however, this list is more focused on the visitor experience. <https://radicalaccessiblecommunities.wordpress.com/the-radical-access-mapping-project/radical-access-mapping-project-vancouver/>

Leading practices – Accessibility for patrons with disabilities

Pick up/drop off areas:

- Provide an accessible pick up/drop off space that can accommodate large vans

People with auditory disabilities:

- Install audiovisual screens that provide audio and sign language guidance in common areas
- Offer assisted listening systems for Deaf and Hard of Hearing audiences
- Provide a good space and lighting for ASL interpretation services at front of theatre
- Offer portable captioning devices
- When designing a new theatre, install extra conduits at the outset – helps to prepare for future assisted listening system and other emerging technologies

Mood disorders:

- Use warm, calming colors in the décor which are more accessible for people with mood disorders

Washrooms:

- Incorporate gender neutral signage
- Provide completely accessible washrooms that meet leading standards in accessibility

Leading practices – Accessibility for technicians with disabilities

Lighting and overhead equipment:

- Use a suspension grid (instead of catwalks/ladders) to prevent falls
- Use bars for hanging lights or scenery that can be lowered to floor level
- Provide full physical access to flyrail, suspension grid, tech booths
- Offer an assisted listening system for Deaf and Hard of Hearing theatre crew

Elevator access:

- When designing a new theatre, work to locate the gallery seating and technician booth at the same level so that an elevator can access both
- If you are not able to afford an elevator lift at the time of construction, explore adding in an elevator shaft which would allow for an easier and more affordable retrofit in the future
- Install video screen that provides captions for people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Control booth:

- Provide ramp/elevator access to control booth
- Position viewing window, sound and lighting boards at wheelchair accessible heights
- Provide space for extra workstations in the control booth that can be removed for wheelchair access if necessary and allow more space for audio description descriptions
- Use good lighting for lip reading and communication (for people who are deaf/Hard of Hearing)
- Offer an assisted listening system for Deaf and Hard of Hearing theatre crew

Leading practices – Access for performers with disabilities

Washrooms:

- Provide a separate washroom for performers that is not shared with the audience
- Provide accessibility features required in BC Building Code
- Provide an automatic door opener
- Include an emergency call button in accessible washroom stall
- Provide a roll in shower
- Incorporate visual strobe lights in emergency alarm for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- Incorporate Braille on signage

Dressing Rooms:

- Provide dressing rooms on the same floor level as the stage
- Provide a flat and wheelchair accessible route between stage and dressing room
- Position counters, make up tables, lights, outlets and clothes hooks at wheelchair accessible heights
- Provide a wheelchair accessible bed
- Provide dressing room lifts for people in wheelchairs to transfer in or out of chairs
- Install large size light switches that are easy to operate
- Install a visual paging system in the dressing room
- Incorporate visual strobe lights in emergency alarms for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Accessible paths of travel

- Provide backstage pathways that are wide enough for two people using mobility devices moving in opposite directions to pass by one another
- Provide extra room in the wings and on stage to allow people in mobility devices to pass by each other
- Use texture carpets (or no carpets) on ramps
- (Note: Wide and spacious backstage pathways and gradual ramps are dual purpose – they help performers using mobility devices and help backstage staff move heavy theatre equipment)
- Provide a seamless path of travel backstage that is intuitive and well marked for people with visual disabilities
- Provide softly lit LED markings, tactile warnings, or a lip at the front of the stage to prevent people going off stage
- Provide removable tactile markers as needed for people with sight loss
- Provide high contrast floor guides and markings
- Provide tactile maps of backstage areas as well as patron areas
- If ramps are provided, include handrails to guide people with visual disabilities

Hard of Hearing performers

- Offer in ear monitors for Hard of Hearing performers
- Offer an Assisted Listening System for Deaf and Hard of Hearing performers
- Cue lights at every entrance
- Emergency alarms incorporate visual strobe lights for people who are Deaf (Note: strobe lighting only to be used in emergencies)

Other reflections/leading practices

Here is a summary of some other recurring themes and ideas that were raised during the best practices review:

- Having the right staff in place with an understanding of accessibility issues and a willingness and/or eagerness to work with people with disabilities can sometimes be more important than the actual design of physical spaces.
- Black box theatres are often most accessible to work in because they are easily customized for a variety of purposes.
- There is benefit to thinking beyond the old model of raised stages (e.g. proscenium theatres) for accessible and inclusive productions – Site-specific theatre³ can be a tremendous creative opportunity.
- To be fully accessible, a range of needs and disabilities have to be considered including physical, invisible, cognitive, sensory, learning disabilities.
- When we talk about accessibility, we are really talking about inclusion and being fully included in the arts and cultural community.
- For a person to be fully part of the theatre community, they need to have opportunities to be part of all aspects of the theatre from writing plays, set design and building, sound, performing.

5.2 Community Engagement Process

As part of the community engagement process, we gathered input through focus groups targeted at performers with disabilities and others who work with disability arts and cultural groups and conducted key informant interviews with five individuals involved in managing/operating performance space venues. People who were unable to attend a focus group also had an opportunity to complete an online survey or send in written feedback.

Focus Groups/Surveys: The key findings for the focus group and surveys are summarized under two headings: What is working well? What are some of the gaps?

³ Site specific theatre is any type of theatrical production designed to be performed at a unique, specially adapted location other than a standard theatre.

Focus Groups – What is currently working well? (a.k.a. what design features are making performance spaces more accessible?)

Stage access:

- At the Roundhouse Theatre, there is a level stage and patrons sit in raised seating. As a result, there are no concerns about performers wheeling off stage
- It is a good practice to make everyone (both people with disabilities and people without disabilities) take the same route to the stage at an awards ceremony
- It is possible to construct temporary ramps in many contexts

Seating

- Places where you can reconfigure the seating and manipulate space are most accessible
- A typical Realwheels production attracts a high proportion of people using mobility aids (e.g. about 20 out of 150 patrons use wheelchairs).
- It is sometimes possible to remove front rows to create accessible seating areas (e.g. Vancouver East Cultural Centre (Cultch))
- Sometimes you can flip the theatre and enter from the exit and it provides more accessible seating options
- The Roundhouse is a black box theatre which can have a variety of seating arrangements
- Many theatres provide companion seating for people with disabilities where their friend/family member/caregiver can accompany them

Access for people who are Hard of Hearing

- Provide ASL interpretation
- Provide Assisted Listening Systems

The role of staff training and willingness:

- Cultch hires ushers with disabilities and has sent people for training
- It is good to use a “one size fits one approach” when serving people with disabilities
- It really helps when staff are aware of accessibility issues and are able to fulfill technical riders
- E.g. The National Theatre in Ottawa – Read the technical rider for a Realwheels production and decided to use the production as an impetus to completely renovate the theatre for accessibility
- E.g. The Calgary Theatre also has built temporary accessible backstage area for a production

Technician areas:

- At the Fei and Milton Wong Theatre, the tech grid is accessible and a person with a disability can hang lights

Stage & backstage areas:

- Some venues have large accessible dressing rooms and roll in showers
- The Cultch has great dressing rooms
- The Roundhouse has spacious backstage areas
- At the Roundhouse, everything is located on single level backstage which can make it easy to get around
- Ramps and different levels on stage can sometimes present creative opportunities in dance productions
- A Discovery Day can improve access by providing 6 hours where everyone can explore the space (e.g. check out high tones, low tones, temperature, flashing lights)

Focus Groups – What is currently working well? (a.k.a. what design features are making performance spaces more accessible?)

Arriving at the theatre:

- Some theatres have excellent access to public transit and parking
- In some cases, you can create a temporary no stopping zone if you apply to the City of Vancouver (e.g. Cultch)
- Some theatres offer tactile maps

Focus Groups – What are some of the gaps? (a.k.a. what are some of the accessibility challenges/barriers that are encountered?)

Arriving at theatre:

- Some theatres, such as those on Granville Island, have limited transit
- Parking can be challenging in some situations
- In some theatres (e.g. SFU Theatre), a performer with disability has to enter from the front or side of building (where patrons can see you)
- When there are multiple sets of doors, it can be easy to get trapped in between sets of doors

Access to information:

- It would be nice if there was a list of different performance venues in the City of Vancouver and their respective accessibility features

Seating

- There is limited accessible seating (i.e. Milton Wong Theatre has 192 seats but only two wheelchair seats)
- Some theatres do not offer choice in accessible seating (i.e. all of the accessible seats are at the back)
- It can be really dark when locating ones seat which is challenging for people with visual disabilities
- Some have uncomfortable seating
- Seating areas sometimes lack handrails

Stage access:

- Some stages are too high for a ramp and artists have to perform in front
- There is stigma associated with hydraulic lifts and they can be noisy and unreliable
- Some theatres have been recently renovated but still do not have an accessible route to the stage or the route to the stage is too narrow
- During award ceremonies, there needs to be an accessible route connecting the audience to the stage

Backstage (dressing rooms & washrooms)

- Not all backstage washrooms provide enough space for power chair users
- Some theatres do not have accessible washrooms or dressing rooms backstage (e.g. one performer had to use a utility room as a dressing room and it smelled like garbage).

Hard of Hearing

- It is rare to find ASL interpretation at shows
- Providing adequate lighting and physical space for the interpreter can be a bit of a challenge since they are usually shoved to the side

Focus Groups – What are some of the gaps? (a.k.a. what are some of the accessibility challenges/barriers that are encountered?)

Cost of facility:

- Some theatres with accessible features such as hydraulic seating (e.g. Chan Centre at UBC) are prohibitively expensive for smaller theatre groups
- Theatres at UBC are not considered part of the City of Vancouver and activities that take place there are not always eligible for City grants
- Some theatres, such as the Roundhouse, are also expensive
- Fei and Milton Wong Theatre is accessible but expensive
- A lack of free accessible rehearsal space can be a challenge for disability theatre groups
- Some venues have expensive equipment and custodians that are a required part of the rental fee which raises the overall cost of the venue

Scale of theatre:

- There is a need to be able to find an accessible theatre that is the right scale for the production. For instance if you book a theatre that is too large, it has the potential to feel half empty

Providing access to upper levels of theatre:

- In some cases the elevator is only large enough to hold two people using mobility devices
- In one situation, the accessible washroom was located on the second level and patrons could not access it during a power outage
- Angled stairs can be more challenging to navigate

Staff training:

- Limited staff training around serving people with disabilities is a huge issue. This is particularly a challenge when lighting and signage is also an issue

Emergency preparedness:

- Theatres that are accessed by an elevator do not always have safe egress and/or areas of refuge for a large number of wheelchair users

Elevators:

- The elevator should have an audible signal which announces each floor for people with sight loss

Interviews with Venue Operators: The findings for the key informant interviews with venue operators are summarized under two headings: What is working well? What are some of the gaps?

Feedback from Venue Operators—What is currently working well? (a.k.a. what design features are making performance spaces more accessible?)

Theatres located on one level:

- Black box theatre designs are very flexible and easy to adapt for accessibility purposes
- Theatres where everything is located on one floor (entrance, dressing room, washrooms, stage area) are good

Arriving at the theatre:

- It is sometimes possible to block off the front of the building as a loading zone to help load/unload people using wheelchairs
- Some theatres are well connected by public transit

Feedback from Venue Operators—What is currently working well? (a.k.a. what design features are making performance spaces more accessible?)

Stage/Backstage Access:

- Sometimes it is possible to install a temporary ramp to provide access to the stage
- Some theatres offer an accessible backstage entrance on the ground floor
- If you make the stage fully accessible, it also helps for rolling props and other heavy equipment onto the stage

Planning:

- Prior to building a new venue, key considerations around accessibility can be incorporated into the overall design

Access for people with visual disabilities:

- Described performances offered through Vocal Eye improve access for people with sight loss
- Good signage helps to guide people with visual disabilities

Access for people who are hard of hearing:

- Assisted Listening Systems improve access for people with hearing disabilities

Low impact shows for people who are autistic:

- Louder, flashier, brighter shows can get autistic people agitated. Low impact shows are where they do the same show but it is less loud, less flashy and less bright

Seating:

- It can be good to provide accessible seating at the front of the theatre where people enter (as long as it does not block sight lines to the stage)
- It is a good idea to be prepared to not only accommodate the people with disabilities but also the people coming with them. This can be a challenge if you sell out a theatre, because you do not want the attendant to be sitting out in the lobby
- There is a need to also consider people who do not necessarily use a mobility device but cannot go up a set of stairs (e.g. some people with arthritis)

Providing upstairs access:

- Performance Works built a long gradual ramp outside the building to connect the two levels of the theatre
- Since elevators are expensive, it is ideal if your theatre can be located all on one story without stairways
- In some cases, theatres are renovated and elevators are installed after the fact to improve access

Accessible pathways:

- Direct pathways connecting to the elevator and different parts of the theatre work best
- Theatres located in civic buildings sometimes have automatic door openers on all doors

Feedback from Venue Operators – What are some of the gaps (a.k.a. what are some of the accessibility challenges/barriers that are encountered?)

Stage access:

- Some theatres do not have an accessible route to the stage and there is not enough space for a legal ramp (this can particularly be an issue in thrust or proscenium style theatres)
- There is sometimes limited space to renovate (for example, one theatre has limited wing space and renovating it would eliminate the wing space altogether)

Wheelchair seating:

- Some theatres do not offer enough wheelchair seating to meet demand
- In some situations, there is a lack of choice in available seating options (for example, theatres that only have accessible seating at the back of the theatre do not send the right message- “the only place you fit is at the back of the hall”)

Planning and financing upgrades:

- Securing funding and fundraising for renovations can be a challenge
- Performance spaces that have been designated as a heritage site can be more difficult to renovate
- Many theatres were not originally constructed as a theatre, they were converted after the fact from old warehouses, fire halls, churches
- The cost of installing an elevator can be prohibitive and sometimes the building footprint does not allow for an elevator
- Venue operators do not always own the facility and may not be able to renovate without permission from another group (e.g. the City)

Upstairs access:

- It can be hard in old buildings to get people to the second level
- The second level (without elevator access) sometimes includes important spaces such as balcony seating, the control booth, rehearsal space, administrative offices, production storage
- Elevator maintenance contracts can be an issue (e.g. You are legally required to have a maintenance contract and a dedicated phone line and 24 hour monitoring. Elevators sometimes break down and when they do, it costs \$3500 to repair them)
- A lot of new theatres are being built by local School Districts. It can be a challenge when the schools/custodians lock the elevator

Technician areas

- The control booth is often located upstairs and typically has not been built to accommodate wheelchairs
- In the control booth, instruments and the viewing window are not positioned at wheelchair accessible heights
- There are steps leading up to the control booth (technicians are often required to work up high – ladders and lifts can be a challenge for people with physical disabilities)

Administrative offices:

- There is sometimes a lack of overall wheelchair access in back administrative offices
- Accessible work stations (with adapted technology) have not been set up for employees with visual and auditory disabilities

Feedback from Venue Operators – What are some of the gaps (a.k.a. what are some of the accessibility challenges/barriers that are encountered?)

Training components:

- There can be a lack of accessibility in training programs for various roles such as stage management, stage designers

Dressing rooms:

- Some dressing rooms do not provide enough space for people to maneuver using larger mobility devices

Washrooms:

- In some cases, only one washroom is accessible for people using wheelchairs and it is shared by both performers and theatre patrons (Note: Normally performers stay backstage out of public view until the end of the show)
- There can be indirect pathways leading to the accessible washroom that sometimes require staff assistance
- In some cases there is only an accessible washroom on the upper level which is problematic if the elevator breaks down (in one case, they had to rent portable washrooms for the street)

Arriving at the theatre:

- Patrons sometimes confuse the backstage loading area with the accessible entrance because the loading areas are sometimes better marked than the accessible entrance
- Some theatres have gravel parking lots which can be an issue for people using wheelchairs
- In some situations, the main entrance to the box office is not the same as the accessible entrance

Accessible pathways:

- Doorways are sometimes too narrow to allow easy passage for people using mobility devices
- Wayfinding can be confusing for patrons when you are sending most patrons one way and people with disabilities in another direction (towards the accessible path of travel).

Diversity of needs:

- Can be challenging to consider the full range of disability types and the different needs (i.e. visual, auditory, cognitive)

Hearing disabilities:

- There used to be a program that helped to fund Assisted Listening Systems and this is no longer available

5.3 Developing and Piloting the Accessibility Audit Checklist

Prior to this project, SPARC BC had developed an accessibility audit checklist that allowed the SPARC BC audit team to quickly and efficiently review accessibility in public facilities. SPARC BC has updated this checklist to incorporate additional feedback and information relevant to theatres and in particular backstage areas for performers and technicians with disabilities. This checklist is organized under the following categories:

1. Arriving at the theatre – Drop off/pick up area; public transit; parking, exterior pathways; main entrance; exterior box office.
2. Theatre patron areas – Coat check; concession areas; washrooms; wayfinding and lighting; emergency wayfinding; accessible pathways and circulation; ramps; stairs; elevators; seating options; adapted technology and other accessibility supports.
3. Backstage areas for performers – Backstage areas; wayfinding and circulation and access to the stage; dressing rooms and washrooms.
4. Technician areas – Accessible pathways leading to the fly rail, suspension grid, tech booths; accessible control booths.
5. Administrative offices – Back office areas used by staff for overall administration, operations of theatre.

The accessibility audit checklist was piloted during a site visit to the Firehall Arts Centre on October 7th, 2016. Refer to the Appendix for detailed audit findings for the Firehall Arts Centre. During this site visit, we identified the following opportunities to add further information to the accessibility audit checklist:

- accessible pay phones
- accessible seating options in reception/concession areas

It was also identified that it may be beneficial to add information about emergency alarms in multiple sections, as opposed to just referring to it in the emergency preparedness section.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY AUDIT CHECKLIST

Through piloting the accessibility audit checklist, we found that it presents a comprehensive list of questions to consider when designing or retrofitting a performance space to become more accessible for patrons, performers and technicians with disabilities and the checklist can serve as a useful resource for arts and cultural groups as well as venue owners and operators. However, we also identified that there are some other considerations that may need to be considered in conjunction with the checklist that would impact how the checklist is applied in a particular building context.

6.1 The Scale of the Facility – Depending on the scale of the facility, some of the considerations may be more or less relevant. For example, a smaller black box theatre that accommodates 100 theatre patrons is less likely to have the space and resources to create a separate low sensory/cry room or install a suspension grid; however, a large scale theatre may be able to more easily incorporate these accessibility features.

6.2 The Age of the Building – It is always much easier to build things to the highest standard of accessibility when you are building a new facility. When working within an existing structure, it may be necessary to use the checklist to identify opportunities to improve accessibility, prioritize the list of needs, and develop a course of action for implementing changes over time as resources and the building footprint allows.

6.3 The Role of Staff Training and Innovation— One of the key findings of the engagement process was the important role that well trained staff can play in making a place welcoming and inclusive for people with disabilities. Often if there is willingness and eagerness on the part of venue staff, it is possible to overcome significant accessibility challenges. In some cases well trained and helpful staff can be as important, or even more important, than the physical design. Through working together, venue operators and disability arts and culture organizations may be able to identify creative ways to address accessibility barriers and include artists and technicians with disabilities. For example, it was identified during our audit of the Firehall Arts Centre that the control booth is not wheelchair accessible because it is located up a flight of stairs; however, there may be an opportunity to set up another work station for the technical equipment from a different, wheelchair accessible vantage point using video feeds. We hope that this checklist will help to stimulate constructive conversations around accessibility needs and opportunities.

6.4 Evolving Building Standards and Technologies – Because the performing arts, building design and available technology are always evolving and there are a broad range of disabilities and access needs to consider, planning for accessibility and inclusion is an ongoing process. For instance, there will be likely opportunities to further enhance and add to this checklist in the near future as technology evolves or new accessibility considerations come to the forefront.

Arriving at the Theatre

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|--|---|----------|
| Drop Off/Pick Up Area | | |
| Sufficient dimensions | Bus drop off zones (min 7925 mm long and min 3050 mm wide) Van drop off zones (min 7315 mm long, and min 2590 mm wide). | |
| Overhead clearance | Min 2490 mm height (To accommodate lifts) | |
| Close to accessible entrance | As close as possible | |
| Sheltered | Sheltered from wind/rain | |
| Well positioned and well-marked by signage | Good, intuitive location (Note: so that people don't mistake the back loading zone for the accessible pick up/drop off) | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Public Transit | | |
| There is a bus stop/SkyTrain Station close to main entrance | As close as possible | |
| Sheltered bus stop | | |
| Places for people to sit and rest | A bench is provided at bus stop | |
| Space for someone in a mobility device | Clear space within sheltered bus stop where a person with a disability can sit alongside someone without a disability | |
| Accessible path of travel | Accessible, clear path of travel connecting bus stop to main entrance that is not obstructed by garbage bins, signs, etc | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Parking | | |
| Sufficient disability parking | 4% of parking stalls (or 1 out of every 25 stalls are made accessible) | |
| Off Street Parking—City of Vancouver bylaw – Sufficient dimensions | Disability parking spaces must be at least: 5.5 m long; at least 4.0 m wide | |
| Vertical clearance to accommodate larger vehicles and side/rear lifts | Vancouver Bylaw requires vertical clearance of at least 2.3m | |
| Off Street – Accessible parking stalls meet BC Building Code | BC Building Code only requires width of 3.7 m (including access aisle) Two adjacent parking stalls can share 1.2 m access aisle (marked by yellow diagonal lines) | |
| Van Accessible Parking Stalls – wider stalls that accommodate wider vans with side/rear lifts | The combined width of a van accessible parking stall is 4.9m (16ft) including the 3.4m wide parking stall and 1.5m access aisle. Two adjacent van accessible parking stalls with a shared access aisle would take up 8.3m (27ft) | |
| Signage and smooth paved surface | Painted symbol in parking space and sign on post and paved parking lot (i.e. not gravel, dirt parking lot) | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Exterior Pathways | | |
| Accessible paths of travel connecting all important activity areas | At minimum they should connect the pickup/drop off area, parking lot, exterior box office, and public transit stops to main entrance | |
| Wide and spacious clear pathway | 1500 mm wide—allows 2 people using mobility devices to pass by; 915 mm wide—the min width of a passageway for someone using a mobility device; 1675 mm – min for a higher traffic pathway | |
| Clear path of travel is free of obstructions | When measuring clear path of travel, ensure that obstructions such as mail boxes, garbage cans, sandwich boards, trees and bicycle racks do not obstruct the path of travel | |
| Surface area is slip resistant, smooth and flat | Smooth pavement/asphalt is best (Note: gravel, grass, dirt and cobble stones can create barriers) | |
| Accessible curb ramps are provided as needed | Provide a smooth transition between the sidewalk and street level for people using mobility devices. (Note: this is especially relevant at nearby crosswalks and by accessible parking spaces). Include tactile indicators for people with visual disabilities | |
| If there are stairs, there is an alternate accessible pathway | Either a gradual ramp or an elevator | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| The main pathway and the accessible pathway are the same | For example, if there are stairs, the ramp/elevator is located alongside and is easy to locate | |
| Ramps meet accessibility standards | Refer to section on ramps | |
| Stairs meet accessibility standards | Refer to section on stairs | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Main Entrance | | |
| Entrance is easy to find and well-marked for people with disabilities | Intuitive Location, good colour contrast with surroundings and signage. If glass doors, easy to see for someone with sight loss | |
| Wide and spacious door opening and level threshold | At least 36 inches (915 mm wide) for larger mobility devices and level threshold (door threshold should be a maximum of 13 mm high and be bevelled) | |
| Power Operated Doors | Automatic doors are best, an automatic door opener with a push button control is also good | |
| Call button for assistance | A call button for assistance is provided if the door opener is not working or someone requires extra assistance | |
| Call button and door opener control are easy to find | Well marked by signage and located at wheelchair accessible heights | |

| Arriving at the Theatre | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Exterior Box Office | | |
| Box office is easy to find | Well marked with intuitive location and excellent signage and good colour contrast with surroundings | |
| Wheelchair accessible counter for patrons & staff | There is a service counter positioned at wheelchair accessible height (between 760 and 865 mm high) that allows people with disabilities to communicate with staff at eye level & staff with disabilities to work at the box office | |
| Hearing Loop | This is a type of sound system for people who are Hard of Hearing and use hearing aids. It would help someone with a hearing disability communicate with box office staff. | |
| Staff training | Staff are well trained on serving people with disabilities, are knowledgeable about the accessibility features the theatre can provide and can help connect people with disabilities available technology and resources | |
| Access to information | The theatre has a brochure of accessibility features that they can share with visitors with disabilities. This should conform to large print standards and is offered in Braille | |

Theatre Patron Areas

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|---|--|----------|
| Coat Check | | |
| Coat Check is easy to find | Well marked with intuitive location and excellent signage and good colour contrast with surroundings | |
| Wheelchair accessible counter | There is a service counter positioned at wheelchair accessible height (between 760 and 865 mm high) that allows people with disabilities to communicate with staff at eye level | |
| Provides information on the Hearing Assist Technology that is available | Signage advertises available technology. Technology is available to be signed out as needed and is well maintained | |
| Staff training | Staff are well trained on serving people with disabilities, knowledgeable about the accessibility features available and can help connect people with disabilities with available technology | |
| Access to information | The theatre has a brochure of accessibility features that they can share with visitors with disabilities. It conforms to large print standards and is offered in Braille | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Reception Areas (e.g. Concession, lobby) | | |
| Concession stand is easy to find | Well marked with intuitive location and excellent signage and good colour contrast with surroundings | |
| Wheelchair accessible counter | Counter is 865 mm high and provides clear knee space beneath the counter for someone using a wheelchair to pull up underneath (the clear space 760 mm wide, 685 mm high, 485 mm deep) | |
| Accessible menu for people with sight loss/who are blind | Provide handheld large print and Braille Menu | |
| Captioned Television Screens | Provide captioning on television screens in the common areas to share important announcements to people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (e.g. when the show will start, the 10 minute warning, updates about performance delays, emergency announcements). | |
| Staff training | Staff are well trained on serving people with disabilities, knowledgeable about the accessibility features available and can help connect people with disabilities with available technology | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Reception Areas (e.g. Concession, lobby) | | |
| Access to information | The theatre has a brochure of accessibility features available for those who need it. It conforms to large print standards and is offered in Braille | |
| If a seating area is provided, it is accessible for people using mobility devices | The tables are located at wheelchair accessible heights and there is removable seating where someone in a wheelchair can sit at a table. There is sufficient space to maneuver for someone using a mobility device. | |
| If provided, public telephone is accessible | Located at wheelchair accessible height with clear space underneath for wheelchairs. Shelf is provided for telecommunications device. Incorporates TTY device for Deaf and Hard of Hearing users and handset with hearing aid coupler coil. | |
| Emergency fire alarm | Incorporates visual signals (blinking lights) for people who are Hard of Hearing/Deaf and is located in all major activity areas and common areas | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Washrooms | | |
|---|--|--|
| Washrooms are easy to find and locate | There should be accessible washrooms on each floor that theatre patrons frequent. | |
| Excellent signage directing people to washroom | Signage directing people to the washrooms and signage on washroom doors with Braille/raised lettering | |
| Accessible entrance | Power operated door, level threshold, doorway is 915 mm wide (to accommodate larger mobility devices) | |
| A universal accessible washroom is provided | This is an accessible washroom that can be used by male, female, transgendered and is particularly useful if a person needs assistance from an opposite gender attendant | |
| Clear path of travel leading to accessible washroom stall | The accessible washroom stall should be easy to reach for someone using a large mobility device during busy intermissions | |
| Space to maneuver within accessible washroom stall | Accessible washroom stall should be a minimum of 1500 mm by 1500 mm (Note: As more people use larger mobility devices such as scooters, the dimensions of 1700 mm by 2440 mm are preferred as it allows for a 1700 mm by 1700 mm clear turning space by toilet). | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Washrooms | | |
| Accessible toilet and transfer space | Toilet seat height—Approximately 475 mm; Transfer space by toilet—min width 1020 mm. The transfer space alongside the toilet is kept clear of obstructions such as cleaning supplies and garbage cans | |
| Stall door opens outwards and does not obstruct the washroom stall | There is an interior door handle so that it is also easy for people with disabilities to grab onto the stall door and close it; the lever style latch system on the stall door is easy to lock and unlock for someone with limited hand dexterity. Coat hook is no higher than 1200 mm | |
| Grab bars are provided which allow someone to safely transfer | Grab bar location should be located by the toilet on the non-transfer area side. Grab bars that angle up from mid-point are preferable. Mounted horizontally between 840 mm and 920 mm above floor. Midpoint in line with the front edge of water closet, mid-point angles up not more than 60°. Grab bar diameter (30 mm – 40 mm); grab bar clearance from wall (35 – 45 mm) (Grab bar length at least 900 mm long). Grab bars have a nonslip finish. | |
| Water closet has a bolted on lid to grasp on to when transferring | Or if no water closet, a second grab bar behind toilet - Bar is 600 mm long, mounted behind toilet between 815 and 865 above finished floor | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Washrooms | | |
|--|---|--|
| Toilet paper should be easy to reach | Toilet paper should be positioned by grab bar so that a person can grasp onto bar for extra support when reaching | |
| Someone using a mobility device can easily use the sink area | The sink is no higher than 865 mm above the finished floor; there is knee space (at least 250 mm high) underneath the sink which allows a person in a wheelchair to pull up underneath; Automatic or lever style faucet handles provide easy access for people with limited hand dexterity or strength, The soap and towel dispensers are located close to the sink and at accessible heights. (Note: No more than 1200 mm high off the floor). The mirror is mounted 1000 mm from the floor. | |
| Emergency call button for assistance | There is an emergency call button for assistance in accessible washroom stalls | |
| Emergency fire alarm | Incorporates visual signals (blinking lights) for people who are Hard of Hearing/Deaf | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Wayfinding and Lighting | | |
| Map directing people to different areas of the theatre (including accessibility features) | Larger theatre complexes can have Tactile/Braille maps to help people orientate themselves | |
| Handheld Map showing the location of accessibility features | The theatre has a brochure of accessibility features that they can share with visitors with disabilities. This conforms to large print standards & includes a map of accessible washrooms. | |
| Voice Guide Systems | Some larger theatre complexes are using voice guide systems (e.g. small transmitters give information to people on visual disabilities about the location of elevators) | |
| Staff training | Staff are well trained on serving people with disabilities, knowledgeable about the accessibility features available and can help direct people with disabilities to their seat (especially in low lighting situations) | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Wayfinding and Lighting | | |
|---|--|--|
| Signage is easy to read for someone with sight loss | Large colour contrast between text and background colour (e.g. white lettering on a black background); Signs use accessible san-serif fonts, such as Verdana, Arial, Helvetica, or Calibri; The lettering is large enough: Internal direction signs – minimum height of 30 mm, Door signage – minimum height of 17 mm; Glare is minimized by using a non-reflective coating. | |
| Signage is easy to read for someone with a cognitive disability and/or lower levels of literacy | The signs use simple and clear language that is easy to understand; Words are paired with clear and concise graphic symbols for people with low levels of literacy. | |
| High colour contrast helps people with sight loss navigate | High colour contrast between floors and walls helps someone with sight loss navigate. Similarly high colour contrast between furniture and surroundings is also important. (Avoid clear/glass furniture) | |
| Pathways are kept clear of clutter | Potential obstacles such as garbage/recycling/displays are located against wall so that they are easier to detect by cane | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Wayfinding and Lighting | | |
| The accessible pathway connecting different activity areas should be intuitive | Ideally the accessible pathway connecting different activity areas is the same as the pathway that the general public uses. However, if a separate route is necessary because of stairs, the ramp/elevator should be located close by. | |
| Areas are well lit | Avoid fluorescent lighting and/or lighting that can inadvertently cause seizures (flashing lights most likely to cause seizures between 5 to 30 flashes per second hertz). Avoid lighting that causes glare or pools of lighting. | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|------------------------------|---|----------|
| Emergency Wayfinding | | |
| Emergency Signage | Emergency exits are well marked by well-lit exit signs that blink in an emergency (for people who are Hard of Hearing) and areas of refuge are well marked with appropriate signage. Exit signs and fire alarms are connected to emergency power system | |
| Emergency Lighting | Evacuation guide lights are provided that help to direct people to the emergency exits (e.g. small lights by base of seats alongside aisle) | |
| Emergency Fire Alarm | Incorporates visual signals (blinking lights) for people who are Hard of Hearing/Deaf and are located in all activity areas and common areas (including washrooms) | |
| Captioned Television Screens | Provide captioning on television screens in the common areas to share important announcements to people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (e.g. emergency announcements when the show will start, the 10 minute warning, updates about performance delays,). | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Accessible Pathways and Circulation | | |
| Wide and spacious clear pathway | 1500 mm wide - allows 2 people using mobility devices to pass by; 915 mm wide -- the min width of a passageway for someone using a mobility device; 1675 mm – min for a higher traffic pathway | |
| Clear path of travel is free of obstructions | When measuring clear path of travel, ensure that obstructions such as garbage cans, displays do not obstruct the path of travel | |
| Surface area is slip resistant, smooth and flat | Use low texture carpets (or no carpet) which is easier to wheel over | |
| If there are stairs, there should be an alternate accessible pathway | Either a gradual ramp or an elevator | |
| The main pathway and the accessible pathway are the same | For example, if there are stairs, the ramp/elevator is located close by and is easy to locate | |
| Signage directs people to important activity areas | (Refer to section on wayfinding) | |
| There are places to sit and rest | Benches and chairs are provided in lobby and in hallways throughout the theatre so that people have a space to sit and rest | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Accessible Pathways and Circulation | | |
|---|--|--|
| Ramps, stairs and elevators meet accessibility standards | (Refer to relevant sections) | |
| All door ways are easy to open for someone with limited hand strength and dexterity | Ideally – left open or automatic opening doors. Also accessible – power operated doors with a push button. Otherwise, lightweight doors with lever style handles | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Ramps | | |
|---|--|--|
| Ramps are cane detectable for people with sight loss | There are tactile warning strips at the top and bottom of ramps that warn people with sight loss about a change in elevation | |
| The ramp has an accessible non skid surface and is wide enough | Ramp is a minimum width of 1500 mm to allow mobility devices to pass by each other (unless it is shorter than 6 m when 915 mm is a permitted width) | |
| The ramp has a gradual slope which allows people to use the ramp safely and independently | <p>The more gradual the gradient the better – a gradient of 1 in 20 is ideal; however, other gradients can be used for shorter ramps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ramp of maximum length of 6 m (gradient of 1 in 12) • Ramp of maximum length of 9 m (gradient 1 in 16) • Ramp of maximum length of 12 m (gradient of 1 in 20) | |
| Longer ramps have flat and level landing areas at regular intervals where people can rest | The dimensions are 1500 mm long by the width of the ramp (located at bottom and top of ramp and at abrupt changes in direction) | |

Theatre Patron Areas

Comments

| Ramps | | |
|---|---|--|
| Avoid curved ramps | Curved ramps should be avoided unless the radius is extremely large because it is challenging to negotiate a corner while ascending or descending a ramp | |
| Provide safety barriers | When a vertical drop at the side of the ramp exceeds 75 mm, provide a barrier such as a 75 mm curb, pipe rail, or solid barrier – this prevents the front guide wheel of a wheelchair from accidentally going over the edge | |
| Provide handrails | Handrails should be provided on both sides of the ramp | |
| Provide handrails that are easy to grasp onto and that help guide people with visual disabilities | They should be smooth and round (approx. 35 mm in diameter) with extensions to signal the start and end of the ramp. | |
| Provide handrails at accessible heights | The preferred railing height is between 865 mm to 965 mm above the ramp surface (920 mm preferred). An additional handrail that is 450 mm high improves access for people seated at wheelchair height and children | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Stairs | | |
| Ensure that staircases are detectable for people with visual disabilities | Incorporate tactile warning strips at the top and bottom of the staircase and on stair nosings | |
| Provide handrails that help to guide people with visual disabilities | Handrails should be located on both sides of the staircase and be continuous. Handrails that level off at the top and bottom of the staircase can help to indicate that the staircase has ended | |
| Position handrails so that they are easy to grasp on to. | Round handrails that are approximately 35 mm in diameter are easiest to grasp onto. Handrails should be positioned approximately 865 -965 mm above the nose of each step | |
| Provide safe stair risers | Use closed risers with a stair riser height between 125 - 180 mm and a min depth of approximately 280 mm | |
| Avoid curved staircases | Curved staircases are less safe because the depth of the stair riser varies | |
| Provide safe landings at the top and bottom of the staircase | The landing should be at least the width of the staircase unless the staircase is more than 1100 mm wide | |

Theatre Patron Areas

| | | Comments |
|--|--|----------|
| Elevators | | |
| Freight sized elevators | Ideally in larger theatres the elevator should be freight sized and accommodate at least four mobility devices at once | |
| Accessible entrance and doors | Doors are open for a minimum width of 910 mm, they remain open for 4 seconds and doors reopen upon meeting obstacle | |
| Control Panel is accessible | Centre line for panel is located at 890 mm and it incorporates Braille and/or raised lettering on the buttons. Use a consistent layout for elevator buttons to make it intuitive (e.g. Main above Parking 1) | |
| Elevator provides auditory signals for people who are blind or have low vision | The elevator verbally announces the floor level and beeps at each floor | |
| Elevator provides visual signals for people who are deaf/Hard of Hearing | Floor numbers light up when the elevator reaches a floor level or a digital screen displays the floor number | |
| Handrails are provided for extra stability and support | Handrails are provided along all non access walls and are located between 800-920 mm from the floor | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|-----------------------------|--|-----------------|
| Elevators | | |
| Emergency Preparedness | Include a text number to call if a person who is deaf and/or hard of hearing is stuck in an elevator | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Seating Options | | |
| Provide choice in wheelchair seating options | Try to provide choice to people with disabilities around seating options – in the front row, middle of the theatre, back of the theatre, gallery | |
| Provide enough wheelchair seating to accommodate productions that are targeted at people with disabilities | For example, one Realwheels performance attracted 20 audience members with a disability for a total audience size of 150 (2 out of 15 seats were wheelchair accessible). This can be accomplished through theatres with flexible seating configurations) | |
| Provide seating options that allow people with disabilities to sit beside friends and family members | Wheelchair seating should not be segregated – there should be removable seats in wheelchair seating areas for friends/family/companions | |
| Provide ample multifunctional space that can serve as additional wheelchair seating as needed and can also serve other purposes as needed | Create a wheelchair seating area/videography area at the front of the theatre (Note: both wheelchairs and film crews using tripods are challenging to position because they take up more vertical space and can block site lines). Provide a multifunctional space at the back of the Orchestra that can be used either as wheelchair seating and/or technician control point | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Seating Options | | |
| Explore the feasibility of removeable seats and/or hydraulic seating systems | Some theatres can remove their front row of seating and open their side exits to create more wheelchair accessible seating. Newer theatres with hydraulic seating can adjust their configuration to allow for more wheelchair seating | |
| Consider the needs of overweight people when selecting seats | Provide seating that can accommodate people with who are overweight | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Adapted Technology and other Accessibility Supports | | |
| Assisted Listening System | Provide an Assisted Listening System for people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing. There are three main types of Assisted Listening Systems: 1) Induction loop systems, 2) Infrared (or IR) Systems, 3) FM Systems If the system relies on receivers, ensure that these devices are on hand at all times and available. Provide staff with training on how to maintain and use these devices so that they can properly assist patrons with disabilities | |
| American Sign Language Interpretation | Provide space with adequate lighting at the front of the theatre for an American Sign Language Interpreter. Reserve some seats for people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing that have a good sight line of both the interpreter and the stage (for lip reading) Provide ushers with training on appropriate non-verbal gestures (sign language) to guide people who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing | |
| Audio Description | Work with Vocal Eye Descriptive Arts Society to offer their live audio description service at shows. It is the first of its kind in Canada and professionally trained describers provide the visual details of live theatre performances to blind and low vision audiences in BC | |

| Theatre Patron Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Adapted Technology and other Accessibility Supports | | |
| Low Impact Shows | These types of shows are autism friendly and usually involve the following characteristics – reduced sounds, lower lights, an opportunity to learn about the show in advance, a non-judgemental environment where the audience is encouraged to move around and make noise | |
| Cry Room/Low Sensory Rooms/VIP Rooms | Some theatres, such as the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, provide a sound proof enclosed room overlooking the performance stage that has audio piped in. This room serves multiple purposes, it can be a discreet VIP room for famous guests, a room for people with crying babies, or a low sensory room for families with autistic children who may be concerned about a sensory meltdown during an performance. | |
| Access to the stage during awards ceremonies | Some theatres without raised stages have an easy route to the stage for awards ceremonies. Other theatres with raised stages may need to install temporary ramps or use an indirect route outside of the theatre. If an indirect route is the only way to access the stage, all the presenters and award recipients should use the same route. | |

Backstage Areas for Performers

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Backstage Entrance | | |
| Provide a separate backstage entrance for performers/technicians with disabilities | | |
| Backstage entrance is easy to find and well-marked for people with disabilities | Backstage entrance is well marked, but not easily confused with the main entrance by patrons. | |
| Wide and spacious door opening and level entrance | At least 36 inches (915 mm wide) and level threshold (door threshold should be a maximum of 13 mm high and be bevelled) | |
| Power operated door | Automatic doors are best, an automatic door opener with push button provides a high level of accessibility. At minimum, it should be a low weight door with a lever style handle that is operable using a closed fist with a kick plate | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|----------------------------|---|-----------------|
| Backstage Entrance | | |
| Call button for assistance | Provide a call button for assistance in case the door opener is not working or if someone requires extra assistance | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Wayfinding and Circulation and Access to the Stage | | |
| Locate dressing room, stage, backstage accessible washroom on the same level for performers with disabilities | | |
| Provide wide spacious pathways | Pathways need to be at least 1500 mm wide in order for mobility devices to pass by one another back stage. (Note: Spacious backstage pathways are also better for moving heavy theatre equipment) | |
| Provide gradual ramps if needed | Provide gradual ramps (see ramps section) that allow performers to use the ramps safely and independently (Note: gradual ramps are also safer for moving heavy theatre equipment) | |
| Provide spacious wings | The wings should be at least 1500 mm wide so that two people using mobility devices can pass each other | |
| Incorporate safety features on front of stage | The front of the stage should be well marked by soft LED lighting or a raised lip which reduces risk of performers wheeling off the stage by accident | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Wayfinding and Circulation and Access to the Stage | | |
| Provide cue lights | Cue lights at stage entrances can help direct performers who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing | |
| Performers with disabilities have access to all the same backstage areas as performers without disabilities | Access should be provided to all of the key activity areas such as dressing room, washrooms, green room, rehearsal space. If these are located on multiple floors, an elevator should be provided | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|---|--|-----------------|
| Dressing Rooms and Washrooms | | |
| Accessible entrance | Power operated door, level threshold, doorway is 915 mm wide (to accommodate larger mobility devices) | |
| Wide spacious dressing rooms | There should be wide spacious dressing rooms that provide enough spaces for large mobility devices to maneuver – larger devices require a 1700 mm by 1700 mm turning radius) | |
| Visual paging system | Incorporate a visual paging system in dressing rooms for performers who are Hard of Hearing and/or deaf | |
| Provide a ceiling lift system | Provide a ceiling lift system to help people transfer in and out of their chairs | |
| A universal accessible washroom is provided | This is an accessible washroom that can be used by male, female, transgendered and is particularly useful if a person needs assistance from an opposite gender attendant | |
| Provide roll in shower | | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Dressing Rooms and Washrooms | | |
| Space to maneuver within accessible washroom stall | Accessible washroom stall should be a minimum of 1500 mm by 1500 mm (Note: As more people use larger mobility devices such as scooters, the dimensions of 1700 mm by 2440 mm are preferred as it allows for a 1700 mm by 1700 mm clear turning space by toilet) | |
| Accessible toilet and transfer space | Toilet seat height—Approximately 475 mm; Transfer space by toilet—min width 1020 mm. The transfer space alongside the toilet is kept clear of obstructions such as cleaning supplies and garbage cans | |
| Stall door opens outwards and does not obstruct the washroom stall | There is an indoor door handle so that it is also easy for people with disabilities to grab onto the stall door and close it; the lever style latch system on the stall door is easy to lock and unlock for someone with limited hand dexterity. Coat hook is no higher than 1200 mm | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Dressing Rooms and Washrooms | | |
| Grab bars are provided which allow someone to safely transfer | Grab bar location should be located by the toilet on the non-transfer area side. Grab bars that angle up from mid-point are preferable. Mounted horizontally between 840 mm and 920 mm above floor. Midpoint in line with the front edge of water closet, mid-point angles up not more than 60°. Grab bar diameter (30 mm – 40 mm); grab bar clearance from wall (35 – 45 mm) (Grab bar length - At least 900 mm long). Grab bars have a nonslip finish | |
| Water closet has a bolted on lid to grasp on to when transferring | Or if no water closet, a second grab bar behind toilet - Bar is 600 mm long, mounted behind toilet between 815 and 865 above finished floor | |
| Toilet paper should be easy to reach | Toilet paper should be positioned by grab bar so that a person can grasp onto for extra support when reaching | |

| Backstage Areas | | Comments |
|--|---|-----------------|
| Dressing Rooms and Washrooms | | |
| Someone using a mobility device can easily use the sink area | The sink is no higher than 865 mm above the finished floor; there is knee space (at least 250 mm high) underneath the sink which allows a person in a wheelchair to pull up underneath; Automatic or lever style faucet handles provide easy access for people with limited hand dexterity or strength, The soap and towel dispensers located close to the sink and at accessible heights (Note: No more than 1200 mm high off the floor), The mirror is mounted 1000 mm from the floors. | |
| Emergency Call Button for Assistance | There is an emergency call button for assistance in accessible washroom stalls | |

Technician Areas

| Technician Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|----------|
| Accessible pathways leading to Fly Rail, Suspension Grid, Control Booths | | |
| Provide accessible pathways connecting all the main activity areas | There should be accessible pathways leading to the fly rail, suspension grid, technician control booths and other areas used by technicians | |
| Provide wide spacious pathways | Pathways need to be at least 1500 mm wide in order for mobility devices to pass one another back stage (Note: Spacious backstage areas are also better for moving heavy theatre equipment) | |
| Provide gradual ramps if needed | Provide gradual ramps (see ramps section) that allow technicians with disabilities to use the ramps safely and independently (Note: gradual ramps are also safer for moving heavy theatre equipment) | |
| Provide an elevator backstage | Elevators are useful in backstage areas for moving heavy technical equipment, providing access to back office administrative spaces and providing access for performers and technicians with disabilities | |

| Technician Areas | | Comments |
|---|---|-----------------|
| Accessible pathways leading to Fly Rail, Suspension Grid, Control Booths | | |
| Provide access to Control Booth | If the control booth is only going to be slightly raised, provide an accessible ramp and entrance leading to the control booth. In a larger theatre explore having the gallery seating and control booth located on the same level so that they can share an elevator | |
| Install a suspension grid | Instead of using a catwalk system, install an accessible suspension grid system – this also reduces health and safety risks of individuals without disabilities falling below | |
| Have fly systems/line systems | Bars for hanging lights, scenery, etc. should have the ability to lower to the floor level for adjustment at floor level | |

| Technician Areas | | Comments |
|--|--|-----------------|
| Accessible Control Booths | | |
| Entrance is wheelchair accessible | At least 915 mm wide, level threshold | |
| Enough room for larger mobility devices to maneuver | (larger devices require a 1700 mm by 1700 mm turning radius) | |
| Control window and controls are located at wheelchair accessible heights | Bottom of window edge should be no higher than 1000 mm and controls should be positioned no higher than 1200 mm. | |
| If a desk is provided, it is wheelchair accessible | Clear knee space is provided underneath the desk | |
| Provide additional flex space for additional workstations | Provide additional flex space for additional work stations – can create extra space for audio visual description – and can also be used to provide more space for mobility devices to maneuver | |

Administrative Offices

| Administrative Offices | | Comments |
|--|---|----------|
| Back office areas used by staff for overall administration, operations of theatre | | |
| The back office areas are accessible for people using mobility devices | If the back office is located on another level, there is either elevator access or a gradual ramp leading to the office. Pathways are at least 915 mm wide to allow wheelchairs to pass through and many passageways are 1500 mm wide to allow people in mobility devices to pass one another | |
| There are accessible work stations | Work stations can be easily adapted for people using wheelchairs and employees with disabilities would have access to adapted technology for employees who are deaf/Hard of Hearing and/or blind | |
| There is an accessible washroom | See earlier sections on washrooms | |
| There is an accessible staff room/kitchen | Features include wheelchair accessible sink, tables, accessible pathways and key features are located at wheelchair accessible heights. Microwave incorporates Braille on buttons and there is good colour contrast between furniture and surroundings | |

6.0 APPENDIX: Audit of Firehall Arts Centre

Introduction

On October 7th, 2016 an accessibility audit of the Firehall Arts Centre took place. The purpose of the audit was to pilot the accessibility audit checklist that has been developed through the *Needs Assessment of Accessible Performance Spaces in the City of Vancouver and Accessibility Audit* project. This checklist is based on international best practices and considers the accessibility needs of performers and technicians with disabilities as well as theatre patrons.

During the site visit, we found that the Firehall Arts Centre has proactively taken steps to improve access for people with disabilities; however, there are some limitations because the building was originally constructed in 1906 as the City's first fire station. This is long before building designers considered access for people with disabilities when designing public facilities.

Since the building was reopened as a theatre in 1982, the Firehall Arts Centre has demonstrated a commitment to accessibility and inclusion by continually renovating the facility over time to improve accessibility. Some examples of accessibility improvements include:

- Installing a ramp leading up to the box office;
- Creating a wheelchair accessible entrance into the theatre;
- Providing ample supply of wheelchair accessible seating at the front of the theatre;
- Installing a universal washroom;
- Providing accessible dressing rooms.

Most recently the Firehall has undertaken a building plan needs assessment and has consulted with the disability arts community during this process around future opportunities to enhance accessibility at the Firehall Arts Centre.

During the audit it was identified that it would be possible to hold a production at the Firehall Arts Centre showcasing performers and technicians with disabilities – despite the fact that it is a 110 year-old heritage building! This speaks to the commitment and inventiveness of Firehall staff who have taken steps to enhance accessibility at the facility and who were able to suggest some creative solutions to overcome accessibility challenges.

Through the site visit, we have identified a number of opportunities to make the theatre more accessible for theatre patrons, performers and technicians with disabilities. We hope that this information will be useful for the Firehall Arts Centre as they plan for future renovations. Because of the age of the facility and the cost of some of the accessibility renovations, it is likely that the theatre will need to prioritize these recommendations and implement them over time as resources allow. This Appendix summarizes the findings of this accessibility audit including recommendations to improve access at the theatre.

Arriving at the Theatre

Using the checklist, we explored the accessibility of the theatre for people with disabilities arriving by multiple means of transportation including being dropped off at the theatre, taking the bus and driving to the theatre.

Drop off/Pick up area: The theatre does not currently have a designated pick up/drop off area that can be used by people with disabilities who are being dropped off by taxi, handyDART or friends and family; however, there is a driveway off Gore Avenue (leading to the courtyard behind the Firehall Arts Centre) that can potentially serve as an unofficial pick up drop off zone for those who require access to one.

Figure 1: Driveway off of Gore Avenue



If the Firehall Arts Centre and the City have an opportunity to create a more formal designated accessible pick up/drop off area in the future, here are some accessibility considerations to take into account:

- Proximity to the main entrance and an intuitive, well marked location;
- Sufficient space for a bus or a HandyDART van to drop people off;
- A sheltered area where people can wait for their ride in poor weather;
- Sufficient overhead clearance to accommodate people using large vehicles with side/rear lifts.

Public transit: There are few different public transit options for people who are arriving at the theatre by bus including bus routes that run along Main Street, Powell Street, and Hastings Street. One of the limitations of the current public transit service at the Firehall Arts Centre is

the fact that none of the buses stop directly in front of the Firehall Arts Centre; rather, they are all located a block away which requires theatre visitors to walk a block or more.

The nearby bus stops have various levels of accessibility. Most of the bus stops do not have bus shelters which limits overall accessibility for people with disabilities. The bus stop at Main and Cordova was built to a high standard of accessibility, because it has the following characteristics:

- A bench which provides space for someone with limited mobility to sit and rest;
- A clear space alongside the bench where someone using a wheelchair can pull up and rest;
- A bus shelter which protects people waiting for the bus from the rain and wind.

Figure 2: Bus Shelter at Main and Cordova



Recommendation: Since the other bus stops lack these accessibility features; it may be worthwhile to approach the City of Vancouver to ask if they would consider creating accessible bus shelters at these locations in the future.

Parking: Overall, there is a limited supply of parking at the Firehall Arts Centre, since it does not have its own parking lot. This is largely due to the fact that the Centre was originally designed as a Firehall, not a theatre. There are a small number of metered parking spots available in front of the theatre on Cordova Street; however, these spots have a time limit. There are also a couple of parking stalls that have been created alongside the building facing Gore Avenue. For those who are able to walk longer distances, there is an Easy Park parking lot at 107 East Cordova and an Impark Lot at Main and Powell.

Providing accessible parking at the theatre would improve access for both people who work at the theatre and theatre visitors. The Firehall Arts Centre may wish to explore the feasibility of offering disability parking spaces that can be reserved in advance. Some potential locations include the two parking spaces on the side of the building by Gore Avenue as well as parking in the Courtyard behind the theatre.

Figure 3: Existing Parking Spaces alongside Gore Avenue



Figure 4: Courtyard Behind Firehall Arts Centre



In the future, if there is an opportunity to add more parking in the immediate vicinity of the Firehall Arts Centre, it would be beneficial to provide designated accessible parking stalls for people with disabilities. A good rule for ensuring that there is enough disability parking is to designate 4% (or 1 out of every 25 stalls) as accessible. In order for a parking stall to be fully accessible, it needs to have the following accessibility features:

- Sufficient dimensions to accommodate larger vehicles with lifts;
- If the parking lot is covered, there needs to be sufficient vertical clearance to allow enough space for lifts;
- A smooth paved and level surface;
- Accessible signage including both a painted symbol in the parking space as well as a sign on a post.

Exterior pathways: During the site visit, we also took a look at the accessibility of exterior pathways connecting the various means of transportation with building entrances. In particular, it is important for a theatre to have accessible paths of travel connecting the pick-up/drop off area, parking lots, public transit to the theatre entrances and box office. Some limitations with the sidewalks connecting these areas include:

- Older sidewalks with cracked pavement that can create a hazard for people using mobility devices (particularly mobility devices with small wheels);
- Dips in the sidewalk where puddles and leaves accumulate.

Figure 5: Cracked pavement, puddles and leaves on sidewalk in front of Firehall Arts Centre



We also noted that some of the nearby intersections have curb ramps which provide access for people using mobility devices; however, the curb ramps do not line up with the path of travel across the street, which could be confusing and/or potentially unsafe for people with visual disabilities as they direct people out into the middle of the intersection.

Figure 6: Example of a Curb ramp that does not line up with the accessible path of travel at intersection



Main entrance: Some aspects of the main entrance were already accessible:

- The main entrance is well marked and easy to find;
- There is both a staircase and a ramp which provide access to the main entrance and box office.

Figure 7: Ramp by main entrance



Figure 8: Stairs by Main Entrance



Our audit also identified some limitations with the main entrance:

- Once a person using a mobility device goes up to the ramp and into the main entrance and gets their ticket from the box office, there is another flight of stairs. As a result, they have to use an alternate accessible entrance to enter the seating area of the theatre.
- The stairs do not have tactile warning strips which indicate a change in elevation for people with visual disabilities.
- The ramp has a very small landing area at the top of the ramp, which does not provide enough space for people using larger mobility devices to comfortably maneuver.
- There was cracked pavement as well as a pile of leaves at the base of the ramp both of which can create a hazard for people using mobility devices.
- The doorway is too narrow (30 inches) for people using larger mobility devices.
- The door does not have an automatic door opener or a call button for assistance that people can use if they require extra assistance.

Recommendation: As part of future renovation plans, explore the feasibility of creating an accessible main entrance that provides access for people with disabilities to the box office, seating area, reception area and public washrooms.

Alternate accessible entrance: After a person using a mobility device connects with Box Office staff, they are trained to offer assistance getting to the accessible entrance which connects to the theatre seating area, the stage and the accessible washroom.

Figure 9: Accessible entrance for Firehall Arts Centre



Through creating an alternate accessible entrance for theatre patrons and performers with disabilities, the theatre has demonstrated a commitment to accessibility. However, there are some limitations with the current accessible entrance including:

- The cracked pavement at the base of the ramp;
- The steepness of the ramp is also a hazard and is challenging to use independently;
- The doorway is too narrow for people who use larger mobility devices;
- An individual requires staff assistance to use it and cannot enter and exit the theatre independently.

Figure 10: Cracked pavement at the base of the ramp



Box Office: The box office at the Firehall Arts Centre is located directly inside the main entrance of the theatre and can be accessed by someone using a mobility device. Some opportunities to enhance accessibility at the box office include:

- Provide signage which directs visitors to the box office;
- Provide a wheelchair accessible service counter;

- Install a hearing loop or other Assisted Listening System which helps Hard of Hearing patrons communicate with box office staff;
- Provide training to staff so that people working at the box office are well trained on serving people with disabilities, are knowledgeable about the accessibility features the theatre can provide and can help to connect people with disabilities to available technology and resources;
- Provide a brochure of accessibility features that staff can share with visitors – This brochure should conform to large print standards.

Figure 11: Box Office



Theatre Patron Areas

Coat check: The Firehall Arts Centre currently does not have a Coat Check area.

Concession area: There is a reception area on the second level of the Firehall Arts Centre, but there is no elevator access leading up to this level, which makes it inaccessible for people who cannot use the stairs. There are some aspects of the concession which make it accessible for people with other types of disabilities:

- The concession is easy to find;
- They provide a large print drink list which is useful for people with visual disabilities.

Some opportunities to improve accessibility of the concession area include:

- Provide elevator access to this level as well as a wheelchair accessible washroom;
- Provide a wheelchair accessible counter that provides a lower counter section as well as knee space for someone using a wheelchair to be able to pull up to the service counter;
- Provide a Braille menu for people who are blind;
- Provide Captioned Television Screens which share important announcements to people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (e.g. 10 minute warning, updates about performance delays, emergency announcements);
- Provide staff training so that staff are well trained on serving people with disabilities;
- Provide a brochure with information about the various accessibility features that are available.

Figure 12: Staircase leading up to Concession Area



Figure 13: Main service counter at bar



Figure 14: Overhead drink list



Figure 15: Large print drink list



Figure 16: Seating options in reception/concession area



Figure 17: Outdoor patio seating area



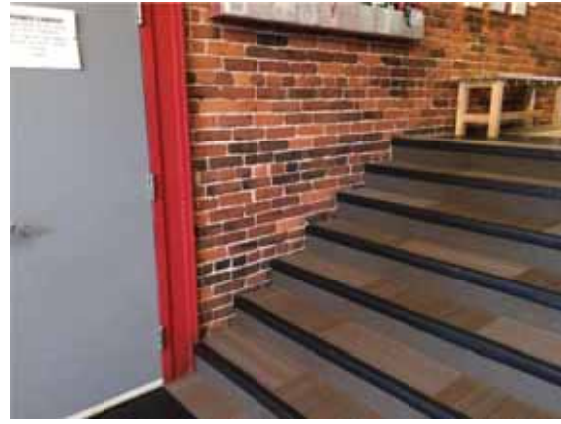
Accessible pathways and circulation: A fully accessible theatre would have accessible paths of travel connecting all key activity areas including the main entrance, box office, theatre seating area, concession area, washrooms, etc. The main limitation around this is that the Firehall Arts Centre does not have an elevator leading to the second level.

Recommendation: Explore the feasibility of installing an elevator which provides access to the second level of the Firehall Theatre

Figure 18: Staircase connecting box office to theatre and concession on second level



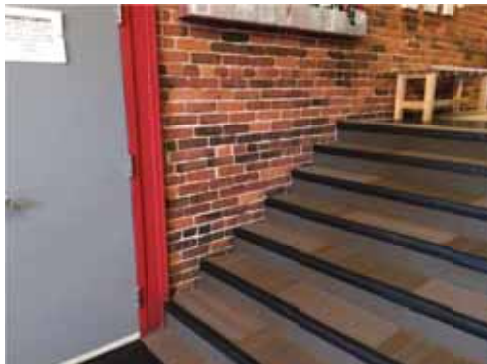
Figure 19: Staircase does not have handrails on both sides



Staircases: The accessibility audit has identified some opportunities to enhance accessibility of existing staircases for people with visual disabilities and those with difficulties balancing including:

- Provide handrails on both sides of the stairs (Note: there is a risk that people may grasp onto the display posted on the wall for extra support and inadvertently knock it off the wall).

Figure 20: Staircases do not have handrails on both sides

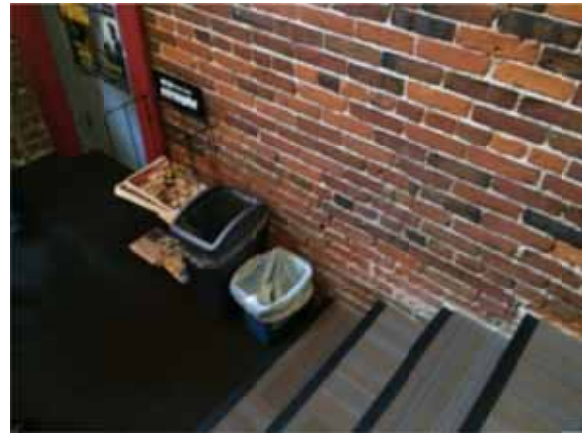


- Provide handrails that run the full length of the staircase and level off at the top and bottom to indicate the end of the staircase;
- Keep the area alongside the wall at the top and bottom of the staircase clear of obstructions such as garbage bins and magazine stands since this obstructs the accessible path of travel for people with visual disabilities who are using the handrail and wall for guidance.

Figure 21: Handrail does not run the full length of staircase and does not level off at the top and bottom of the staircase.



Figure 22: Garbage bins obstruct accessible path of travel at base of staircase



- Use high colour contrast tactile warning strips on stair nosings and at the top of staircases to warn people with visual disabilities about a change in level (Note: the black tactile strip by entrance to the theatre seating area is confusing because it lines up with the doorway, not the top of the staircase).
- Provide handrails that are round and easy to grasp onto for people with limited hand dexterity

Figure 23: Stairs connecting outdoor patio area to rear courtyard lacks tactile warning strips & round handrails



Figure 24: Confusing tactile warning strips by entrance to theatre seating area



Upstairs Washrooms: There are washrooms located upstairs that can be used by both the administrative staff who work upstairs as well as theatre patrons during intermission. The washrooms located upstairs are currently completely inaccessible because of the lack of elevator access to this level. They are also older style washrooms that need to be retrofitted with accessibility in mind.

Recommendation: Once elevator access is provided to the upper level where the upstairs washrooms and administrative offices are located, renovate washrooms with accessibility in mind. Some characteristics of fully accessible washrooms include:

- Excellent signage directing people to accessible washroom;
- Signs that incorporate Braille/raised lettering;
- Accessible entrances with an automatic door opener or lever style handle;
- Universal washroom stall is provided that can be used by male, female, transgendered and can be particularly useful if someone needs assistance from an opposite gender attendant;
- Clear path of travel leading to the accessible washroom stall;
- Adequate space to maneuver for people using wheelchairs and larger mobility devices;
- Accessible toilet height and transfer space alongside the toilet;
- Grab bars provide extra support during transfers;
- Someone using a mobility device can easily use the sink area and easily reach mirror, soap dispenser, paper towel/hand dryer;
- Automatic or lever style handles are provided;
- Emergency call button for assistance is provided.

Downstairs Washrooms: The washrooms on the downstairs level can either be accessed by going down the stairs from the concession area or by walking across the stage to a side hallway. Most of the washrooms downstairs were built before the Building Code took into account

accessibility and are inaccessible. These washrooms should be retrofitted with accessibility in mind during future renovations (see above list for some considerations to take into account).

Downstairs Universal Washroom: One washroom has been renovated to be accessible for people with disabilities and incorporates accessible features such as a wheelchair accessible sink, space to maneuver, grab bars. Some opportunities to improve accessibility of the universal washroom include:

- Install a sign with Braille and raised lettering
- Replace the round door handle with a lever style handle or automatic door opener
- Install a kick plate on the door to protect it from people using their feet to push open the door.

Figure 25: Accessibility features in universal washroom



Figure 26: Washroom door with round handrail and without kick plate



Wayfinding and lighting: Because the theatre is very small, it is relatively easy to find one's way around. Staff training is an important element because they would play a key role in directing people with disabilities to the accessibility features such as the accessible entrance and washroom.

Wayfinding could also be improved by adding more signage directing people to different parts of the facility. The signage should ideally be easy to read for someone with sight loss as well as easy to read for someone with a cognitive disability and/or lower levels of literacy (refer to checklist for specifics).

Emergency wayfinding: The emergency exits are well marked in the theatre and well lit. Some opportunities to enhance accessibility in emergencies is to:

- Provide evacuation guide lights in the theatre along the aisles that help to direct people to emergency exits;
- Incorporate visual signals (blinking lights) for people who are Hard of Hearing/Deaf and locate them in all activity areas and common areas (including washrooms);
- Provide captioning on television screens in common areas to share important emergency announcements to people who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Seating options: Depending on the configuration used during the show, the number of seats in the Firehall Arts Centre ranges between 135-150 people. The first two rows of the seating are comprised of flexible seating that can be easily moved. As a result, it would be possible to provide a significant amount of accessible seating within the theatre.

Figure 27: Flexible seating in the first two rows



There are some limitations with the accessible seating options within the theatre:

- Wheelchair access is only provided by an alternate side entrance to the theatre;
- To access an accessible public washroom, a staff member would have to accompany someone using a mobility device across the stage;
- The only wheelchair seating option available is at the front of the theatre because the rest of the seats are located up a flight of stairs

Figure 28: Entrance and staircase connecting main box office to theatre seating area



Figure 29: Latecomer seating in the back row up a flight of stairs



Adapted technology and other accessibility supports: In the past, the Firehall Arts Centre has offered some adapted technology and accessibility supports when they have been included as part of a production. For example, they have had live audio description services at shows before. It would also be possible to find a place for someone to do American Sign Language interpretation within the theatre. Since the stage is not raised, it is also easy to provide wheelchair access to the stage during performances and awards shows.

Recommendation: Explore the feasibility of installing an Assisted Listening System for people who are Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing.

Backstage Areas for Performers and Technicians

Backstage Entrance: In most situations, performers with disabilities would likely use the same accessible theatre entrance as patrons with disabilities; however, there is also another backstage entrance that is used to load and unload equipment that could also serve as an accessible entrance for performers and technicians. Theatre staff have used this entrance in the past for people who use large mobility devices that are too large for the other accessible entrance.

Figure 30: Alternate backstage entrance to theatre



Wayfinding and Circulation and Access to the Stage: Many aspects of the theatre are relatively accessible for performers with disabilities. For example, the dressing room, stage, and accessible washroom are all on the same level and connected by accessible routes of travel. Since it is a black box theatre design, the width of various routes are flexible and determined by the stage set up. As a result, it would be possible to provide wide spacious pathways backstage. Since the stage is located on the floor level, there is no need to construct a ramp.

The main limitation with the Firehall Arts Centre is there are some additional spaces located on the second and third levels such as the concession area, administrative offices, another dressing room, and studio space that are not currently accessible because there is no elevator access to the second level.

Dressing Rooms and Backstage Washrooms: Our review identified that the first floor dressing room would function well as a backstage dressing room for performers with disabilities because of its proximity to the stage. The main limitation is that performers would have to share the accessible washroom with theatre patrons, which is not ideal.

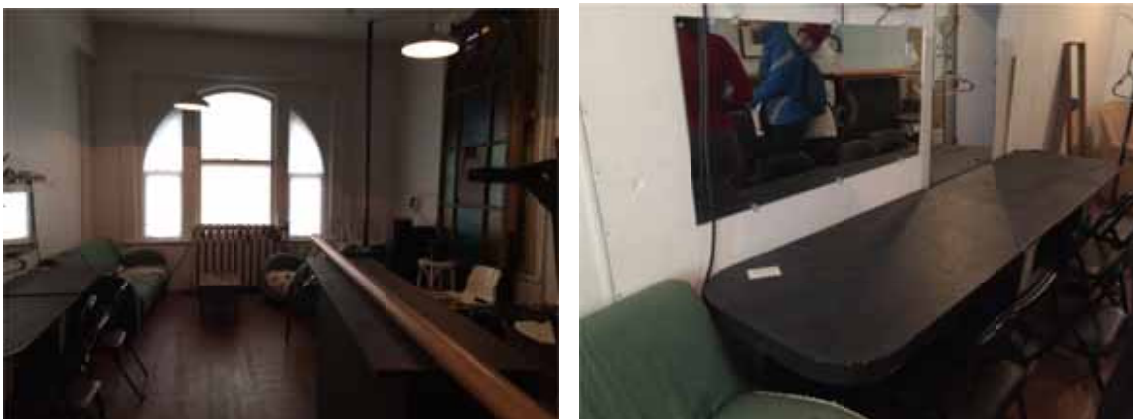
Some opportunities to further enhance accessibility as part of future renovations include:

- Providing an accessible washroom for the exclusive use of performers and backstage staff;
- Explore the feasibility of adding additional features such as wheel in shower, bed, visual paging system, emergency alarms incorporating strobe lights;
- Provide a wider hallway connecting the stage to the backstage dressing rooms.

Figure 31: Ground Floor Dressing Room



Figure 32: Upstairs dressing room



Technician Areas

Accessible pathways: The current theatre set up would be challenging for technicians with disabilities because the tech control booth is located up a flight of stairs and tech staff have to climb ladders to adjust the lighting. Because of the scale of the theatre, other features such as a fly rail and suspension grid are not feasible.

Recommendation: One recommendation proposed by Firehall Arts Centre Staff that may work well in this context and other contexts is to set up an alternate tech control point using live video

feed. This would allow a person using a mobility device to set up backstage and run tech equipment when they are unable to access the official tech control booth. This is a good example where staff training and readiness can help to overcome a limitation in the physical design of a building

Figure 33: Ladder providing access to overhead lighting equipment



Figure 34: Technician Control Booth



Administrative offices: The administrative offices for the Firehall Arts Centre are located upstairs. In the future, if there is an opportunity to provide elevator access to this floor, there are also some other ways that Firehall staff can make it more accessible for people with physical disabilities such as:

- Renovate the upstairs washrooms to be accessible for people with disabilities (see earlier section);
- Provide pathways that are clear of clutter and wide enough to accommodate people using mobility devices;
- Provide accessible workstations that can be adapted for people using mobility devices;

Currently, it may be possible for the Firehall Arts Centre to improve access for people with other types of disabilities such as those with visual disabilities and hearing loss. This may require providing access to some forms of adapted technology at computer work stations.

Figure 35: Pathways in Upstairs Administrative Offices

