

ARTS BUILD ONTARIO
Creative Spaces Case Study Series
The Lighthouse Festival Theatre



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Introduction

These in-depth case studies serve as a resource for arts and heritage organizations embarking on a capital project to learn from the successes and challenges of others in the sector.

In these case studies, we analyze the **why** (why they took on this capital project), the **what** (what were they building and creating), the **who** (who are they serving, who supported this project, who led this project and who they hired), the **how** (how was the project financially supported and what positions were created/how were they funded), and the **ongoing** (what happened after? How is the building maintained/operated? Is it sustainable? How is revenue generated?) behind each project.

We looked at a wide range of spaces from across the province with varying operational models, sizes, locations, project sizes and artistic disciplines. The case studies focus on each organization's process for completing their project; from the planning phase, to the building phase, to the operations and maintenance phase. Following the completion of all 19 case studies, a Best Practice Summary released on ABO's website, free for all to access.

The case study series is supported by the Learning Series, which is a collection of webinars and workshops that support ABO's core programs. Webinars that highlight the capital projects featured in the 2018-2020 case studies series are available on

the ABO website. Please check <https://www.artsbuildontario.ca/learning/webinars/> for more information.

The case study series is supported by the Department of Canadian Heritage and Canada Council for the Arts.

ArtsBuild Ontario

ArtsBuild Ontario is the only organization in Ontario dedicated to realizing long-term solutions to building, managing and financing the sustainable arts facilities needed in our communities.

ABO offers tools, resources and programs that support arts organizations with their creative space projects. ABO's core programs include Asset Planner for the Arts, the Creative Spaces Mentoring Network, and the Learning Series.

Lighthouse Festival Theatre

Interviewee

- Helen Wagenaar, Previous Administrative Director
- Nicole Campbell, Executive Director

Vision & Mandate

Lighthouse Festival Theatre (LFT) is dedicated to fostering and promoting live professional theatre in southern Ontario; for Canadians by Canadians. With 170 productions under Lighthouse Festival Theatre's belt since its inception in 1980, every artist, technician and staff member has aimed to find that perfect blend of theatre, year round, for everyone who crosses her threshold.

Without wavering in our vision, Lighthouse Festival Theatre will continue to focus on nurturing and presenting the highest quality of professional theatre in beautiful lakeside Port Dover.

Historical Background

Incorporated in 1980, the Lighthouse Festival Theatre has been a landmark in the community of Port Dover for nearly 40 years, with history dating back to the early 1900s. In the early years, the building was owned by Port Dover and the City of Nanticoke and maintained by the Town Hall Management Committee. For the next 18 years, LFT rented the building from Municipal Council for \$100 per day. In return, Council returned 80% of those payments to LFT for their management of the

facility. This arrangement continued until the Lighthouse Festival Theatre purchased the building in January 1999.

Designated provincially as a heritage building in 1983, LFT has always attempted to preserve the heritage of the building with renovations that have gone into developing the old Town Hall building. This includes maintaining the pressed embossed tin ceiling, oak beams, hardwood floor and original stage.

Since incorporation, renovations and facility upgrades have been made possible by supportive community members. From generous financial contributions, to community volunteers that installed a heating and air-conditioning system, residents have always recognized the value of the theatre and played a role in its evolution.

Project Summary

While LFT has undergone many capital upgrades over its 40 year history, this case study will address four substantial capital projects that have greatly improved their facility and operations. Beginning in the year 2000, these projects included the instalment of an elevator, rejuvenation of their entryway, expansion of the lobby, bar and office areas, offering new seats to subscribers and a separate rehearsal hall for performers. Realized by need, circumstance and availability of funding, these projects considered the needs of their users and were made possible by a dedicated staff team.

The “What”

Who owns and operates the building?

After the now dissolved City of Nanticoke announced its intention to sell the old Town Hall building, LFT entered into discussions with the City and purchased the building in 1999. Along with the building, they acquired two tenants that operate the neighbouring storefronts. The building is currently non-profit owned and operated by The Lighthouse Festival Theatre Company.

What are the Lighthouse Festival Theatre’s recent capital projects?

Since purchasing the building in 1999, there have been a series of renovations that have allowed the Lighthouse Festival Theatre to continually evolve into a space that best serves the needs of its community. For this case study, the following projects will be included:

- “Get a Lift” Lobby Renovations (2000 - 2001)
- “Room to Roam” Expansion project (2009 - 2010)
- Acquiring and Renovating the Rehearsal Hall (2015 - 2016)
- “Get Cheeky” Seat project and Entryway Renovations (2017 - 2018)

1. “Get a Lift” Lobby Renovations:

After acquiring the building, LFT leveraged public and private funding to renovate the lobby of the building. This project included installing an elevator to allow patrons to access the stage on the second floor, and rejuvenating the lobby space and box office. Choosing to restore the bricks hidden behind the wall coverings, the lobby currently features historic brick walls, which provides a beautiful backdrop for the works of local artists in the theatre gallery.

2. “Room to Roam” Expansion project:

In 2008, LFT bought the adjoining building to the theater, and began construction in 2009. For this project, they completely renovated the space and lowered the floor to be level with the second floor of their original building. This project resulted in two major additions to their venue. Firstly, it allowed for the creation of what is now known as the “Long Bar Lobby”, a fully licenced event space that is available for the community to rent. Secondly, it allowed for improved and additional administrative office space for LFT staff.

3. Acquiring and Renovating the Rehearsal Hall

In 2016, LFT bought a property on Main Street a few blocks down the road from their main building. They transformed the space into a black box theatre and replicated their stage by mapping out its dimensions on the hall’s floor. The new facility also includes an accessible washroom and change-room. It serves as their first designated rehearsal space.

4. “Get Cheeky” Seat project and Entryway Renovations

From 2017 - 2018 LFT replaced all the seats in their 350 seat theatre after hearing from their patrons and subscribers that seats were not comfortable. This project also included a rejuvenation of the front entryway, that now features a three-door barrier free entrance and light up overhang.

The “Why”

Why did LFT take on these capital projects?

Much of the need for these facility upgrades was made apparent by managing the venue. For example, in regards to the entryway renovations, LFT had always been operating with environmentally unsound windows and a door that often blew open. Having a barrier free entrance with a grand exterior that now features an overhang and a three-door entrance has created an inviting front facade that reflects the professional productions being presented in the building.

Moreover, by investing in owning and renovating their own rehearsal hall, they are now able to have a designated space for rehearsals. No longer needing to jump from venue to venue, they now have the freedom to operate the building around their own needs and schedule. They are able to black out dates for their busiest periods, and open the space up for use by the community through their rentals program.

Which tools and processes helped identify the need?

In terms of the building, LFT credits Asset Planner for the Arts as a tool that has helped them justify the need for facility upgrades. Using the data from this software, LFT has been able to generate reports that demonstrate the expected life cycle of their assets, validating the need for building upgrades and renovations.

Understanding they are part of the larger community of Port Dover, LFT prides themselves on providing a welcoming environment. They actively interact with audiences, facilitate surveys and keep lines of communication open to invite community input from their patrons. When LFT conducted a survey to determine a list of wants from their patrons in 2011, there was an overwhelming response by participants that seats in the theatre were no longer comfortable. Demonstrating the importance of participant feedback, having ongoing communication with their audience enabled LFT to uncover a need they had not internally perceived.

The “Who”

Who led the project within LFT?

Within the LFT Board of Directors, a Building Committee manages the building's assets and approves facility renovations. For the aforementioned projects, the committee was consulted in the design phase and responsible for signing off on plans and

contracts. They became more involved when anomalies and contingencies came up, including increases in project costs.

As the Administrative Director, Helen Wagenaar was the lead on the construction and execution for these projects. After receiving approval from the Board on drawings, permits and contracts, the Administrative Director managed day-to-day construction operations. From project start to finish, she managed the contractors, convened meetings and kept staff up to date.

The Building Committee member affiliated with capital projects include:

- 2000 Get a Lift Campaign (Lobby and Elevator): Wayne McDonald
- 2009 Room to Roam Campaign: Steve Sterczer and Joan Shirlow
- 2016/17 Rehearsal Hall Project: Paul Lipsit, George Araujo, Paul Morris, Joan Shirlow
- 2018 Get Cheeky Campaign: Paul Lipsit, George Araujo, Paul Morris, Joan Shirlow

Who else from the LFT staff team involved in the capital projects?

Capital campaigns have always been instrumental in enabling the LFT renovations projects to move forward. As such these capital projects have been described as a collaborative team

effort, in which each staff member has been directly involved, within their respective positions. While development was instrumental in garnering donor support and maintaining relations, marketing played a crucial role in disseminating information to supporters and patrons alike.

While no new staff were hired specifically for these projects, LFT learned the value of a dedicated Development officer to manage capital campaigns. LFT hired a part time Development Officer in 2012 initially to steward donors, but this role eventually took a lead on the “Get Cheeky” capital campaign. They created an effective schedule for the campaign and oversaw its implementation, demonstrating how crucial this position was to the overall success of the project.

Who were the key stakeholders and supporters outside of Lighthouse Festival Theatre?

Other than their supportive private donors, subscribers and patrons, LFT credits three partners for their contributions to the facility’s renovations. They include:

1. CIBC:

As their bank for the past 40 years, CIBC were loyal supporters of every project LFT has undertaken. They have been a major stakeholder and always willing to work with the organization to find the best way to manage their projects. Whether extending

their line of credit or approving a loan, their support played a key role in the renovation projects.

2. The Port Dover Board of Trade:

As champions of arts and tourism in Port Dover, they have been avid supporters of LFT. Both financially and conceptually, they have continuously vocalized their support for the Lighthouse Festival Theatre.

3. Reid & DeLeye Contractors Limited:

As their sole contractor for all renovation projects since 2000, LFT has a long and positive relationship with Reid & DeLeye Contractors Limited. Not only have they consistently proposed solid project budgets and executed projects, they have demonstrated pride of partnership through sponsorship and recognition.

[Who did Lighthouse Festival Theatre contract for the projects?](#)

Reid and DeLeye contractors were recommended for the lobby renovations from then Board Chair Wayne McDonald, who had extensive, successful history with the firm due to his role as Buildings/Facilities Manager with the Board of Education.

Noting the importance of reputation in a rural community, their previous connection to Wayne McDonald ignited a partnership with LFT that now spans almost two decades.

They have maintained their relationship by consistently providing high quality work within their allocated budget. They understand the importance of timing in a theatre organization, and the need for most renovation projects to be completed during their off season from October to April. Their long history has also enabled them to develop a deep knowledge of the organization and the building, which has been key in the success of their projects.

Who does the Lighthouse Festival Theatre strive to serve with its spaces?

LFT's spaces actively serve users, audiences and the local business community. Projects such as the Lobby renovations, the "Room to Roam" expansion of the Long Bar and the "Get Cheeky" seat campaign were undertaken to enhance the experience of patrons, and rolled out with their considerations top of mind. The acquisition and renovations of the rehearsal hall enabled LFT to address the need for additional space to accommodate their rehearsal schedule and offer artists and performers a safe and comfortable venue. Lastly, while the renovations in the interior and exterior of the building benefit LFT, their success is also felt by restaurants and local businesses that in turn profit from the generated foot traffic.

Who opposed the projects?

While LFT did not face major opposition to their projects, relationships with neighbours and local groups were managed

with forethought to ensure the community was on board. Shortly after opening the rehearsal hall, one of the property neighbours had noticed an increase in noise levels due to a high concentration of rentals. However, through continued communication and in person meetings, relationships with neighbours remain positive.

The “How”

[How did the projects go from concept to construction?](#)

In most cases, renovations made by LFT were realized by equal parts need and circumstance. For instance, there was always a need for a larger lobby space and an elevator to bring guests up to the second floor. When LFT acquired the building and discovered funding was available from the Ontario Trillium Fund and their corporate sponsors, they were able to put their lobby expansion plans into action.

Similarly, in 2008, financial contributions from corporate partners, and an increased line of credit from CIBC, enabled LFT to take on the “Room to Roam” project. Having the cash flow to support the expansion of office space and the Long Bar allowed LFT to respond to the identified needs.

While having their own rehearsal space has always been top of LFT’s wish list, the project was only able to move forward due to the availability of a suitable space, as well as support from

Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, a substantial capital reserve and corporate donations.

In terms of the “Get Cheeky” seat campaign and exterior renovation, securing a Canada 150 grant and corporate donations were ultimately what allowed this project to go from inception to construction. Although it was apparent that better theatre seats were needed and a renovated entryway would increase accessibility and visibility of the building, this project was made possible by the availability of public funds, and the support of a few corporate partners.

[How was a construction plan formed?](#)

Finalizing designs was a collaborative process between the internal building committee, Helen Wagenaar, the contractor, architect and the community. Consultations with the community were held through focus groups as well as casual conversations with subscribers. Their input was actively considered, and when members identified the proposed designs for the new entryway as being too contemporary for the heritage building, LFT returned to the drawing board to create a vision that better reflected their organization and its history.

Once these designs were approved, the contractors would determine a construction plan. This was then brought forward to the Building Committee and the Administrative Director for feedback. After receiving final approval from the committee,

the contractors were able to move forward on the construction plans.

How was accessibility included in the project?

Keeping their audience demographics in mind, accessibility has been incorporated into all renovations since the addition of the elevator in 2000. LFT is up to code, and their theatre building offers a barrier free entrance, access to an elevator, assisted listening devices, accessible washrooms and seating. LFT has also gone above code by incorporating 16 instead of 12 accessible seats in their 350-seat theatre, and continually updates their hearing assist systems.

How was energy efficiency and the environment incorporated?

LFT has recently installed LED light bulbs throughout their theatre building, and uses low voltage lighting wherever possible. This is incorporated into their signage and the newly installed canopy at the entrance. In order to make their new rehearsal hall energy efficient, LFT worked with Hydro One to determine the best LED lights and placement of lights to save on cost. They also consulted with Hydro One and their HVAC provider to determine best use, and incorporated an efficient floor heating system. Insulated curtains are also used to keep the temperature standard and reduce the risk of overusing their heating and cooling system.

How were day-to-day operations managed?

In order to manage their capital projects and day-to-day operations, there is typically a shift in priorities, and renovations take precedence. Noting the importance of a collaborative team, LFT staff remain open with one another on deadlines and tasks get reoriented to different team members if something becomes too much. There are also weekly meetings for capital projects as well as regular team meetings that allow for updates from each department and open dialogue between staff.

How were the projects funded?

In 2000, fundraising began and with financial assistance from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, S.C. Johnson, the Port Dover Lions Club, The Ventin Group, Reid and Deleye, the Lighthouse Volunteer Committee and donations from community members supported the elevator and lobby renovations. To recognize donors for this project, local artist Alec Godden created a large bronze lighthouse plaque.

For the 2008-2009 expansion of the offices and Long Bar, the project was given the name “Room to Roam.” Private funding including \$40,000 from S.C. Johnson, \$10,000 from the Board Chair, \$10,000 from Alliance Homes and smaller donations were a major source of funding for this project. Private donors were given recognition through the addition of seagulls around

the lighthouse shaped bronze plaque in the lobby. For this project, LFT took out a line of credit with their bank.

Rather than having a capital campaign for the rehearsal hall project, LFT reached out to their loyal donor base and explained that they wanted to improve the quality of art audience members see on stage, and needed their support. LFT also took out a mortgage on their main building for extra capital as a precaution. Considering they had a substantial capital reserve to fund this project, the donations were significant, and they received funding through Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, LFT did not need to apply their mortgage to fund the \$200 000 project.

LFT's most recent capital campaign was titled "Get Cheeky". In order to fund the replacement of theatre seats, LFT sold seat and armrests to subscribers, corporate sponsors, foundations and board members. The capital campaign began in 2017, and audiences were engaged through digital outreach including social media, website and email promotions, as well as initiatives in the theatre. LFT installed a seat just outside of the theatre that patrons could test out and printed out two big posters that incorporated the seating plan.

Once a seat was sold, it was marked as such on the posters. Once all seats and armrests were sold, they invited purchasers to an open house for a first look at the seats, and gave them a chance to confirm the plaques were property spelt and all seats

were properly accounted for. Through this campaign, LFT sold 347 seats and 366 armrests.

How were contingencies managed?

During the 2008-2009 expansion of the Long Bar and administrative offices, a couple contingencies arose. First, LFT ran into an issue with sewage lines that forced them to peel up their entire floors and mark each individual line. This added an \$8,000 cost to the project cost. Due to the increase in cost, the architect decided to remove a design aspect without discussion with the committee. Once the long bar was completed, Wagenaar noted the element was missing. In the end, LFT chose to spend an additional \$10,000 to insure the feature was installed as originally planned.

When LFT began their seat renovation, the project timeline was complicated by a floor plan that had to be continuously revised to allow the proper amount of room between aisles. When the plan was finally approved and all seats were installed, subscribers made it clear that the new arrangement of chairs obstructed views of the stage and had less legroom.

The Administrative Director, Publicist, and Artistic Director resolved this issue by speaking to patrons individually to hear concerns and reassured patrons they were actively solving the problem. Seating issues were resolved by raising the stage and subsequently adding a platform to the balcony, which required removing and reinstalling the seats on the second level.

Additionally, uncomfortable seat positioning was solved by removing one inch of padding from the back of every seat.

How was the community engaged during construction?

By choosing to undergo renovations in their off season, programs and performances were not impacted by construction. Patrons and the community were kept up to date on progress through emails and social media, and invited to celebrate the completion of their projects at open house events.

The “Ongoing”

How did Lighthouse Festival Theatre project new financials?

In order to project the budget post renovations, LFT relied on the knowledge of their board, namely their treasurer for expertise on effectively balancing their budget.

Considering the “Room to Roam” project was completed well into their fiscal year, LFT did not account for additional revenue in their projected budget. Once the space was open however, they were able to recognize increased revenue from rentals and incorporate it into their following fiscal year. In terms of the rehearsal hall, once it was usable by LFT, they were able to remove rehearsals as an expense from their budget, as they were no longer required to rent space from their local church

and library. Using the revenues they generated from renting the hall, they were able to offset operational costs of the space.

Do the spaces provide a new revenue source?

The Lighthouse Festival Theatre is able to generate additional revenues from successful rental programs. This includes renting the main stage, the Long Bar, lobby and rehearsal hall. By having a fully licensed bar area upstairs, they are able to generate additional revenue from the bar for both their performances and events as well as private party rentals.

Were new staff hired after the projects?

In order to support the increase in rentals, LFT hired their seasonal Production Manager on a full-time basis. This position entails coordinating rentals, being present on site and any minor building servicing. On average, they spend approximately five hours a week on building upkeep which includes tasks like looking after the light bulbs or calling a plumber. LFT recognizes that this is a necessary hard cost for the organization to be successful in their rentals program as they need a dedicated individual to liaise with renters and be on site when needed. The position is supported by the improved rentals program.

How is The Lighthouse Festival Theatre being maintained and operated?

While the Facilities Manager and LFT staff are responsible for day-to-day management and upkeep of the space, the Building Committee manages the building's assets and decides on

facility renovations. Their decisions are supported by Asset Planner for the Arts - a facility and asset management tool for creative spaces. Future projects will be funded through a capital reserve fund that is populated by donations and a capital surcharge built into their inclusive ticket pricing.

What lessons were learned in the first 90 days?

Completing several capital projects has enabled the LFT team to learn how to best manage project expectations and take the bad with the good. Understanding that contingencies will always arise, leaders must be prepared for intense periods and be ready to make quick decisions. It is also important to take pride and ownership in the finished projects and recognize the major feats that have been undertaken by the team.

What lessons were learned in the first year?

For one of their initial projects, LFT did not have a formal contract with their Project Manager. This proved to be a major lesson in the importance of signed contracts, good communication and professional relationships. By choosing to take a more hands off approach, the project was approximately \$10,000 over budget and some aspects were missed.

Due to this experience, LFT was better equipped to handle their following projects. They learned not to be afraid to ask questions that may seem unimportant, and always keep lines of communication open with the project team. Moving forward, introductions were made with workers and project managers,

cell phone numbers were exchanged and the project leads communicated on a daily basis. All of these aspects fed into a collaborative and productive environment.

Case Study Summary

As an organization deeply rooted in community and gathering, the Lighthouse Festival Theatre is dedicated to providing a space that meets the evolving needs of its community.

Leveraging opportunity with public and private funding, they have successfully integrated facility upgrades identified by their audiences, performers and staff. As LFT enters into its 40th season, their retrofitted space is able to support their vision and continue to focus on nurturing and presenting the highest quality of professional theatre in beautiful lakeside Port Dover.

Resources

The following resources below have been provided as additional information for readers.

Website:

- [Lighthouse Festival Theatre Website](#)

Documents, Webpages, and Press Releases:

- [Capital Campaign Webpage - Unveiling of Rehearsal Hall & Plans for Get Cheeky](#)
- [Get Cheeky Press Release](#)
- [Ontario 150 Grant Announcement for Get Cheeky](#)