

Brief Project Description

Barkerville's Theatre Royal has been hosting seasons of live theatre for over 150 years. As the building in which cultural and heritage presentations are centralized at Barkerville Historic Town & Park- the largest heritage site in western North America- the theatre is the most well-used building in Barkerville; every year, the structure is home to special events, presentations, travelling delegations, big-ticket performers, and a full season of entertaining, educational, and accessible live theatre created and performed by Barkerville's own team of museum theatre professionals and cultural storytellers.

Maintaining and revitalizing the building is of utmost importance for delivering on Barkerville's mandate to strengthen cultural heritage in its traditional and globally-renowned methods of combining stage arts and history in a way that visitors of all ages and cultural backgrounds can appreciate, enjoy, and learn from.

Although the first Theatre Royal was built in 1868, the newest iteration has been standing since 1937. As of right now, there are five major areas of improvement that will be required for Barkerville's Theatre Royal to continue to optimally fulfill its purpose and grow in utility and functionality; improvements are needed with the foundation, lighting, concession area, and seating, as well as accessibility upgrades required of the entrance-way and its public washroom.

Detailed List of Project Works

Lighting System Assessment and Implementation:

The current lighting is energy inefficient and hazardous. A proper engineering assessment of roof-structure is required to determine how a lighting system can best and most safely be managed. Then, a state of the art lighting system that protects the building from fire and protects workers from other potential safety hazards must be installed.

Foundation:

Requires improvement. Eventually, structural heritage assets such as the Theatre Royal require serious foundation work to ensure the long-term viability and protection of the asset. The Theatre Royal is due for this, and moving forward on this immediately is in the best interest of the site, province, and building in terms of both financial priority and maintaining structural and historical integrity.

Seating Area:

Current benches for seating are outdated, poorly designed for safety, and most importantly, they are not easily moved or reconfigured. Due to the need for unpredictable seating-plan re-arrangement in a COVID-afflicted reality, seating that is more flexible and contemporary will be required.

Concession area:

Substandard in terms of safety, practicality, and aesthetics: generally, outdated and in need of improvement.

Entrance & Washroom Accessibility:

Re-design must be done to ensure modern standards of accessibility and inclusivity, which allow for people with mobility issues to safely and conveniently access the building and its amenities.

Project Rationale

The five structural upgrades proposed are intended to support Barkerville in delivering on its responsibility to use the Theatre Royal not only protect historical knowledge, but to engage with the arts in order to share stories concerning the province, country, and region's heritage in a compelling way.

This project, which represents the continued investment in arts and culture, heritage preservation, and rural BC tourism, ensures that Barkerville's main facility for diverse storytelling is protected and optimized. Barkerville's method of presentation and programming, Historical Interpretation, sees dozens of museum theatre practitioners, actors, artists, musicians, and cultural storytellers of many descents engage directly with the public around the townsite; and yet, the most important venue for entertainment on-site, where all of these perspectives meet their confluence, is on the stage in the Theatre Royal. Generations of Historical Interpreters and museum professionals have taken great care of this space, which was left behind by an active theatre community that began practicing stage arts on the planks of Barkerville's Theatre Royal in 1868. Now, the tradition of live theatre is continued in this storied space and vital lessons of the past are imbued with messaging carefully tailored to entertain and educate audiences of the present, with the hopes of contributing to a better future. As Barkerville shifts to year-round operation and continues to sustainably grow through all four seasons, the Theatre Royal is the only historic building on-site that is known to be suited for year-round operation, sporting the capability to host a wide variety of interpretation and programming within.

The Theatre Royal also provides local economic stimulus; every year, a team of professionals are hired specifically to take the stage and present a full-season of live theatre. For visitors, attending each show requires the purchase of a ticket beyond the admission price for the Barkerville site itself and once within the theatre, audience members make purchases from the concession. Therefore, the Theatre Royal's operation is both a generator of revenue and a creator of jobs in itself: ticket and concession sales in the past three years have averaged \$140,000 in the five-months of the main season.

Barkerville prioritizes the conservation and protection of heritage infrastructure, and taking care of the Theatre Royal has been a top priority in this regard for generations. Nevertheless, as a facility primarily aimed towards preserving and sharing historical and cultural heritage knowledge through the arts, the Theatre Royal's ability to continue flourishing in its traditional role requires a degree of revitalization in terms of safety, accessibility, and accordance to entertainment industry standards that would be fulfilled by this project.

Most Positive Community Impact

While generating revenue for a rural site amidst COVID's severe tourism impact, Barkerville will deliver on its duty of protecting and preserving cultural heritage using the safest and most professional practices available. By revitalizing this heritage structure, the Theatre Royal, the building can continue to be preserved not only structurally, but as a venue that fulfills its purpose; important cultural stories and the lessons contained within them can continue to be shared between cultural storytellers and visitors from around the province, country, and world, in a way that is safe for all involved. The theatre will host major events and shine a light on the triumphs and tragedies of British Columbia's rich history, and the narratives which emerge from the Indigenous, Chinese, and European Settler perspectives that came together in the Gold Rush and, combined, constructed the formation of British Columbia as we know it.

Describe how the project will help support long-term economic growth and recovery in the community.

The Theatre Royal is the largest performance hall and event centre within at least an hour of the District of Wells, and is one of the most significant venues in the north of the province. By functioning at a safe, professional level, an important event space remains available for conferences, big-ticket events, and daily performances throughout the main season of Barkerville that attract visitors from all over the world.

In terms of economic recovery from COVID, the Theatre Royal is vital to staying afloat in these trying times, and it's not currently available to host events due to seating and concession problems that are insurmountable without serious structural adaptations. These elements of the project will not only ensure that the space is safe by COVID standards, but also allow for a more comfortable and contemporary layout that is more attuned to the standards of the modern visitor and audience member.

As a site that uses the art of Historical Interpretation as its primary method of engaging with the public and enriching the visitor experience, the Theatre Royal has been a serious attraction for visitors from around the province, country, and world for over 40 years. When the theatre is healthy and thriving, its reputation alone draws audience members from far and wide, who come to enjoy the entire site, but often consider the theatre the "main event" of their stay. As such, local accommodations and dining options in Barkerville and Wells also benefit from the theatre, which offers evening shows and therefore encourages visitors to stay overnight and spend more time in the area. Without evening entertainment and activities, Barkerville has found that visitors do not have nearly the same incentive to on-site in Barkerville; this, of course, tends to shorten their length of stay. Similarly, in conjunction with added accommodation and dining efforts in Barkerville, the theatre's ample space (as the largest and highest-capacity venue in the area) makes it a viable option for conferences, bringing more visitation to the area and generating more revenue in an indirect way.

Between ticket sales and concession items alone, the Theatre Royal tends to bring in at least \$140,000 per 5-month operating season. As Barkerville strives to extend its operating season and use the facility through the shoulder and winter seasons, this source of revenue has huge potential for growth and, eventually, job creation. The institutions annual contribution of \$140,000 in sales revenue is vital to keeping this venture in line with sustainability goals.

Finally, Barkerville's Theatre Royal is where the skills, talents, and abilities of the site's Historical Interpretation-based approach to entertainment and education fully comes to fruition. By showcasing the research and accumulated expertise of this area, time period, and historical moment through the arts, Barkerville's approach to visitor engagement fulfills its potential through performance at the Theatre Royal.

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Describe how the project will create jobs in your community.

Without the Theatre Royal, an entire suite of programming that directly creates and protects at least 7 full-time jobs is lost immediately (almost 10% of Barkerville's 2020 seasonal workforce); also lost is at least \$140,000 of sales revenue generated. Considering, in the short-term, the fact that the theatre cannot safely operate without new concessions and seating areas, and in the longer-term that the theatre will soon be overdue for a new foundation, ensuring the long-term viability of the theatre is crucial for protecting jobs, and for maintaining the integrity of Barkerville's method of entertaining and engaging with visitors, Historical Interpretation. Considering the Theatre Royal and its programming are the primary reason that many of the site's visitors come back as repeat visitors on an annual or near-annual basis, the drop in visitation and the entailed loss of revenue suggests a potential loss of employment; just as the inverse is true, when the Theatre Royal is thriving as an institution, visitors are attracted, revenue is gained, and jobs are created.

Indirectly, a robust Theatre Royal means that conferences and major events can be held at Barkerville all year round, that visitors will be attracted to the various touring big-ticket and locally-devised entertainment events being held, and that the average seasonal visitor is incentivized to stay long and spend more in Barkerville. All of this represents a boost to Barkerville's visitation and an increase in revenue generation, both of which are vital for the creation of jobs on site. A busy Theatre Royal means that events, operations, curatorial, custodial, and administrative staff will be required-- all of these positions are primarily hired from within the local communities from Wells through Quesnel.

Directly, more than creating employment in a conventional sense, the upgrades to the Theatre Royal will protect jobs that may be at-risk due to the affliction of COVID and at-risk if the long-term health of the building's integrity is not upgraded and addressed. But, as Barkerville pulls through this time and continue to adapt and grow, the long-term health of the theatre will generate jobs through its substantial contribution to the visitor experience, as the Theatre Royal's annual evolution has already proved to be a major incentive for repeat visitation.

Identify the sector and how within this sector the project will contribute to the creation/restoration of jobs.

Tourism. Barkerville, as western North America's largest heritage site, is one of northern British Columbia's premier tourism destinations, attracting visitors from all around the province, country, and world to the Cariboo. In a COVID-afflicted reality, Barkerville's location as a spacious, outdoor, remote locale where physical distancing is made easy has already seen a boost in tourism from the Lower Mainland of British Columbia and other regions of the province; although this has not been substantial enough to offset the negative impacts of COVID on tourism, it is an encouraging step in the sustainable growth of the site. Nevertheless, without the proposed maintenance and structural adaptations for the Theatre Royal, the site's most vital organ in ensuring the site's primary method of entertaining and educating the visitor directly (Historical Interpretation) is critically compromised.

At a time when impressions on new and repeat visitors matters more than ever in allowing Barkerville to grow through the struggles of a global pandemic, being able to utilize the power of the Theatre Royal in ensuring a positive visitor experience is a major part of what Barkerville needs to accomplish to ensure sustainable growth.

Will this project create jobs for the hardest hit populations (e.g. women, young, underemployed in the community, displaced workers)? How has your project considered the potential positive and negative impacts of the project on all community members (e.g. sex, gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, age, ability, geography, economic status)?

Generally, at least half of the Theatre Royal staff identify as women, and closer to 75% of the Theatre Royal employees are under 30. Artists, who have been impacted horribly by COVID's economic devastation, are the main employment demographic hired by the Theatre Royal.

In Barkerville's estimation, there are no demonstrable negative impacts on community members.

The Theatre Royal was not always on the cutting edge of social justice perspectives or cultural sensitivity, especially in the 19th-century and into the mid-20th century. Nevertheless, the institution is now aligned with Barkerville's diversity and reconciliation goals, which have already seen encouraging returns.

In 2020, the Theatre Royal could not operate because of COVID, but Historical Interpretation did take place outdoors and safely using hybrid indoor-outdoor presentations that were approved by provincial health officials as being fully in line with COVID-19 public health regulations. The make-up of the Historical Interpretation staff in Barkerville's 2020 season, in terms of diversity, shows:

-53% of Historical Interpreters identified as women

-30% as BIPOC

How does the project create opportunities for local business in the community?

Stay, eat, cultural economy-- rehearsal stages in conjunction with the sunset theatre, collaboration with collaboration with Wells' artistic community, secures infrastructure to grow cultural economy, IMA
SUNSET THEATRE

Describe your historic place and its heritage values. How will they benefit from the proposed project?

The Theatre Royal is the largest and one of the most well-known buildings in Barkerville. Its presentations are a serious highlight for visitors to Barkerville, who come from around the world to see Victorian-style variety shows and period dramas, as well as a vast array of other theatre, music, and film presentations; beyond just its artistic usage, the Theatre Royal continues its historic role as a community hall and gathering spot for the town, and has always adapted to serve the concept of community in Barkerville. As a business, ticket sales to shows and concession sales in the past three years have averaged \$150,000 in the five-month operating season, which is an important source of revenue generation for Barkerville.

Historically, the Cariboo Amateur Dramatic Association, with members such as the Gold Commissioner and high-ranking government agent John Bowron, and pioneer icon Florence Wilson, erected a building after the 1868 fire to house the fire brigade on the main floor and the theatre on the upper floor. It was the earliest constructed theatre in the interior of the province. As Barkerville's population declined, the building became neglected. Reporting on its demolition in 1937, the Vancouver Province described the situation in the 1870s, "The building was originally two-storey, but due to freshet conditions which brought down tons of tailings from upstream placer workings, it was considered wise to cut off the lower floor." The upper section was jacked up after it was separated from the buried main floor, and a new entrance built.

Barkerville's citizens and caretakers have been prioritizing the institution for over 150 years now, and the Theatre Royal- as a relic which represents an important saga in theatre history- has been the subject of academic, cultural, and historical analyses. Originally, it was the miners and merchants who were not only purchasing tickets to see the stories which concerned them take place on the stage, but also performing as parts as the amateur dramatic association. Now, professional actors, dancers, musicians, and cultural storytellers from all around the province are hired to share re-invigorated and re-imagined historical theatre pieces which, although entertaining and occasionally light-hearted, are grounded in principles of telling the story of British Columbia in a fair, balanced, diverse, and educational way.

Describe how you will consider the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada to guide your project.

(<https://www.historicplaces.ca/media/18072/81468-parks-s+g-eng-web2.pdf>)

In accordance with the General Guidelines for Preservation, Rehabilitation and Restoration, Barkerville has long prioritized understanding the structural system of our heritage buildings, and emphasizes how such matters contribute to the heritage value of our historic site. Further, such factors determine the techniques and materials used by the site when constructing and altering, as will be done through various steps of this project. Barkerville has 125 heritage buildings on its unique streetscape, which means that the site has developed world-class procedures for assessing the condition of structural systems (like foundations) and determining the most effective way to move forward from there. In terms of this Theatre Royal Revitalization project, Barkerville has worked with specialists to determine the best solutions regarding the foundation, lighting, concession, seating area, and entry-way, and come to the most sustainable and energy-efficient solutions as a result of such consultations. These changes do not sacrifice authenticity and they do make the Theatre Royal a safer and more professional theatre space.