

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRE

In the Fall of 1975 a group of about fifty people met to discuss the need for an Arts Centre, to serve Fort St. John and the surrounding area.

It was apparent, at that meeting, that there was a consensus among those present that this type of facility should hold a priority position in the future planning for this area.

During the many discussions, a concept emerged of a multi-use Community Arts Facility, combining a library and a facility for demonstrative and visual arts. A committee of thirteen people was therefore established to investigate the need, do preliminary planning and study possible sources of funding. The results of a year's study and work by this committee are herein outlined.

A NEEDS :

1. LIBRARY

A library is a town's information center. Every person should have access to knowledge in a great range of print and related materials. An effective location centrally placed to afford maximum accessibility is necessary to its success.

Why do we need a new building ?

1. Lack of space for present collection - 18,500 volumes.
2. Lack of space for patrons.
3. Need for adequate reading and study areas.
4. Need for children's area.
5. To meet L.D.C. standards for towns of 10,000 population :
  - a) Minimum of 6,000 square feet of floor space.
  - b) Space for book collection of 25,000 to 30,000.
  - c) Adequate work space for staff ( 800 square feet ).
  - d) Provide room for expansion.
6. Provincial government may ask us ( the library ) to vacate the premises at any time.

Fort St. John has no adequate theatre or auditorium. The school gyms have poor acoustics, inadequate stage and wing areas and dreadfully uncomfortable seats. They are extensively used as gyms and very limited booking is difficult. An Auditorium with sloping floor, good seating, proper stage, adequate storage for a future pipe organ, adequate wings, dressing rooms, lighting, etc. and good acoustics, would be in constant use. Some of the possible uses are : high school productions, (drama, band, choral work), concert series, touring performers (Yukon Follies, Grande Prairie Symphony, plays from Dawson Creek, etc., U. of A. mixed choirs, touring children's theatre, etc., etc.); fairs and conventions (seed fair, municipal conventions, C.W.L. convention, businessmen's conventions etc.) ; public meetings, religious meetings, revivals and entertainers; Peace Country Arts Festival, Peace Country Drama Festival, (also regional festivals) and rental to outside shows (transcendental meditation, E.S.P., hypnosis, wild life movies and lecturers, etc., etc.) The possibilities, with good programming are enormous and many more activities would be possible for this district with a good auditorium.

### 3. WORKING ARTS ROOMS

Arts and crafts are severely limited at present because of the lack of a facility and a coordinator. The scope of children's arts and crafts is almost unexplored, except in the schools. Working arts and crafts needs are :

- i) a studio approximately 35 ft. square to house dance (all ages, ballet, ballroom, creative and gymnastic dance, etc.); chamber music; music recitals and workshops, choral practice, films, poetry reading, children's theatre, festival and drama rehearsals, intimate theatre, theatre in the round and crafts such as crocheting, weaving, knitting, embroidery, etc.
- ii) A "wet" workroom for crafts such as batik, print-making, photography (with darkroom), children's painting, etc.
- iii) A potters studio. Because of the clay dust and heavy equipment i.e. kilns, wheels, worktables, clay storage etc., it is impossible to combine this area with another type of craft.

iv) Meeting rooms.

v) A suitable place to store and make proper use of the grand piano.

vi) Suitable storage space so that the above multi-use rooms may accommodate as many activities as possible.

#### 4. GALLERY

Permanent gallery space for exhibiting paintings, pottery, children's art, museum pieces, native handicrafts, touring exhibits, etc.

### B. CONCEPT

After having compiled the needs of the district, the committee discussed them at length, weighing the possible and practical ways of meeting these needs. We discussed them with people in the community and we visited other arts centres and met with other directors. We contacted a number of other communities to learn what they had in facilities and programs and to learn their plans for the next few years. Eventually a concept emerged for a multi-use facility. This facility would probably include :

#### 1. FOYER-GALLERY

A foyer of suitable size for a northern climate, with facilities for coat and boot racks, refreshment bar, etc. This area would serve the library as well and should be adequate to serve as a small gallery, as outlined under 'Needs'. It would also serve as an intermission area during events in the Auditorium.

#### 2. LIBRARY

The specifications for a library are fairly specific under the Library Development Commission. A minimum space of 6,000 square feet is required.

Library services to patrons could be improved if we had a building large enough to meet the needs of the staff and public.

1. Lounge Area for browsing- with magazines and newspapers and books for all patrons, adults, young adults and senior citizens.

2. Reference Area with tables and chairs for reference work and information service for adults and young adults.

3. Work and Study area large enough to accommodate students of all ages.
4. Reading Area near stacks for all patrons,
5. Conference Rooms for special group meetings..
6. Children's Area for story hours and special children's programs.  
A browsing section for children to look at their picture books, too.
7. A-V Area with headphones, screens for films and records and tapes.
8. Display Area
9. Local History section for history buffs.

With adequate work space the staff would be able to provide library service for shut-ins, senior citizens and the handicapped.

### 3. THEATRE- AUDITORIUM

After much discussion and research into facilities in other centres, it was concluded that a theatre of 600 seats would be most suitable. This size is small enough to be reasonably intimate for theatre, speakers, etc., but still large enough to accommodate concerts, festival finale, conventions, etc. The few shows demanding a larger auditorium (Anne Murray, rock shows etc.) would simply require a facility beyond the financial capabilities of this district and would regretfully have to continue to be housed in the Rec. Centre.

The theatre must have a sloping floor and comfortable seating. It must be acoustically excellent and be properly designed to accommodate theatre, dance, small symphony, etc.

Some of the requirements which we believe to be essential are :

- a stage minimum 40 ft. x 40 ft., with proscenium not over 50 ft, minimum 20 ft. run-off on each side.
- a scene shop
- suitable dressing room areas, light booth, stage manager's office, fly area etc. fly area etc. fly area etc. fly area etc. fly area etc.
- a space allowed for storage of a future pipe organ.

3. THEATRE (Contd.)

We must point out that to economize unduly on these absolute essentials would be to design a very inferior facility and in the long run be extremely unwise.

4. WORKROOMS

These rooms could be in the basement area, under the Auditorium. They should include : a pottery studio, a "wet" workroom, a "dry" workroom and other meeting and working rooms, depending on available space.

5. OFFICE

An administrative office should be included.

In summing up our thoughts on the concept, we believe the centre should be designed by a firm of architects with experience in this field, employing consultants who are specialists in theatre design. The Library Development Commission can be of assistance in the library planning.

FUNDS

We are aware of, and have investigated, some of the following sources of funding:

1. Capital Facilities Fund (Provincial Recreation Branch)- it is our understanding that this fund will provide one third of the capital of a recreational facility, up to a maximum of \$ 1,000.000.
2. Library Development Commission - Assistance is available from this source and we are at present enquiring into the extent of their involvement.
3. Department of Secretary of State and Canada Council - We understand that assistance in design is available from Canada Council and we are exploring the possibility of other capital funds being available.
4. Koerner Foundation - It has come to our attention, through the Provincial Art Board, that some amount may be available from this foundation.
5. Local Individual Contributions - We will shortly become a registered charitable society and donations will be tax deductible.

We are prepared to donate personally on this basis and hope to mount

6. Foundations, Industries and Local Businesses - Mr. J. Howard has made initial contact with forty foundations and industries and we will vigorously follow up all possible leads.
7. Service Clubs - As soon as a decision is made to open a public drive, we will start to contact service clubs in the hope that a community centre may take a high priority in their money-making activities.
8. Lottery
9. Regional District and/or City of Fort St. John - A project of this size could not be considered without the involvement of the City and/or the Region. This is, of course, the purpose of this brief and will be discussed fully at your convenience.
10. Auxiliary Group to Building Fund - The member groups of the Arts Council have contributed \$ 700.00 to date to a building fund and are naturally prepared to assist through their own fund raising projects, as well as to help equip a centre.
11. Northern Lights College - If School District # 60 should decide to join Northern Lights College, there are several avenues which may be explored. The College is interested in building joint facilities in all communities. Administrative offices might be combined; the Fine Arts (music, drama, painting, potting, etc.) programs would require facilities. This is an area with great possibilities in which we are anxious to cooperate.

Groups in Need of Facilities, who might be Sources of Funding -

1. Library Development Commission
2. Northern Lights College
3. School District # 60
4. Regional District
5. City of Fort St. John
6. Arts Council and Member Groups

## Operation of a Community Centre

It is essential that the operation of such a facility be carefully considered before its construction.

It would be essential to have a director for such a facility. This person must be qualified, imaginative, have a major interest and knowledge of the arts and be a capable administrator. A director would assure that the building was used to its full potential, would increase revenue by proper booking and by instituting programs. This must be a carefully considered position in order that maintenance costs be minimized and that the building be fully used.

If School District No. 60 were to join Northern Lights College, there are possibilities for renting space and for joint programs, which would help reduce maintenance costs.

### Benefits to Area

During the years to come, as oil exploration decreases, the City of Fort St. John and the surrounding district will be hoping to attract other industries. The presence of a centre such as this and the many programs and activities available through such a centre would make this district more attractive to potential industry. The difficulties northern communities have in attracting professional people are partly due to lack of such facilities. By attracting business, industry and professional people to this district, we might hope to broaden our tax base and thus make the cost of building and maintaining all of our recreational facilities more reasonable.

### Regional Concept

We are appealing to the Regional District to consider such a project under a regional benefitting zone, surrounding Fort St. John, because these are the people who would be using the facility. We are of the opinion that the people in the immediate area surrounding Fort St. John would be willing to assist in financing such a project if they were given the opportunity.

We realize that it is difficult for the City to assume the total burden of recreation and believe it is to the advantage of the surrounding district to cooperate.

May we thank you for your consideration and may we, the Community Centre Committee join with the City of Fort St. John in recommending to you that you join with us in presenting such a proposal to the people of this area.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert J. Bennetts  
Chairman  
Community Centre Committee



Box 7442  
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December 23, 1979

Ministry of Provincial Secretary  
and Government Services  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dear Mr. Hall,

After two and one-half years of planning, the Community Centre Committee is preparing an April referendum for a \$2.6 million library-theatre facility. Since our last correspondence, plans for the facility have altered. Northern Lights College will be building separately due to delays in co-ordinating two ministries on this project.

The City of Fort St. John has designated the library-theatre facility first priority in 1980 for a Recreation Facilities Grant. Previous correspondence from your office indicated that we would be eligible to apply for two \$400,000.00 grants on this dual complex. The Regional District would like confirmation of this in preparation for capital costs. They anticipate completion of the capital costs budget by January 7, 1980. We will be pleased to receive a letter from you which will be forwarded to the Regional District.

Representatives of the Regional District, Municipal Council, and the Community Centre Committee will be in Victoria late January to meet with the Municipal Affairs Ministry. Are you interested in meeting with the delegation at that time?

Your interest in Fort St. John's library-theatre facility is greatly appreciated. The economic and recreational demands on our rapidly expanding population has put a strain on sources of funds. We will keep you informed of our progress.

Sincerely,

*Susan E. Popesku*

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Project Director  
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