

2020 Update – Accessibility at Persephone Theatre and Rемаi Modern

ISSUE

Since the opening of Rемаi Modern Art Gallery of Saskatchewan (Remai) in 2017, patrons wanting to access Persephone Theatre (Persephone) from Rемаi or the River Landing Parkade were required to use the interior pedestrian corridor link located in between the two sites, or to travel outdoors around the east face of the building to enter the main entrance to Persephone. Patrons in wheelchairs using the interior pedestrian corridor link have had to use a portable stair climbing assistive device as the floor height difference between the two areas is 1.0 metre. The stair climbing assistive device has been identified by the Human Rights Commission as not being a dignified or optimum solution from one barrier-free building to another. Administration has been communicating with Persephone and the Human Rights Commission on possible solutions Persephone can perform to ensure a more seamless and accessible transition to their property. A solution of a wall-mounted wheel chair lift has been identified. Persephone is currently pursuing federal grants to fund the purchase and installation of the wheel chair lift.

BACKGROUND

The Standing Policy Committee on Finance, at its meeting held on May 7, 2018 and August 12, 2019, considered update reports from Administration related to accessibility concerns at Persephone and Rемаi. At the 2019 Committee meeting, Administration reported the wheelchair lift solution had been agreed upon, but funding opportunities had not been identified. The Committee resolved, in part:

“That the Administration report back to the Standing Policy Committee on Finance on the matter in one year.”

CURRENT STATUS

Remai is a City of Saskatoon (City) owned and operated facility, whereas Persephone is owned and operated by a non-profit organization. During construction of Rемаi, a common corridor or link was constructed between Rемаi, Persephone and the River Landing Parkade in order to permit patrons to visit all three facilities through an indoor corridor. At the same time, Persephone also expanded its adjacent Backstage Stage area and lobby during construction, which eliminated the opportunity for a wheelchair accessible ramp to the corridor because it reduced lobby floor space. A drawing of the area in question is provided in Appendix 1.

A portable wheelchair stair climbing assistive device was then purchased by Persephone to assist patrons in wheelchairs to ascend the stairs into their new lobby space from the common corridor.

The stair climbing assistive device had been identified, by a letter from a citizen and the Human Rights Commission, as not being a dignified or an optimum solution for accessibility from one barrier free-building to another. Persephone noted accessibility to

all patrons is very important to them and they have incorporated the following components, to enable people with disabilities to attend their performances:

- The main front entrance is completely wheelchair accessible, with a ramp; and it has an Inclusivity Program, which includes ASL (American Sign Language) interpreted performances for deaf or hard of hearing persons.
- Audio described performances will be available for people of varying visual abilities and relaxed performances (for those patrons on the autism spectrum or persons who for other reasons are not comfortable at public performances).

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

In order to explore possible design solutions to ensure a more seamless and accessible indoor transition from the link to Persephone, City Administration met with Persephone Administration and its architect throughout 2019, to analyze possible solutions. City Administration also brought the Human Rights Commission into those meetings to gather their input on these possible solutions.

The following solution has been identified:

- A wall-mounted wheelchair accessible lift to be constructed against one wall adjacent to the Persephone stairs that will transport wheelchair users from the corridor elevation up to the Persephone lobby elevation, in a more dignified and independent manner than the current situation.

Persephone and its architect throughout 2019, researched various Provincial, Federal and private grant opportunities to fund the costs of the wheelchair lift, but no viable opportunities were available. However, in spring 2020, a new federal grant became available and Persephone submitted a grant application in mid-July to the Federal Government's "Enabling Accessibility Fund" to purchase and install the lift. If successful with the grant application, construction could start in 2021 (the application decision will be made by December 2020). If the grant application is not successful, Persephone will explore alternative funding avenues in order to fund the wheelchair accessible lift.

To note: Persephone has recently announced they are cancelling their planned 2020-2021 season. Administration is not sure if this will have an impact on the possible work and timelines.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial, privacy, legal, social, or environmental implications identified.

NEXT STEPS

Persephone Theatre and its architect have submitted an application to the "Enabling Accessibility Fund". A funding decision is not expected until late 2020. Civic Administration will continue to monitor the situation and will report back when new information is available.

APPENDICES

1. Link to Persephone Theatre

REPORT APPROVAL

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