

The New Royal George Theatre



The Shaw Festival organization is embarking on a plan to completely reconstruct the Royal George Theatre in its current location at 83 Queen Street. The Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association fully supports the Shaw in this endeavour and believes in the continued partnership between the Town and the Shaw to preserve and advance live theatre arts in our historical Queen Picton heritage district.

The Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association has reviewed the technical documents submitted to the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake and summarizes the details of our written delegation as follows:

Executive Summary

- *The proposed New Royal George Theatre is an extensive expansion of the theatre's presence in the very heart of the Queen Picton Heritage District and as such, the Shaw Festival should seek some better architectural symmetry for the theatre's dominant feature, the entrance facade, with the general streetscape of Queen Street.*
- *Art is the celebration of imagination, creative talent and innovation and there is a need to modify some of the building's currently stark architectural aesthetics with an eye to art itself exclusive of basic engineering standards.*
- *Somehow, the front façade of the New Royal George should be reviewed architecturally and possibly modified*
- *The New Royal George has a footprint that is 3 times the existing theatre. The reasons given for the dimensional increases are contained in the documentation and revolve primarily around regulatory requirements for workers, public safety, and accessibility.*
- *The Shaw Festival team expanded the total floor space of the theatre by 5 times to 51,000 square feet justified again on current regulatory requirements, a new, on-site rehearsal studio for actors and students and ultimately an enhanced experience for their patrons.*
- *The Shaw Festival has communicated in the public domain, their commitment to deploy accumulated deferred contributions and the support grant from Government to build a 350 seat live theatrical performance venue at 83 Queen Street. Nothing more, nothing less.*
- *The Shaw Festival team however, did add two levels above the lobby floor dedicated to rooms identified as two*

lounges, a multipurpose room and a viewing terrace which has drawn the attention of some businesses and residents who suggest these floors will be made available for private hospitality venues such as wedding receptions, birthdays and other life celebrations. The Shaw Festival team firmly deny these suggestions.

- ***To allay the concerns of the business community and residents the Niagara-on-the-Lake Residents Association recommends that the town amends the site-specific zoning bylaw application to read as follows:***

WHEREAS the Council of The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake enacted Zoning By-law 4316-09 on October 21, 2009; and

WHEREAS Council deems it appropriate to amend Zoning By-law 4316-09 to permit and regulate theatre use at 178-188 Victoria Street, 79-83 Queen Street, known in the application as the Royal George Theatre, in a manner sensitive to the Old Town Heritage Conservation District and in keeping with the century of history of a theatre on Queen street,

NOW THEREFORE the Council of The Corporation of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake **ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:**

1. AMENDMENT TO SECTION 5 - COMMERCIAL ZONES

section 5.2 (CI - Old Town Commercial Core Zone) is hereby amended by inserting, in proper numeric sequence, the following new exception

5.2. CI-XX (Royal George Theatre Exception)

Lands Affected: 178-188 Victoria Street, 79-83 Queen Street, Niagara-on-the-Lake properties (the "Lands")

Permitted Uses:

- 1. Live/Theatrical performance by a registered non-profit or charitable theatre enterprise or institution as defined herein**
- 2. Accessory uses including rehearsal rooms, box office, fundraising, concession/licensed refreshment service, administrative offices, educational/cultural programming, dressing rooms, and all associated production and facility support areas**
- 3. Theatrical performance can be seen as a live presentation of a scripted or improvised story, event, or concept performed by actors or performers before an audience. eg: plays, musicals, operas, cabarets, concerts, dance theatre, and experimental stage productions.**
- 4. The exception is not intended to grant use as a commercial hospitality location for weddings, life events (such as marking birthdays), or other non-theatre or arts related celebrations. Any such for-profit/commercial event will require a special events permit and should not exceed 6 per annum.**
- 5. Notwithstanding the above, use of the facility for similar charitable purposes by associated cultural, community, education, or social service charities in cooperation with the owner shall be similarly allowed (eg: a fundraiser for a local charity, a donor recognition event, a lecture, etc)**

Regulations (notwithstanding any conflicting provisions of the parent CI zone):

Details

Impacts and Stakeholders

Looking at the Shaw 2024 Annual Report, the Executive Director's Report clearly sets the stage for prioritizing large scale capital expenditures sooner than later with a high sense of urgency. Quote *"the depreciation of capital assets continues to exceed our deferred contributions, which led to an accounting deficiency of **-\$491,717**. As our new assets like the recently acquired Shaw Artists Village site and a rebuilt Royal George come online, we would expect to see this long-standing issue begin to reverse."*

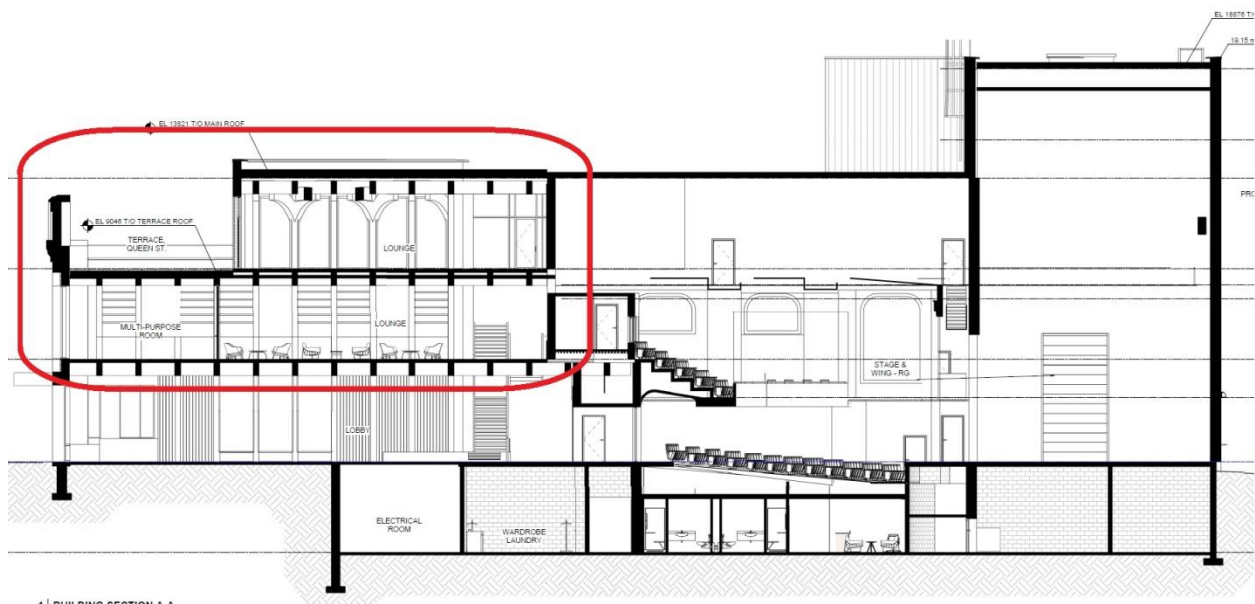
The existing Royal George Theatre was constructed over 100 years ago as a temporary facility for officers and to provide entertainment to troops. The building was intended for a life cycle of 10 years and has undergone mitigating upgrades to keep it going to today.

At one time, the Shaw Festival acquired the old Anchorage Motel property below Queens Landing with the intention of building the New Royal George Theatre there, but after further assessment and support from Queen Street businesses to keep the location where it is, the Shaw Festival abandoned the idea and reverted the site to Vintage Inns.

Total capital cost of the New Royal George is estimated to be \$75 million dollars, backstopped with a grant of \$35 million from the Ontario Government, so the financial resources are available to move the reconstruction project forward. The Ontario grant is time dependent, so the clock is ticking.

Royal George theatre at 83 Queen Street is advantaged by its location in the heart of the Niagara-on-the-Lake Queen Picton Heritage District and has a sufficient seating to satisfy market capacity for live theatrical shows while also making the local shops and restaurants available to patrons.

Neighbors on Victoria Streets to the north and west will experience considerable disruption during almost 3 years of construction requiring mitigations by the Shaw Festival team.



Dimensioning

The New Royal George has a footprint that is 3 times the existing theatre. The reasons given for the dimensional increases are contained in the documentation and revolve primarily around regulatory requirements for workers, public safety, and accessibility.

Primarily, the length of the building is influenced by the new, large lobby and café entrance sized sufficient to hold the entire 350 patrons. This is a regulatory requirement in the case of emergency and evacuation. The existing gallery space entering the theatre has a capacity of 13 patrons.

The theatre seating arrangement on the ground floor level has a wider square footage per seat allowance due to the efforts of the Shaw Festival to achieve Rick Hanson Foundation Gold Certification for accessibility. This would be precedent setting for a live theatre. Spacing for wheelchairs and sufficiently shallow slope angles on the aisles will allow individuals to propel themselves unassisted.

The total number of seats in the theatre is 350 which is 15 more than current seating capacity. Market surveys conducted by the Shaw

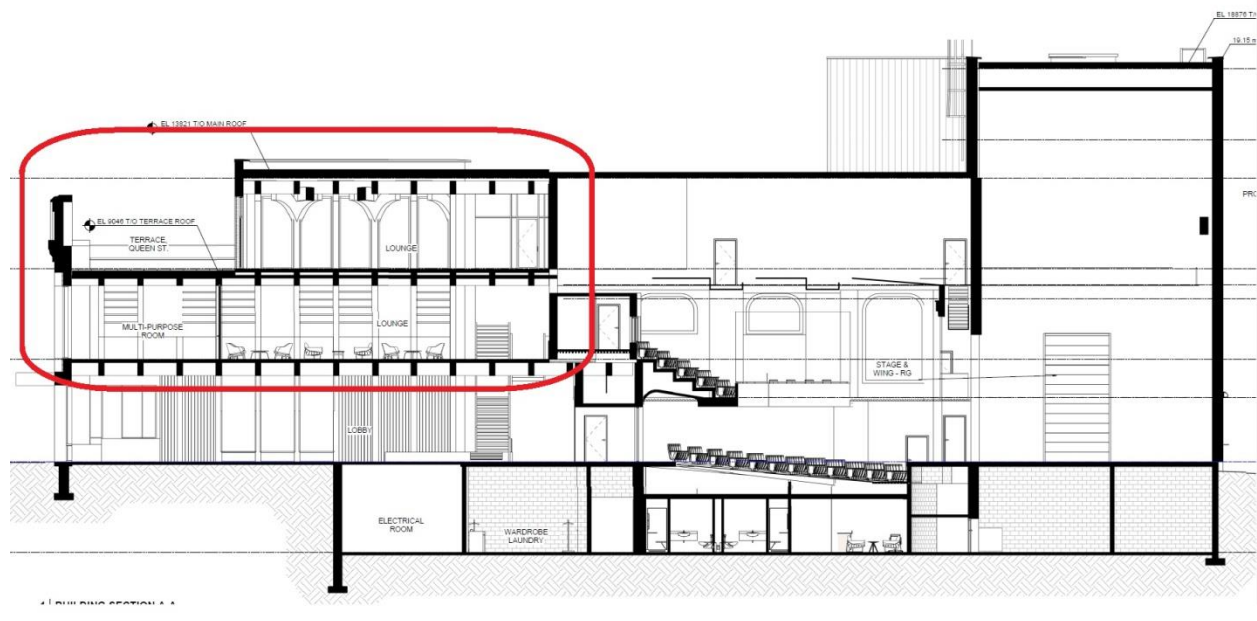
indicated that a capacity above 350 patrons was not economically justified.

The fly-tower above the stage is wider than currently because the original tower was configured for a different use originally will now have an elevator on the west side to move employees and lighting equipment safer. The height of the tower is roughly 6 feet higher than today to provide head room and eliminate tight crawl spaces. Many of the current employees at the Shaw are long term members with some physical limitations that can be overcome when given labour code compliant access ways. Staff retention of the skilled is a priority for the Shaw.

The Shaw Festival team expanded the total floor space of the theatre by 5 times to 51,000 square feet. Along with increased footprint of the lobby and theatre, the Shaw Festival team added a rehearsal hall. Prior to this, rehearsals took place on the 3rd floor of the old Courthouse. This facility can also be used for student workshops and training for young people interested in a career in theatre arts or arts in general.

The interior of the New Royal George has two substantial lounge and multi-purpose rooms above the rehearsal studio. According to Shaw Festival, those rooms are intended for workshops, meetings and Shaw events like dinners. The Shaw Festival Team have stated that these facilities will not be used as venues for third parties.

The concerns of neighboring Queen Street businesses that these areas could be rented for events in competition with nearby restaurants and hotels can be allayed by defining the site specific zoning by-law application narrowly to arts and live theatrical purposes only.



Geotechnical

The geotechnical reports stated that the Royal George (83 Queen) and the adjacent 79 Queen were slab on grade and did not have basements but discussed issues with minor flooding. Similarly the adjacent Gallery building and 188 Victoria were slab on grade and 178 Victoria only had a shallow sub floor.

Taking all this into consideration, the entire foundation design for Royal George was raised 3 feet to apparently reduce the risk factor for the foundation stability but (conveniently) eliminates at least 50,000 cubic feet of dirt that needs to be hauled away, leaving the challenge of 150,000 cubic feet to find a home. That's roughly 200 to 250 truck loads

Foundation damage in your adjacent homes is still a concern due to vibration from excavation and hauling but there would not be any need here for pounded piles as you suggested. The use of multiple helical piles would probably be the solution for this foundation design.

Potential vibration on the south perimeter have raised the attention of the neighboring Bank of Montreal where vibration could set off vault alarms.

Regardless, the mass of steel and concrete that will arrive on site will create vibration, particularly from the movement of roadside cranes, delivery of structural components and concrete trucks.

The Shaw has confirmed that non-stationary equipment during the construction phase of project will be marshaled at the old Anchorage Motel site on Ricardo Street to minimize congestion in the Queen Picton District.

I would expect that from a raised foundation, the perimeter water and roof collections would be directed by gravity to the storm water systems on Queen and Victoria. Town Operations staff must confirm that the receiving storm water management system has the capacity to receive a 5 to 20 year return event.

Unlike a hotel or condominium, the theatre is not continuously inhabited so the demand on sewer and water services should be generally similar to today.

Architecture



Figure 23: Existing Facade



Figure 24: Proposed Facade

From the front, the New Royal George Theatre emulates a design from a famous theatre in the UK, but to many residents I talk to, it seems incongruous with the setting on Queen Street and should be reviewed.

A large, stark pillar of stone rising vertically to smooth, untextured frieze doesn't seem to align with our Queen Picton setting. The windows are big, unframed, and brightly lit.

The pendant feature that dominates the streetscape is acutely large and obtrusive because it reaches one story higher than it does today. The top of the pendant stands in front of the viewing terrace.

This feature needs further architectural attention and possible modification.



Figure 19: Existing Street Elevation



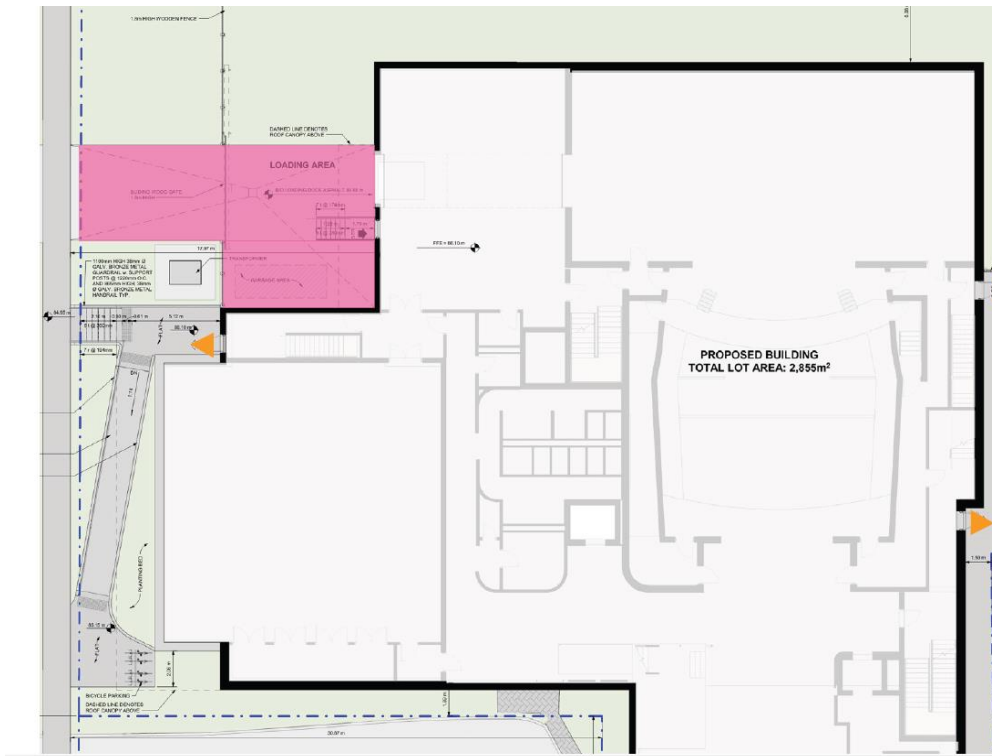
Figure 20: Proposed Street Elevations

The realignment of the Royal George façade stepped-back from the sidewalk will illuminate the appearance a tall vertical wall facing east.

The long accessibility ramp from the east to the theatre entrance is set away from the sidewalk and will be obscured from view with green plantings.



The view from the west on Victoria Street is dominated by three features, broad blank walls, the large glass wall of the rehearsal studio and the loading area.



Fortunately, the service bay and loading dock accessed from Victoria Street is not intended for daily deliveries of food and beverages. Those

supplies are delivered directly into the lobby from Queen Street as they are today.

The loading dock receives the manufactured sets and props for the theatrical presentations and will be utilized less than 2 weeks out of the year.

Garbage deliveries are combined in the designated commercial alley behind the bank of Montreal as they are today.

To soften the impact on the streetscape, addition trees and plantings would take away the obtrusiveness and align with the traditional plantings floral theme of the Queen Street Heritage District.

Fly Tower and the Tree Canopy

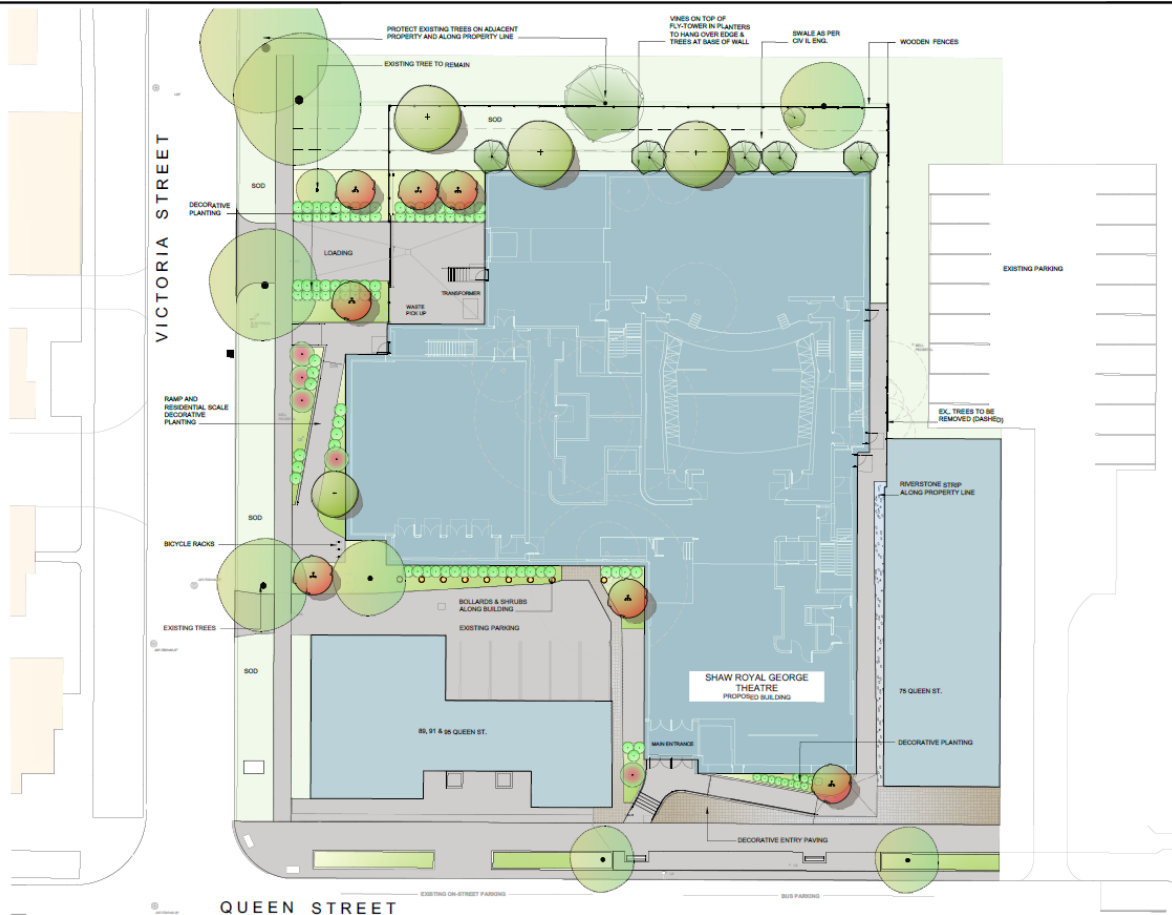
The new fly tower will be 19.1 meters above the lobby or 20 meters above the street level, is set back from Queen Street to the south but will definitely dominate the field of view from the north

The Shaw Festival has offered to use green as a colour choice for the tower, but this change doesn't substitute for the mitigating element that obscures the fly tower today...the trees.

The arborist's report identifies 43 individual trees that occupy the site, predominantly on the 178 Victoria and 188 Victoria lots. There's no question that these very tall, mature trees act to substantially obscure the existing fly tower today.



According to the Shaw Festival team the most mature trees will be salvaged but an alignment between the Arborists Report and the Landscapers Report is necessary to allay any concerns about tree preservation.



The landscaping plan submitted by B&A Landscape Architects attempts to address the loss of tree canopy from above by introducing the feature of “vines on top of the fly-tower in planters to hang over edge” and from below, “trees at the base of wall”.

The effort by Shaw to address the obtrusiveness of the fly-tower is commendable and a detailed landscaping report would be valuable for public information.



The concept of a 'living wall' is generally adopted throughout the world today. The landscaping drawings illustrate the locations from the roof of the fly tower and will be complimented with vegetation rising from below.

This concept is critical to the overall future acceptance of the new Royal George Theatre.