

# Architectural Design Reveal for Courthouse

*Sydney Street Courthouse Design Plans to be Submitted to Heritage Review Board this week.*

PRESS RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL: 12:01PM, FRIDAY JANUARY 29, 2021

SAINT JOHN – The Saint John Theatre Company’s (SJTC) plans for the design of the Sydney Street Courthouse were submitted today to the City of Saint John’s Heritage Review Board in advance of the next meeting of the Board. **The SJTC is holding a special virtual presentation of its design plans at 12 noon on Friday, January 29<sup>th</sup> to invited guests including the media.**

Built in the 1820s, the Courthouse, situated on the corner of Sydney Street and King Street East in Uptown Saint John, was gutted by fire in 1919. The current structure was rebuilt within the shell of the original Courthouse and completed in 1925. With the construction of the new Provincial Law Courts, the Courthouse has sat empty since 2013. The SJTC first approached the province of NB in 2016 to explore the Courthouse as an option for its expanded programming needs. After extensive negotiations and an announcement of Federal funding in 2019, transfer of ownership to SJTC from the province was finalized



in early 2020. **The SJTC intends to transform the building into a multi-purpose performance and event venue for SJTC, the Atlantic Repertory Company (ARC) and other community groups, proposing to double the existing footprint of the building.**

Exploratory construction work on the Courthouse over 2020 has helped to secure the existing footprint, says Executive Director Stephen Tobias, and to inform a design that maximizes programming opportunities, preserves heritage aspects of the Courthouse, and also anticipates technological developments and public gathering preferences in a post-covid world.

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EXP Architects and Avant Garde Construction Management are the design and construction firms for the project, which also draws on expertise from theatre and acoustic design specialists. *“The Courthouse is essentially a 100-year-old steel structure housed within 200-year-old stone walls,”* said Tobias. *“We have spent extensive time and effort over 2020 in an almost forensic analysis of this extremely complex structure. We are confident that our diligence has resulted in a plan that is highly functional, that represents state-of-the art theatre design, that is future-focussed, inspiring and welcoming - but that is also deeply respectful of the heritage of this beautiful building.”*

*“We have worked in consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders over the course of this process and there are tremendous synergies and opportunities created for us all through this venue”,* says Tobias. The proposed design can accommodate up to three events in the building simultaneously with programming spaces that include:

- a 220+ seat performance theatre with flexible configurations
- box office, patron elevator, backstage, dressing, rehearsal and administrative spaces
- receiving area and freight elevator
- a lobby café with catering options
- an additional small studio rehearsal and performance venue

**The company says that the next steps are to work closely with the Heritage Review Board to ensure the project will be ultimately approved and welcomed by the community.** *“Once we know that the design proposal is green-lighted by the Board, we will undertake a detailed costing exercise,”* says Tobias. *“We need to make sure we can balance this plan to light up the corner of King and Sydney Street with our ability to mobilize community support.”*

*“Work on this project has advanced steadily even when much of the world shut down in 2020,”* said Board President George Daniel. *“The SJTC building committee has met weekly for almost the entirety of 2020, working closely with the design and construction team. The Board is extremely grateful for the commitment of these volunteers and of our team of contractors. We feel confident that the design submitted to the Heritage Review Board is solid. In addition to breathing new life into a cherished building, it will be a stellar performance venue, unrivalled in Atlantic Canada.”*

The SJTC has not yet raised all of the funding that would be required for the project. *“We’re undertaking a detailed cost analysis, says Daniel. “We’ve had government, individuals and Foundations step up with support and interest. The submission to the Review Board marks an important phase, that enables us to take this plan to the next stage. We know that we and the community will have a lot to do to realize this visionary project.”*

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