

Ramsdell Theatre Civic & Cultural Center

**Planning Workshop
Manistee, Michigan**

August 8 and 9, 2014

Summary Report

Submitted September 1, 2014

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Introduction

The Ramsdell Theatre is featured in several sections of the “City of Manistee Strategic Plan Update: 2013-2014 through 2015-2016” and also is the subject of a detailed white paper, ***Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward*** published by the City of Manistee in February 2013. The City’s Strategic Plan establishes the goal to “Develop a sustainable model for management of the Ramsdell Theatre to insure its long term operational needs.” (Goal 2.2 under City Infrastructure and Facilities)

Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward, a February 2013 City-authored report provides a brief history of the **Ramsdell** and summarizes Chapter 253 of the Codified Ordinances. This November 2005 ordinance provides for the ongoing management and operations of the Ramsdell by the City of Manistee and establishes the Ramsdell Theatre Civic and Cultural Center Governing Board (Ramsdell Governing Authority or RGA). As the ***Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward*** points out:

“Ownership and operation of the Ramsdell has required the investment of significant resources from the City’s general and capital improvement funds. The Ramsdell does not currently cover its operating costs and has no ability to pay back any of the capital investments; although this is not for a lack of effort on the part of many individuals. **Therein lies the fundamental dilemma of the Ramsdell: An irreplaceable community asset that has widespread support but is not an essential government service and requires heavy, ongoing taxpayer support.** ...The RGA believes that it is now time for the Ramsdell to “Move Forward” by taking aggressive step(s) to move the Ramsdell towards sustainability in a reasoned, effective manner.” (*Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward*, p. 3-4).

As a result of planning and analysis and guided by the ***Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward*** recommendation, the City of Manistee made a commitment to fund the position of Executive Director for the Ramsdell Theatre and hired Mike Terry in the fall of 2013. It is generally agreed that this step is not enough. No one person, no matter how talented, can ensure the sustainability of the Ramsdell Theatre. The City, RGA, Friends of the Ramsdell (FoR) and committed citizen volunteers have significant roles to play if sustainability is to be achieved.



The August 2014 Planning Workshop was designed to explore the Ramsdell as more than a physical facility; considering it a vehicle for accomplishment based on a consensus mission, values set and future vision of service to the people of the greater Manistee region. Priority next steps as a result of this Workshop seek to harmonize the efforts of the RGA, Executive Director, various Ramsdell partners and others in order to enhance the Ramsdell's influence and ensure its future vitality as one of the region's most distinguished economic and cultural assets.

Planning Approach

An accelerated planning format was employed in the workshop that drew on participant pre-work and encouraged participants to identify and focus attention on promising strategic alternatives for the future. Experience gained in numerous planning environments confirms that individuals from the aforementioned group have a good deal of the information needed to create effective strategies. While depth research, analysis and clear presentation provide a context for this process, it is important to engage the insight and intuition of those directly involved in and responsible for the future success of the Ramsdell. The purpose is to sharpen the collective future vision, establish a short list of priority goals and adopt strategies calculated to achieve competitive advantage and future success. The workshop process was highly interactive. Participants worked in table groups on a series of structured exercises followed by group prioritization of results.

Prior to the workshop Eaton Cummings Group facilitators conducted a series of confidential interviews with key members of the Ramsdell "family" in order to gauge the overall operating climate and identify key issues and concerns likely to influence facilitated discussions during the workshop. (See Attachment B: Telephone Interviewees) Interviews were open-ended, permitting interviewees the opportunity to comment and raise topics of personal concern. Topics included:

1. Think forward 5 years. What would make the "state of the arts" in Manistee more vital, vibrant and able to attract new audiences?
2. What role do you envision the Ramsdell playing in this future?
3. Describe greater efficiencies that could be achieved involving the Ramsdell and its primary partners (Manistee Civic Players and Manistee Arts Institute).
4. Currently the Ramsdell is subsidized by the City of Manistee. For some, this is a controversial use of public funds. What is the key to the Ramsdell becoming more financially sustainable on its own?

Planning Assumptions for the Workshop on August 8-9, 2014

The following planning assumptions provided a basis upon which to establish a Vision for the Ramsdell Theatre Civic & Cultural Center and prioritize future strategic initiatives. These assumptions were derived from background research, confidential interviews, and the general consent of workshop participants.

- The Ramsdell is more than an iconic historic building. To be considered a success it must also be a vehicle that enables valuable, memorable experiences to be shared by individuals and the community.
- The Ramsdell must be alert to and evolve with the needs of the communities it serves.
- The Ramsdell serves a regional community—City of Manistee and Manistee, Benzie and Mason Counties.
- There is a sense of urgency about the near and longer-term sustainability of the current Ramsdell business model. Action is required to assess and refine or reconfigure the business model.
- Collaboration among Ramsdell partners must be effectively managed and enhanced.
- The Ramsdell must expand its relevance to new audiences and engage them.
- The Ramsdell must pursue and engage new partners for long-term sustainability of its mission and purpose.
- The governing body of the Ramsdell must be collaborative, forward thinking and fully committed to its mission, vision, purposes and sustainability.

Ramsdell Theatre Civic & Cultural Center Workshop—Strategic Planning Outcomes

In structuring the workshop it was agreed to work toward the following outcomes.

- Identify Mission, Values and Vision,
- Identify and prioritize trends that will influence the future of the visual and performing arts in the greater Manistee area,
- Prioritize strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Ramsdell and
- Identify and prioritize 3-5 key strategies and related measures of success that will move the Ramsdell closer to its Vision for future sustainability and vitality.

Ramsdell Strategy Workshop – Agenda

The agenda for the workshop is outlined below to refresh the memories of participants and make clear the progressive steps and discussions pursued during the workshop.

Agenda A—August 8, 2014

- Welcome
- Workshop goals and review of agenda
- Expectations-introductions—participants share expectations for the workshop and introduce themselves to the group
- Planning assumptions—ECG overview and participant discussion
- Ramsdell Mission and Values—facilitated table discussion
- Trends—facilitated table discussion followed by group prioritization
- SWOTs—facilitated table discussion enhanced by results of participant pre-work, followed by group prioritization
- The Ramsdell—Our future Vision—facilitated table discussion enhanced by results of participant pre-work, followed by group prioritization
- Key Messages—Consensus statement describing process and results to be shared with media and affiliated networks

Agenda B—August 9, 2014

- Vision in action—Focused Strategy for the next 12; 24; 36 months
- Road map to success: Goals, Action Steps, Resources, Metrics
- Immediate Next Steps
- Key Messages

Future expectations for the Ramsdell as expressed in pre-work and table groups

- Financial sustainability/diversified funding
- Community involvement plan
- Visit the Venn Diagram
- Enhanced grassroots effort and support
- Sustainability of the building
- Increase scope of marketing
- Develop organized volunteer base
- More welcoming and accessible—making clear that all are welcome
- Establish additional partnerships representing the greater Manistee region (see Attachment D – Venn diagram describing current relationships).

Ramsdell Mission

Working in table groups participants discussed and offered words and phrases designed to capture the basic mission of the Ramsdell Theatre Civic & Cultural Center. It was clear that the Ramsdell is considered more than an impressive historical artifact. It is seen as a gathering place for intellectual stimulation and cultural growth, a magnet that brings people together and contributes to an enhanced sense of community. A draft mission statement was synthesized from the common elements identified by participants.

Draft Mission Statement. *The Ramsdell: An historic, regional gathering place for live “cultural” experiences – where all are welcome as presenters, participants and audience members. At the Ramsdell friendships are made, learning happens and people of all ages feel enriched.*

Ramsdell Values

In establishing a climate for partnerships and philanthropic giving it is helpful to be clear about the shared values espoused by the organization. Participants were asked to consider the Ramsdell in its entirety and deduce the Ramsdell’s shared core values. The effort produced the following, which suggest Ramsdell values in practice.

The people of the Ramsdell engage each other and the community through behavior that demonstrates:

- Welcoming and Inclusive
- Accommodating
- Cooperative
- Respectful
- Friendly
- Knowledgeable
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Professional
- Attentive and warm hospitality—caring
- Trusted stewardship of the Ramsdell and its resources
- Honest communication
- Creativity
- Openness
- Commitment to Education



- Pride in the Ramsdell’s role and history
- Future oriented

Trends Likely to Influence the Future Success of the Ramsdell

Working in table groups participants identified, discussed and prioritized external trends likely to influence the future success of the Ramsdell in service to the greater Manistee region. The trends that follow are considered by participants to be among the most influential in shaping the Ramsdell’s sustainability and vitality as a regional economic and cultural asset.

Participant table groups were assigned specific categories in which to identify trends. These included: “Competition,” “Technology,” Social/Demographic,” and “Role of Fine and Performing Arts.” The Discussions focused on:

- “What external trends are likely to significantly influence future Ramsdell success — either helping or hurting?”
- “Of the trends identified, which are likely to be the most influential?”

The following trends were considered the most likely to influence the success of the Ramsdell. The trend regarding increased competition ultimately produced the surprising result that competitors may have concern for survival in common and therefore a reason to cooperate. (The numbers following each item represent the number of prioritization votes received during voting by Workshop participants.)

1. **Competition: Response—Grow Partnerships (9)**

Competition takes many forms: competition for the time of busy people—volunteers or audience members; competition from organizations offering the same or similar programs and services; and competition for philanthropic dollars. The competition for donors is real and likely to remain so. If private philanthropic investment is to play an increasingly important role in the Ramsdell funding equation, the Ramsdell, like other organizations that depend on donor support, must build its fundraising muscle, involve committed volunteers and enhance institutional fundraising sophistication.

Fundraising aside, increased competition among organizations surprisingly was considered a potential **HELPING Trend** because it opened the door to explore and promote partnerships that capitalize on the benefits of strategically combined efforts. Reaching out to competitors might result in: cooperative scheduling; resource sharing; joint action to enhance the region’s image; and greater combined economic and cultural impact. Finding ways to strengthen the Ramsdell’s

role in partnership with other organization to help promote tourism in the region was of special interest to Workshop participants.

Criteria for Partnerships. Participants developed a set of criteria to determine useful partnerships including: contributing to the Ramsdell mission and current partner goals; leveraging assets and building capacity; and fostering new investment and new creative work. Workshop participants also cautioned that new “partnerships” also might lead to awkward relationships, stress Ramsdell resources and require risk-taking.

2. Technology: Response—Adopt useful technologies as quickly as possible (15).

Helping and Hurting Trend. The rapid evolution of technology is seen as producing trends that could both help and hurt the future prospects of the Ramsdell. On the hurting side there is the ever expanding range of options for entertainment and the use of discretionary time involving technology including Netflix, YouTube, gaming, social media, Hulu, etc. There is also the issue of money. If the Ramsdell is to be current with emerging technologies that enhance its programs, services and administrative capability, this effort will require substantial and continuous investment.

On the helping side the adoption of currently available technologies will enable the Ramsdell to access more effective channels for marketing and promotion and employ administrative applications (e.g. ticketing, budgeting, etc.) that will increase management capability. Live streaming promotes access to a broader range of offerings and helps engage new audiences. Enhanced stage and theater technology will upgrade the audience experience, expand production capability and perhaps introduce new tech-based arts forms to the region.

3. Social/Demographic: Response—Capitalize on trend toward volunteer-based society (8)

Helping Trend. The opportunity to engage volunteers appears to be increasing in part due to an aging demographic and also the desire of some younger people to engage in volunteer experiences that will strengthen their skill sets and contribute to their resumes. The full range of current and projected activity at the Ramsdell suggests a variety of rewarding volunteer assignments. The cautionary note suggested by participants was that recruiting volunteers and using them effectively in ways that are satisfying to them and useful to the Ramsdell involves a



volunteer management system that may require resources beyond those currently available.

4. Role of Fine and Performing Arts: Response—Recognize their importance when deciding where to live, work and play (6)

Helping Trend. The emerging concept of “place making” suggests a local community that capitalizes on its assets, inspiration, and potential to promote people's happiness, and wellbeing and attract and hold transplants to the community.

Participants considered the Ramsdell with its history, attractive facilities and established role in nurturing the fine and performing arts to be an important community asset with even greater promise for the future. Building its capacity and enhancing its influence will benefit both the economic and cultural life of the region—helping to attract and hold those interested in a lively and engaged community. Broadening the Ramsdell agenda could enhance its ability to educate and develop talent within the community.

Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOTs)

As noted in the *Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward* (p. 13), “Successful organizations build on their strengths, correct their weakness, take advantage of opportunities and proactively manage external threats. They also keep a watch on the overall environment and recognize and exploit new opportunities faster than others.”

Both in participant pre-work and during the Workshop, participants were asked to think deeply about the Ramsdell and identify those SWOTs likely to have the greatest influence on the Ramsdell's success in the next 3 to 5 years. Because the SWOT analysis contained in the *Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward* was primarily based on so called “internal” perspectives, it should be noted that the current SWOT analysis conducted in advance of the August Workshop produced a somewhat more “externally focused” result. Following table group discussions, participants were asked to prioritize the SWOTs concentrating attention only on those considered to be the *most important* to future Ramsdell success. The results are summarized below. See Attachment E.

Strengths

- Established reputation—Provides/hosts most of the cultural and artistic events in the community



- Versatile—Provides a building that can house and successfully handle many events at one time.
- Emerging brand image—Classic, historic theatre that musicians and artists are thrilled to perform in. Something proud to put on resume. Showcase for local talent.

Weaknesses – Opportunities for Improvement

- Governance structure; strengthen leadership role and authority in operational decision-making
- Marketing throughout expanded geographic region including traditional promotion, website and social media
- Funding streams beyond City support including earned income, corporate sponsorships and private philanthropic investment

Opportunities

- Revisit governance model – clarify roles, increase partnerships and capitalize on enhanced volunteer participation
- Educate about the Ramsdell’s role in regional cultural and economic development – make clear its brand and value, work to build support for millage and increased philanthropic investment, expand partnerships
- Expand educational opportunities with K-12s in region

Threats

- Current governance structure
- Territorial attitudes, fluidity, lack of true collaboration beyond just space sharing
- “Elite” perception - Ramsdell a gathering place only for “certain people”

Key Themes that Emerged from SWOT Discussion

1. The cultural work of the Ramsdell is not just for the “fancy people.”
2. The Ramsdell can and should have a role in driving the region’s cultural and economic future.
3. To succeed the Ramsdell must leverage available administrative, theatrical and communications technology.
4. Future success will depend on relentless relationship building with partners, audience members, donors, and voters.

The Ramsdell: Our Future Vision:

By 2017-2018 the Ramsdell is a vibrant, financially sustainable center for fine and performing arts and related education.

Attaining the Vision: Three Goals

1. Reduce the City's operational contribution to the Ramsdell by 33% by FY 2017-2018.

Action steps:

- Develop fundraising strategy. Resources required: donor list-database (role for Community Foundation?). Grant writer. Fundraising expertise.
- Reactivate Friends of Ramsdell Board. Board Development. Case for Support.
- Restructure Governance. Determine most appropriate structure. Have "another meeting" on governance—present three models: purpose (vision), characteristics (key players).
- Identify joint fundraising efforts.

2. Create and nurture strategic partnerships sufficient to achieve our Vision

Action Steps:

- ED Schedule/invite planning workshop participants to plan restructuring Ramsdell partnership board. Timeline: today.
- Resources required: ED emails all partners to meet to form initial planning committee. Timeline: by 9/26.
- Metrics: Working board in place by 12-31-14.

3. Market the Ramsdell—help drive the region's cultural and economic future.

Action steps:

- Unified website—identify vendor platform. Timeline: 6-12 months. Resources required: consensus, money, content. Metrics: fewer complaints, traffic stats.
- Engage the public with stronger unified image among partners. Timeline: immediately and ongoing. Resources: agreement among partners to support where possible—and the Alliance; social media-expertise and access. Metrics: increase awareness and support and attendance by 60% fiscal year FY17-18
- Sell the arts with interactive performance. Timeline: Begin in FY 15-16 and do one per year. Resources: MAI, City, MCP, Ramsdell, etc.—



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identify lead partner. Participants become stronger partners, breed
“new ownership”
See more detailed Action Plans on pages 12-18.

**Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center
Action Plan 2014-2017**

Goal 1: Reduce the City’s operational contribution to the Ramsdell by 33% (\$35,000) by FY 2017

| Action Step | Metric | Completion Date | Person Responsible | Resources Required |
|--|---|--------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Reactivate Friends of Ramsdell (FoR) Board-add members to reflect communities served. Be clear about the board’s job/role—fundraising. Determine if this is a function of the “new” Ramsdell governing board or a stand-alone board. For the “new” governing board-research board models for similar organizations and present 3 models—role/characteristics. Select one. | FoR Board reconstituted or becomes a function of the “new” governance board. Governance issues resolved with new/improved board structure. Board job description written. Board members recruited. | December 2014 | Mike Terry and Board Leadership | Staff/volunteer time |
| 2. Identify collaborative opportunities for fundraising with | Collaborative opportunity identified, rules of engagement agreed to | January 2015 and ongoing | Mike Terry, FoR Board, partners | Staff and volunteer time |

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|--|---|---|------------------------------|--|
| Ramsdell partners and related “rules of engagement.” | | | | |
| 3. Prepare fundraising case for support | Case prepared and endorsed by FoR. | February 2015 and updated annually | Mike Terry or designee | \$ for writer |
| 4. Leadership Awareness—test the case with key influencers/affluent in order to sharpen/refine the case. | Case for support shared with 10+/- key individuals (limited feasibility test). | March 2015 | FoR Board Members | Volunteer time and a list of influencers |
| 5. Retrieve donor database from preservation campaign, add prospects from box office records, partners, networks of FoR Board members, etc. Research and choose donor database software to manage donor records and campaigns. | Database established. Aim for at least 500 names of past donors or future prospects. Select software and implement. | March 2015 and ongoing (donor prospects must continually be added to the database and solicitation process) | Mike Terry and FoR Committee | Staff and volunteer time. \$ for donor software (grant?) Training of Cross-training of staff/volunteers to use database. |



| | | | | |
|--|---|---|----------------------|---|
| 6. Develop fundraising campaign goal for each year, solicitation strategy (encourage multi-year pledges), materials and timeline. First campaign should be conducted within the current fiscal year. | Campaign strategy and materials prepared. | To be determined by 2014-15 fiscal year end and recurring annually. | FoR Board & Partners | Possible consultant assistance for 1 st campaign to help with strategy, materials, etc. Cost to print campaign materials/set up website and/or social media for campaign. Annual staff/volunteer time to identify, cultivate, solicit donors and maintain donor records. |
| 7. Identify public grant opportunities | Minimum of two grant sources identified and applications submitted. | June 2015 and ongoing | Grant writer | \$ for grant writer. Case for support. |

**Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center
Action Plan 2014-2017**



Goal 2: Create strategic partnerships to achieve our vision.

| Action Step | Metric | Completion Date | Person Responsible | Resources Required |
|--|--|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Create a new Ramsdell partnership/governance board (see Goal 1, Action Step 1). | See Goal 1, Action step 1. | See Goal 1, Action step 1. | See Goal 1, Action step 1. | See Goal 1, Action step 1. |
| 2. Identify prospective partner-users that are compatible with the Ramsdell mission and vision. Develop. Create calendar, pricing, policies and procedures for partner recruitment. Identify goal for optimal partner facility use based on capacity and revenue model. Engage partners and steward relationships. | List of priority partners developed. Calendar, pricing, etc. documents developed and approved, as needed. Budget model developed. Partners engaged and positive relationships are stewarded. | June 2015 and ongoing | Mike Terry | Staff time |
| 3. Update website to incorporate seamless partner awareness, marketing, ticketing and donor transactions. | Ramsdell website provides seamless access to Ramsdell and its Partners for event calendar, | January 2015 | Mike Terry, Partners, Web designer | \$ for web redesign, PayPal and credit card transactions |



| | | | | |
|--|---|--------------|-------------------------|--|
| | performance/event, information, ticket/donor transactions, etc. | | | |
| 4. Create a seamless box office experience for all Ramsdell event attendees. | Ramsdell box office has a single system for payments and ticketing. | January 2015 | Mike Terry and Partners | \$ for software and credit card terminal |



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**Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center
Action Plan 2014-2017**

Goal 3: The regional community views the Ramsdell as essential to the region’s cultural and economic future.

| Action Step | Metric | Completion Date | Person Responsible | Resources Required |
|--|---|---|--|--|
| 1. Develop and implement a plan to raise community awareness about the cultural and economic impact of the Ramsdell. Identify target audiences and key messages to be communicated, methods of communication and a process to measure and report results. Set annual metric goals. | Awareness and by 60% over 2013-14. | FY end in 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 | Mike Terry, Partners and governing board, writer, pr consultant, researcher, webmaster | \$ for writer, web updates and opinion poll |
| 2. Develop and implement a plan to increase attendance at Ramsdell events. Identify target audiences, performance and | Attendance at Ramsdell increased by 60% over 2013-14. | FY end in 2014-15, 2015-16, and 2016-17 | Mike Terry, Partners and governing board, writer, webmaster, pr/media expert | \$ for writer, web updates, other media and publications |



| | | | | |
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| educational events and related marketing plans to reach current/new audiences. Create a process to measure and report results. Set annual metric goals. | | | | |
| 3. Plan and orchestrate interactive performance with multiple partners. Includes identifying target audience(s), a lead partner, possible "theme" for each year, etc. | Present at least one interactive (multiple partner) performance per year | FY 2015-16 and ongoing | Mike Terry, Partners, performers, pr/media expert | \$ for production costs, promotion/advertising |



Next Steps

1. By September 26, 2014:
 - a) Clarify role and goals of Partnership Board (or Implementation Team or Coordinating Committee)
 - b) Identify Board leadership, meeting schedule, etc.
2. Accept/adopt planning outcomes (Mission, Vision, Values, Key strategic priorities, Action Plans, etc.)
3. Engage Friends of the Ramsdell (FoR)

Key Messages

- Enhancing cooperation among partners
- Initiated plan for Ramsdell sustainability
- We have a clear mission and exciting vision for the Ramsdell
- The Ramsdell is critical to the future cultural economy of the region

Attachment A—Ramsdell Status Update

The historic Ramsdell Community and Cultural Center is owned by the City of Manistee, MI. Its public venues consist of a 400-seat theater, a ballroom with seating capacity for 290 and Hardy Hall with seating for 100. The Ramsdell is the long-time home for theatrical productions staged by the Manistee Civic Players, it also hosts a variety of visiting performers and serves as a gallery for changing exhibitions that are planned and coordinated by the Manistee Arts Institute. Offices and operations for both the Civic Players and the Arts Institute are housed at the Ramsdell.

Today the facility plays host to over 200 plus events annually. In addition to musicals, plays and workshops, arts exhibits and classes, the Ramsdell is known for Metropolitan Opera Live Broadcasts, music concerts, dance recitals, weddings and hosting community events like the annual Festival of Trees produced by the Manistee Chamber of Commerce. Its annual operations are funded primarily (approximately two thirds of revenue) by the City of Manistee. Facility rental fees, programming, concessions and modest fundraising revenue comprise the balance.

In 2013, the City of Manistee hired its first-ever full time executive director to oversee the operations and management of the Ramsdell under the supervision of the Ramsdell Governing Authority (RGA). The RGA is comprised of one member each from the Manistee Civic Players Board and the Manistee Arts Institute Board along with the City Treasurer. Mike Terry was selected for the position and began his duties in the fall of 2013.

The City's charge to Executive Director Terry is sustainability of the Ramsdell. One of his primary goals is to increase revenue for Ramsdell operations from user fees, fundraising and grants in order to significantly lessen the dependency of the Ramsdell on public (City) funding within three years.

Recently, the Ramsdell facility was renovated with funds provided by a capital campaign spearheaded by the Friends of the Ramsdell, a 501(c) 3 organization. Local donors were solicited, and what was perceived as an ambitious local \$5 million fundraising goal was achieved. Since renovations were completed, a similar campaign was undertaken to raise \$3 million for and renovate the local Vogue movie theater in downtown Manistee. The Vogue, a 186-seat theater (with an additional 42-seat mini-theater) and event venue is now in full operation under the auspices of the Downtown Development Authority.

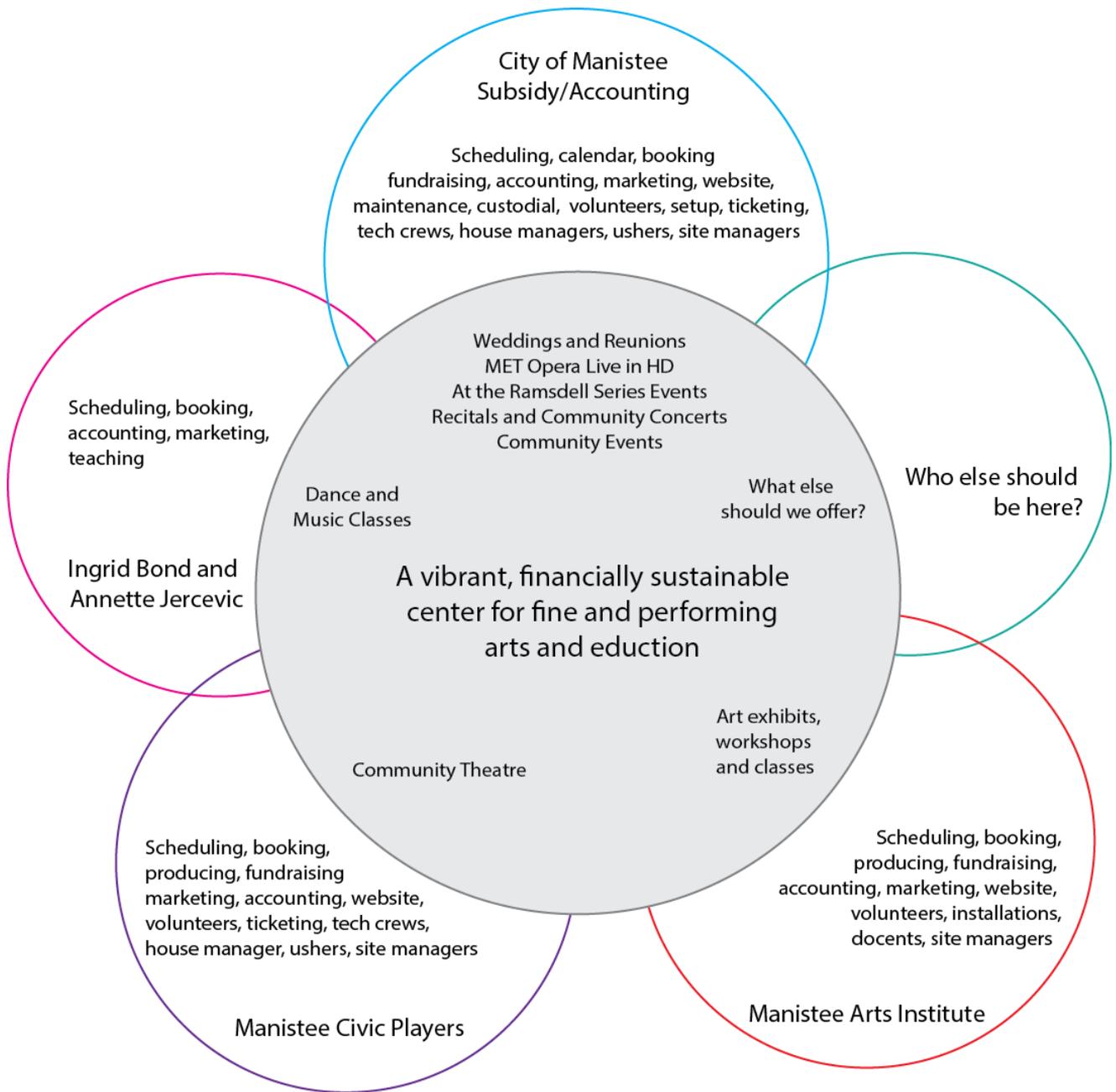


Attachment B—Telephone Interviewees

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|--------------------|--|
| Edward Bradford | Finance Director, City of Manistee |
| Mitch Deisch | City Manager, City of Manistee |
| Dr. Charles Dillon | President, West Shore Community College |
| Robin Hogan | Business Owner, Friends of the Ramsdell Board Member |
| Jackie Karnisz | Board President, Manistee Civic Players |
| Jake Knight | Owner, Conservatory of Dance |
| Carol Pasco | Arts Patron |
| Mary Paine | Arts Patron |
| Rick Richter | Past Ramsdell Governing Board Member |
| Kerry Schubach | President, Manistee Arts Institute |

Attachment C—Workshop Participants

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Ed Bradford | Finance Director, City of Manistee |
| Ingrid Bond | Manistee Intermediate School District |
| Stacie Bytwork | Executive Director, Manistee Chamber of Commerce |
| Mitch Deisch | City Manager, City of Manistee |
| Brian Garcia | Ramsdell Governing Authority |
| Laura Heitzelman | Executive Director, Manistee County Community Foundation |
| Sarah Helge | Community Leader, Business Owner |
| Robin Hogan | Business Owner, Friends of the Ramsdell Board Member |
| Frank Joseph | Board Member, Manistee Civic Players |
| Jackie Karnisz | Board President, Manistee Civic Players |
| Dr. Rick Plummer | Theatre Faculty, West Shore Community College |
| Nancy Lyon | Past Ramsdell Governing Authority Chair, Friends of the Ramsdell Chairperson |
| Alan Marshall | County Commissioner, Manistee County |
| Beth McCarthy | Community Leader, Business Owner |
| Diana Monovich | Board Member, Manistee Arts Institute |
| JoAnn Muma | Executive Director, Manistee Civic Players Ramsdell Governing Authority |
| Pat Murdoch | Board Member, Manistee Arts Institute |
| Marty Paine | Community Leader, Paine Foundation |
| Rick Richter | Volunteer, Community Leader |
| Kerry Schubach | President, Manistee Arts Institute, Ramsdell Governing Authority |
| Catherine Zaring | City Council, City of Manistee |
| Roger Zielinski | City Council (elect), City of Manistee |



**Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center Planning Session
SWOT Analysis
Summary of Confidential Participant Pre Work**

STRENGTHS – From your perspective, what are the things the Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center does well?

1. A unique space for arts, social and community events that is being maintained and improved.
2. Customer service for external renters.
3. Willingness to address/make discussible challenges.
4. Restored historic building.
5. Showcase for local talent.
6. Special events venue (receptions, etc.).
7. Free standing opera house (Met Opera--HD).
8. Ballroom use.
9. Excellent volunteers support the building and events.
10. Provides most of the cultural and artistic events in the community.
11. The site is well known and well respected.
12. Tours.
13. Maintaining the character and beauty of the venue.
14. Executive Director available during events for setup, and to assist.
15. Great reception venue.
16. Excels in highlighting its history and charm.
17. A volunteer group with passion.
18. A productive and exquisite theater.
19. Provides a building that can house and handle many venues at one time.
20. Provides options for weddings, receptions, fundraisers, etc.
21. Centrally located, walk--ability, geographically accessibility for locals.
22. Very accommodating and helpful for rental events.
23. Not much outside duplication (no other theatre company, art institute/museum, etc.).
24. A destination center for surrounding communities for special events. It has the ability to package dining, entertainment and exhibits.
25. City and user groups demonstrate commitment to the larger community by supporting the arts in Manistee County.

26. The historic preservation that has been present provides a unique and positive user experience.
27. Unique, beautiful venue offering separate and distinct spaces.
28. Great step to hire executive director, who is professional and focused on what's important
29. Commitment from City and community.
30. Classic, historic theatre that musicians and artists are thrilled to perform in. Something proud to put on resume.
31. Recognized as center for the arts in Manistee County.
32. City provides primary financial resources.
33. Stable user groups.
34. Community commitment.
35. Well--preserved landmark—readily identifiable and easy to find.
36. On--site manager—better connection, more accessible building.
37. Custodian worth her weight in gold. Building is far cleaner and readied for use.
38. The Ramsdell Theatre building itself– historic, preserved, modernized and maintained.
39. A professional, experienced, dedicated Executive Director.
40. Strong and growing wedding reception business.
41. The fact that the City has steadfastly supported the Ramsdell is an asset and a strength.
42. The Ramsdell is a recognized historic building that could possibly tap into some revenue from that sector if appreciated for what it is and maintained properly.
43. Recognizing so many of the limitations that are involved in successfully running and maintaining the Ramsdell and evaluating what I see at this time and in the past, I am hard put to give an accurate answer because what I see are hazy visions, no well--organized goal or plan and no standout success except the loyalty of the MCP – sorry to mention them, but they have supported, in their own way for many years and kept on going. To many natives the MCP and the Ramsdell are one.
44. Co--productions with WSCC.
45. Events bringing James Earl Jones home.
46. The facility itself is a jewel. Preservation of the Ramsdell and continuing maintenance of this historical treasure.
47. The many talented people that are actively involved in the performing and visual arts. Behind every spruce tree is a talented artist, actor, musician waiting to be recognized— find them.

WEAKNESSES – From your perspective, what areas need to be improved in order to ensure the success of the Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center and its mission?

1. Governance (including user group relationship/subsidization).
2. Operations (web, technical services, ticketing, maintenance/custodial).
3. Lack of strategic plan/actions that focus on serving the community in a sustainable manner – i.e., services and programming.
4. Lack of public funding.
5. Marketing/advertising (understand funds are limited)--focus on outside the area, working with partners, need new website.
6. Need different structure for Board, preferably active individuals in the arts and theatre to bring new ideas.
7. Communication with user groups.
8. Create a more relaxing atmosphere.
9. Muddy organizational structure and therefore governance.
10. No plan for sustainability.
11. Collaboration with the DDA, Chamber, Vogue and Tribal Government
12. City negativity (unwarranted).
13. Executive Director's very limited sphere of authority.
14. The concept that tenants have decision--making capabilities.
15. Leadership that respects the arts, and works well with all groups.
16. Leadership that can raise money for building other than rent.
17. The box office mess.
18. Not relevant to enough of the community.
19. Considerable debt for improvements.
20. Space utilization—revenue vs. subsidized programming.
21. User group needs vs. Director's perception.
22. No active fundraising program (annual, planned & capital) and thus absence of an endowment fund.
23. Incoherent confusing brand(s) or lack thereof— multiple websites—who is the Ramsdell?
24. Insufficient market to support operations without fundraising and/or subsidies: small community with too many choices in summer, not enough people in winter.
25. Extremely dysfunctional governance structure.
26. Using Big City models, not capitalizing on the “throwback” nature of both venue and community.
27. Community stewardship/grassroots support element greatly diminished since the Seat Campaign ended. (Ramsdell Patrons)

28. Too many websites for ticket purchase—and generally, sweeping changes in media technology is making it difficult to get the word out about events accurately and timely to the public.
29. City provides primary financial support that cannot continue in the future—Income stream “IFFY.”
30. Overall small population in area that supports the Ramsdell.
31. Lack of parking.
32. Often sitting empty, not open, lack of constant/consistent events.
33. Intimidating building, no main entrance.
34. Not utilized by the community (high ticket prices for families, locals unaware of events held there, reliance upon old marketing and PR practices).
35. Inadequate maintenance.
36. Does not appear to be integrated into the various events that occur throughout the year in the community thereby losing the opportunity to develop linkages that could cross promote use of the theatre, ballroom and hall.
37. Lack of major corporate sponsorship.
38. Not taking advantage of the huge potential of engaging volunteers to do more in and around the RTCAC (greeting, office assistance, cleaning, routine maintenance, etc.).
39. That the theatre is for everyone in the community and should be enjoyed by all. Because the Theatre is so beautiful and historically significant, I think there’s a misperception that only the “upper crust” in the community attends events. We need to make the Ramsdell more accessible to everyone in the community by promoting events as such.
40. Provide better concessions to generate more revenue.
41. Lack of consistent high quality and high production values.
42. Not enough advertising, promotion outside the county. Do not “beat the drums” loud enough for the treasure of the theatre.
43. Too many of the same people in leadership—need new, younger ideas to excite and attract new audiences.
44. No promotion for opera HD series—must use the Met’s information on poster, news releases which are available.

OPPORTUNITIES – From your perspective, what are the most conspicuous opportunities that should be capitalized on in order to ensure the future success of the Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center?

1. Actively engage community in facility governance/programming.
2. Leverage the emotional attachment residents have for the historic facility and the experiences they have had and can have.
3. Need a concentrated focus on creating an endowment fund, annual giving and planned giving that can generate future income.
4. Build/share dedicated volunteer and community support build appropriate programming/engagement.
5. Grant opportunities, sponsorships.
6. Develop greater support from the people who grew up here and have a true love for the Ramsdell. Allow those people and their families to be involved and once again 'own' the place. Make it 'community' – involve them in the vision.
7. Remember that the Ramsdell Theatre is an amazing piece of history and use that to garner support from a different area.
8. Obtain Liquor License, add concession area for events in the theatre (potential revenue).
9. Rent analysis for current tenants. Utilize extra space for income.
10. Use the experiences for the user groups to help generate ideas for collaborative events that benefit all.
11. Strategic planning to clarify mission, goals, and strategy as well as organizational model and governance structure.
12. Collaborating with other arts organizations including the Vogue to increase the presence of arts in the community and to attract more users.
13. Restructure governance model – up to and including transferring ownership to a better suited regional County-wide organization.
14. Develop enthusiastic volunteer program.
15. Strive for attainable goals, not wishes.
16. Small percentage of County-wide tax for financial support.
17. City support for grants.
18. Marketing campaign--state wide or further to draw tourism.
19. Joint ventures.
20. Dedicated millage.
21. More variety in performances.
22. Connection to City wide events.
23. Social Media (updates, photos, giveaways, contests, more participation from audiences online).

24. Free or reduced rental fees for other nonprofits, fundraisers, gala events, etc.
25. Regular hours including some evenings (whether a show or not) to view gallery, theatre house, lobby, and (NEW!) gift shop showcasing Ramsdell brand.
26. Program with the audience in mind (families, retirees, baby boomers)-- don't alienate audiences with programming choices.
27. Competitive pricing, group rates, senior/child ticket prices.
28. A social event paired with a Ramsdell event: couples night out, drinks in the ballroom at intermission, ladies night out, etc.
29. Team up/partner with local restaurants: Meet at TJ's Pub after the event (Meet the Artists, Meet the Cast), Dinner at Blue Fish before the show (show your ticket stub for 15% off or a free dessert), Free scoop of ice cream at House of Flavors with your ticket stub after the show only. [Give the restaurant an ad in the program for the deal they provide to the Ramsdell patrons!]
30. Children's acting and visual arts classes.
31. Adult mentoring (classes) in all aspects of theatre production (WSCC??).
32. On-going visual arts classes for teens plus.
33. Grants, marketing and collaboration.
34. Expand user base.
35. Involve many talented artists in Manistee County.
36. Reach out to the past and present actors to help for professional advertising and appearances.
37. Revamp website for one-stop shopping.
38. By creating an art and cultural atmosphere in Manistee, we could attract new potential employers leading to more jobs in the area.
39. More live music and free events for community to learn how important the Ramsdell is to revitalizing Manistee County.
40. Keep It Simple! Keep new technology and equipment as user-friendly and durable as possible. "State of the art" is not what we need!!
41. Basement Black Box—simple, tiny theatre for kids, small audiences, experimental theatre/workshops.
42. School kids –outreach to schools: busing mini grants? Theater etiquette, workshops, teaching opportunities that connect with curriculum. Develop future stewards of the building e.g. there is no secular community chorus/vocal training program in the high school. There are potential areas to share trained young tech personnel.
43. RGA.
44. Tenant's role.
45. Festivals during the winter months to give the community something to do

- during those times; create revenue for Ramsdell during slow season.
46. Partner with Vogue theatre more; more festivals.
 47. Regional leadership for arts based special events including serving as a clearinghouse for information and technical support.
 48. Outreach into every corner of the community (businesses, churches, service groups, schools, etc.) to foster ownership.
 49. Capture more potential support and usage by seasonal visitors (including boaters) and outlying communities.
 50. Integrated ticketing system that accommodates any event held at the RTCAC and links to ticketing at other venues for partnered events.
 51. Consider and get a millage – County wide – to increase revenue.
 52. Develop an endowment through the Community Fund and actively work to increase the fund for long--range sustainability.
 53. Develop a partnership with Interlochen Center for the Arts that would not only increase performances but audiences. Work with West Shore Community College in the same way if possible. Interlochen would draw from different area.
 54. Build a great name for the Ramsdell – put it on the map.
 55. More collaboration.
 56. Major gifts campaign.
 57. Strengthen management of the facility.
 58. The vast new technical world that drives immediate communication.
 59. Linking with all N.W. communities—television in T.C., Cadillac—invite people to come down, televise what Ramsdell is about.
 60. Working with all entertainment entities in N.W. area—Ludington, Cadillac, casino, WSCC, Interlochen, T.C.—combine forces—“strength in numbers”—“can’t do it alone.”
 61. Marketing plan to encourage community and City management support.

THREATS – What threats, if any, should we be aware of as we consider current and future Ramsdell Theatre and Community Arts Center operations? Be specific.

1. Not deciding or committing to the role of the City and user groups (landlord/tenant, partnership, shared services, other?).
2. Not making significant changes (actions) and expecting significant change (results).
3. Ignoring/not understanding the social and economic realities of Manistee.
4. Competition with the Vogue, loss of donors.
5. Current structure, i.e. Governing Board, relying on City funding.
6. Limited staff and resources.
7. People in the community not understanding the historical and present da importance of the Ramsdell facility.
8. Economic challenges to this community.
9. Reduction or loss of capital investment in the building by the City will be detrimental to its long--term survival with immediate alternate funding.
10. User groups leave.
11. City withdraws support.
12. Elite perception – choice of productions and/or gathering place for only certain people.
13. Failure t spread the arts as good for community.
14. Lack of appreciation by the City government and community.
15. Lack of creativity or knowledge in solving financial problems of the building.
16. Loss of parking.
17. Citizen outcry against public spending.
18. Economy.
19. Unstable funding base.
20. Small population supporting the enterprise.
21. Overwhelming number of funding requests in Manistee County—unsustainable in the future.
22. Limited Ramsdell personnel.
23. Very limited base of support based on demographics and physical location (rural area further confined by Lake Michigan on the west and forest areas to the north, south and east).
24. No clear ownership for leading and articulating vision for the RTCAC.
25. Lack of cooperation and buy in and\or resistance to change of key user groups and stakeholders.

26. Reduction in City funding and/or human resources in future.
27. Inability to provide an outstanding customer experience due to lack of staffing.
28. Competing venues.
29. Reduced City and organizational budgets creating an unhealthy community battle for funds.
30. Population decreasing because of lack of jobs in the area.
31. Trust issues between managing hierarchy and user groups.
32. Impatience. Building a new vision of community arts involvement in Manistee will take years, not splashy, flash--in--the pan, single events that rely on a visiting celebrity.
33. Extremely limited on--site area for set--building, painted, or stand--by for load in.
34. Territorial attitudes-- true collaboration needed, not just space--sharing.
35. Resistant to change and innovation.
36. Poor use of volunteers (overuse?), should value relationships with volunteers, members, and donors (recognition, thank you events, tickets, preview opening, etc.).
37. Vulnerable due to unknown future commitment of City and lack of other plan.
38. Cost of events vs. ability of local demographic to pay.
39. Inconsistency between user group agreements (amount of time they occupy space vs. fees) and actual cost of providing the space, as well as user groups limiting the ability of other groups to use the facility.
40. Lack of a team effort from the City on down. The best managers are those that can work with others as equals and respect them and their ideas. We are not all on the same track as far as vision and inspiring forward movement for the best of the Ramsdell.
41. If the people on top aren't doing a good job, other threats are unimportant because there is no back--up support to deal with the other real or imagined threats. You can say that the Ramsdell can't compete with the Casino - why not? Maybe the track just has to be different. Whatever, it will take the people on top, community supporting a vision and baby steps.
42. Internal politics.
43. Weak commitment from the City.
44. Economy—both national and local.
45. Too many entertainment options available—local groups must join together to work out manageable scheduling—enabling people to attend.

***Results of previous SWOT Analysis reported on page 14 of the white paper
Ramsdell Theatre: Moving Forward.***

Strengths

- Classic, historic theatre
- 75% renovated
- New HVAC
- New Roof
- Multi-purpose facility
- Anchor tenants (MCP, MAI, Ingrid)
- Council commitment
- Community commitment
- RGA Board
- Projection capability
- Proven donor base
- Facebook page

Weaknesses

- No professional management
- No annual or planned giving program
- Limited programming
- Lack of technical staff
- Lack of administrative staff capacity
- Web page look and feel
- \$1,000,000 remaining renovations needed

Opportunities

- Vogue Theatre partnership
- WSCC partnership\other partnerships (LRBOI, MCCF)
- Capital grants
- Capacity grants
- User group partnerships

Threats

- Limited market area
- Increasing availability of on-demand entertainment
- Other entertainment options (free & paid)
- Various summer concert series