

**The Sheldon Theatre Board of Directors
Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers
June 17, 2025**

Members Present: President Chap Achen; Board Members Laurie Bell, Meridith Wardle, Susan Christenson, Art Kenyon, Dennis Brennan, and Glen Witham

Members Absent: All members were in attendance

Others Present: Shantel Dow, Executive Director; Beth Snyder, Council Liaison; Chris Heineman, Council Administrator; Samantha Whipple, Associate Director of Development & Community Relations; Meyer Beckner, Programs Manager, Red Wing Downtown Main Street

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by President Achen at 5:15 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

President Achen led the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. Roll Call

President Achen reported that all members were in attendance.

4. Approval of Agenda

President Achen summarized the agenda. A motion was made by Member Christenson, seconded by Member Bell and unanimously carried, to approve the agenda as presented.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

6. Consent Agenda

A. Motion to Approve April 15, 2025, Minutes.

A motion was made by Member Wardle, seconded by Member Kenyon and unanimously carried, to approve the meeting minutes as drafted.

7. Placer AI Information Session

Associate Director Whipple and Meyer Beckner from Downtown Main Street introduced themselves. Mr. Beckner provided an overview of Placer AI, noting that this tool was funded by the Downtown Philanthropic Collaborative.

Mr. Beckner reported that Placer AI tracks phone data from apps. He clarified that app users need to provide permission to be tracked. He stated that this data is combined with census data to determine patterns of behavior, primarily in public spaces and businesses.

Mr. Beckner and Associate Director Whipple described how businesses have been utilizing this information. Associate Director Whipple reviewed a map showing the home zip codes of Sheldon Theatre patrons over the last year and a graph depicting the trade area coverage by distance. Mr. Beckner reviewed year-over-year growth statistics for the Sheldon Theatre over the last three years. Associate Director Whipple discussed a chart showing monthly visit trends over the last year, a chart showing pre-visit and post-visit patron journey information, a chart showing the duration of visits to the Sheldon, and a chart depicting loyal versus casual visitors. Industry trends in terms of loyalty were discussed.

Mr. Beckner discussed the top three and bottom three consumer lifestyle segmentation categories (per Experian's Mosaic) that best describe Sheldon visitors. Associate Director Whipple reviewed a household income chart and an ethnicity chart for Sheldon visitors.

Board Members expressed appreciation for the valuable information and asked whether other types of data are available. Associate Director Whipple and Mr. Beckner indicated that other types of analytics could be generated from the data and provided examples. It was suggested to obtain comparison information with other performing arts venues. President Achen inquired regarding the percentage of phone app users who decline to be tracked. Mr. Beckner provided additional information, noting that he could provide specific numbers in this regard.

8. Motions & General Business

A. Lead Production Technician Proposal.

President Achen provided background information and referenced the agenda materials. Director Dow commented that Director of Production Russell Johnson will be retiring in mid-2026 and noted the need for a succession plan. She referenced the growth statistics that were presented earlier during the meeting.

Director Dow reviewed a proposed succession plan that would include a Lead Production Technician along with an Associate Director of Production and four part-time technical crew positions. She reviewed the 2025 technical department budget and a proposed future technical department budget.

Director Dow reported that a current part-time employee, Samuel Betcher, has been training to take on additional tasks. She stated that he would be a great candidate for the Lead Production Technician position and would be able to shadow Director Johnson for the next year. She noted that Mr. Betcher is also well versed in the historical nuances of the Sheldon Theatre building.

President Achen added that Mr. Betcher is interested in a promotional opportunity with the Sheldon. He noted that the Sheldon could potentially lose this part-time employee to other endeavors, which is why the proposal is being brought forward for Sheldon Board action at this time.

Director Dow shared some of Mr. Betcher's other skill sets. She commented that he is very interested in the position and lives locally.

Member Bell commented that it may be easier to hire part-time staff in the future if they see that there are potential growth opportunities at the Sheldon.

It was clarified that the Lead Production Technician is a full-time position. Director Dow stated that she has been working with City staff to determine the starting pay for this position. She noted that this position could serve as a stepping stone for Mr. Betcher to eventually assume Director Johnson's position. Director Dow commented that the financial report does not include benefits cost.

Member Wardle asked about the impacts of adding more technical staff in terms of revenue growth. Director Dow commented that more shows could be added, especially during the summer months. She stated that she often gets calls from show producers who are interested in renting the Sheldon.

Member Brennan commented regarding the competitive hiring environment for skilled technical professionals. Director Dow provided additional information in this regard. Member Bell commented regarding the hiring timeframe, noting that anyone hired for the position would need to overlap with Director Johnson.

Budget impacts were further discussed. It was noted that there would be room in the budget to increase the Lead Production Technician salary.

Council Administrator Heineman clarified that the position description and salary range are preliminary at this point and would need to be further researched. He recommended that the Sheldon Board consider action to add the position but not approve a hiring decision at this time. He expressed appreciation for the planning and fiscal analysis that have been conducted.

A motion was made by Member Brennan, seconded by Member Bell and unanimously carried, to approve the Lead Production Technician position.

9. Communication Items

A. Director's Report.

Director Dow provided updates and highlighted information from her report:

- Director Dow reported that the first 16 days of ticket sales for the new season resulted in a 12% increase in sales compared with 2024 in terms of the number of tickets sold, calculating to a 13% increase in revenue.
- Director Dow reported that sets and rehearsals for the Phoenix Theatre production of *Shrek the Musical* are well underway. She noted that a large, multi-age cast has been selected to perform this fun show in late July, with the July 27 matinee being sensory friendly. She commented that there will be a cast presence at the Downtown Main Street Fairy Fest on June 28.

The sensory-friendly aspects of the July 27 performance were further discussed.

- Director Dow discussed a professional development conference that she and Associate Director Whipple recently attended in Fairmont, Minnesota.
- Director Dow reported that Steinway piano is in need of replacement, noting that a local patron has offered to help raise the funds.
- Director Dow referenced advocacy activities by the Minnesota Citizens for the Arts. She reported that the Minnesota Legislature passed a bill in May to continue the current level of Legacy funding to the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Minnesota Regional Arts Councils. She stated that the Sheldon receives significant grant funding from these two organizations toward operating expenses.
- It was reported that a sound consultant recently toured the Sheldon and will be providing recommendations for sound system improvements.
- Summer rentals and activities were reviewed.
- Director Dow reported that the 2025 Elks State Convention will be hosted by the Red Wing Elks Lodge, with many activities taking place at the Sheldon.
- Director Dow reported that the All-American Alumni Band will be spending a week in Red Wing during August, during which free concerts will be offered.
- It was reported that the Red Wing Ambassadors program has been cancelled for 2025.
- An update was provided regarding maintenance projects.
- Director Dow reported that Director Johnson will be meeting with tour managers of 2025-2026 season shows.
- Director Dow reported that the 2025-2026 season announcement event was very successful, with approximately 200 people in attendance.
- Ticketing system challenges were discussed.
- Promotional activities were detailed.
- A ticket sales update was provided in terms of ticket package sales and the top five shows at this point.
- Friends of the Sheldon, sponsorship, and grant updates were provided.
- Front of house and volunteer activities were reviewed.
- A food license update was provided.
- Box office and online sales data were reviewed.

B. Finance Report.

Member Wardle provided background information and referenced past Sheldon Board discussion of the financials. She summarized subsequent meetings with City staff, during which it was recommended that the Sheldon Board preliminarily approve City-generated financial reports quarterly, with final approval of the year-end report following the annual financial audit. Member Wardle referenced the newly created monthly dashboard report and discussed how this report along with City-generated financial reports will be utilized. President Achen stated that the new procedure is not optimal but will serve as a compromise for now.

Council Administrator Heineman provided additional information and described the monthly snapshot report as a great tool.

Director Dow reviewed the monthly dashboard report, highlighting recent revenue and expenses. She thanked Member Wardle for her guidance. Allocation of ticket revenue and fees was clarified. Potential revisions to the monthly budgeting process were discussed. Main stage and educational show expenses were clarified.

C. Board Chair's Report.

President Achen provided an update regarding the strategic planning process. He discussed plans to conduct a survey process to help determine the primary areas of focus. He stated that the survey data will be shared with the Sheldon Board during the August meeting. He discussed the intention to develop clear goals and action items that will be incorporated into the Strategic Plan. The types of data that will be collected were discussed. Member Bell asked about collecting information from community members who are not currently engaging with the Sheldon Theatre. Council Administrator Heineman commented that Public Information and Engagement Officer Michelle Leise might be able to provide assistance in this regard.

D. Committee Reports.

There were no other committee reports.

E. Government Relations Report.

Council Liaison Snyder summarized recent City Council topics of discussion, including the 2024 financial audit and cannabis regulations.

Council Administrator Heineman further discussed local cannabis regulations and the retail dispensary application approval process. Involvement by the Prairie Island Indian Community was discussed.

F. Board Member Comments.

There were no other Board Member comments.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.