

**The Sheldon Theatre Board of Directors
Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers
August 19, 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; Council Liaison Beth Snyder was absent

Others Present: Shantel Dow, Executive Director

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 requested the addition of an agenda item related to the acceptance of gifts. He noted that the Sheldon Theatre Board Bylaws require the acknowledgement of any gift over \$10,000.

A motion was made by Member Brennan, seconded by Member Wardle and unanimously carried, to approve the agenda as amended.

5. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

6. Consent Agenda

A. Motion to Approve June 17, 2025, Minutes.

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

7. Motions & General Business

There were no general business items.

8. Communication Items

A. Director's Report.

Director Dow provided updates and highlighted information from her report:

- Director Dow detailed a pre-fiesta event in partnership with Hispanic Outreach on September 12.

- A new collaboration with the Red Wing Public Library was discussed involving the Manhattan Short Film Festival.
- Director Dow described recent collaborations with Downtown Main Street, the Red Wing Area Chamber of Commerce, and Visit Red Wing.
- A very successful Phoenix Theatre production of *Shrek the Musical* was discussed.
- Director Dow provided an update regarding use of the new sensory space.
- The recent All-American Alumni Band visit to Red Wing was discussed.
- A 2025-2026 ticket sales update was provided.
- A volunteer update was provided.
- Director Dow reported that the Sheldon Theatre was awarded a \$15,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts toward Black History Month events.
- Director Dow summarized recent discussions with Minnesota State Arts Board representatives.
- Grant funding was discussed.
- Director Dow discussed upcoming Minnesota Arts and Culture Coalition and Heartland Arts Board activities.

President Achen asked Board Members to comment regarding the verbal report format. Members expressed support for new high-level format of the Director's Report.

Member Bell commented that season ticket package sales are up 30%. Director Dow provided additional information, noting that the 2025-2026 season includes a few more shows, which partially accounts for the increased revenue. She also discussed the impact of social media.

Member Witham asked why Associate Directors Samantha Whipple and Brenda Stewart have not been present to provide reports during Sheldon Board meetings. President Achen commented that staff members have attended meetings in the past on a rotating basis. Member Kenyon suggested inviting staff members to attend meetings if there are topics to discuss that pertain to their areas of responsibility. Member Witham indicated that he appreciated the input that was provided by Associate Director Whipple during the June meeting. President Achen suggested inviting staff to attend meetings periodically to discuss issues and provide their perspectives.

President Achen provided background information and referenced recent Sheldon Board discussion of a Lead Production Technician position, noting that the position was approved by the City Council. He asked Director Dow to provide an update. Director Dow announced that Samuel Betcher will be moving from a part-time position to a full-time position and assuming this role.

Member Bell inquired regarding the new ticketing system. Director Dow discussed the transition and noted that data reporting and user challenges are being addressed.

B. Finance Report.

President Achen provided background information regarding the Finance Report. He noted that, as the 2024 City audit has now been completed, the final year-end financials are able to be reviewed and considered for approval.

Member Wardle reviewed the final 2024 year-end Balance Sheet. President Achen requested clarification of the revised document, and Member Wardle and Director Dow provided additional information. Member Wardle detailed revenue sources and noted that the actual results exceeded the budgeted amounts. Salary expenses were discussed. A motion was made by Member Kenyon, seconded by Member Bell and unanimously carried, to approve the final 2024 year-end financials.

Member Wardle reviewed the preliminary 2025 Q1 and Q2 financial statements. She summarized revenue and expenses and provided comparison information with 2024. Director Dow provided additional information related to expenses. A motion was made by Member Christenson, seconded by Member Bell and unanimously carried, to preliminarily approve the 2025 Q1 and Q2 financial statements. Member Wardle clarified that the preliminary financial statements are provided as an operational dashboard report. It was noted that Council Administrator Chris Heineman is aware of the new process.

Member Wardle reviewed the July 2025 year-to-date report, including revenue and expenses compared with the budgeted amounts. President Achen requested clarification of how revenue and expense projections are determined, and Director Dow provided information in this regard. She discussed the negotiation process with artists.

C. Board Chair's Report.

1. Motion to Approve Strategic Planning Proposal.

President Achen provided background information. He stated that he and Director Dow have been working with Jim Pence to create a proposed framework for a two-day strategic planning session for the Sheldon Theatre. He noted that Sheldon staff would participate on the first day, with the Sheldon Board and staff participating together on the second day. He noted that this framework is different from the process that was initially proposed, which involved small group discussions.

President Achen stated that Mr. Pence's preferred approach is to first establish outcomes, followed by assigning timeframes for those outcomes, which then determines the length of the strategic plan. He referenced the cost for providing facilitation services.

Member Kenyon described the strategic planning proposal as comprehensive, adding that the cost is very reasonable. President Achen stated that Mr. Pence has been very generous with his time and has met with him and Director Dow several times to discuss the proposal, at no cost. Member Christenson expressed support for including the Sheldon staff in the planning process. Member Bell also expressed support for the proposal. Member Witham commented in favor of a more streamlined approach to strategic planning and expressed agreement with the cost.

A motion was made by Member Brennan, seconded by Member Bell and unanimously carried, to approve a strategic planning process to be facilitated by Jim Pence, at a cost of \$4,266.

Potential dates for the strategic planning sessions were discussed, and November 7 & 8 were suggested. President Achen stated that this would be noticed as a public meeting.

2. Motion to Accept Gifts.

President Achen read a list of gifts that have been donated to the Sheldon Theatre since April of 2024.

Endowment:

- Evelyn Sweasy Trust - \$2,028,629.59
- Evelyn Sweasy Trust - \$1,181,522.63

Operating Fund:

- Red Wing Area Fund - \$80,000 (2024)
- Red Wing Area Fund - \$80,000 (2025)
- Minnesota State Arts Board - \$35,000 (2024)
- Minnesota State Arts Board - \$107,724 (2024)
- Minnesota State Arts Board - \$17,327 (2024)
- Minnesota State Arts Board - \$35,000 (2025)
- Minnesota State Arts Board - \$71,177 (2025)
- Jones Family Foundation - \$15,000 (2024)
- Jones Family Foundation - \$15,000 (2025)
- Red Wing Shoe Company Foundation - \$70,000 (2024)
- Red Wing Shoe Company Foundation - \$70,000 (2025)
- SEMAC (Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council) - \$10,000 (2024)
- National Endowment for the Arts - \$15,000 (2025)

A motion was made by Member Wardle, seconded by Member Christenson and unanimously carried, to accept the gifts as presented.

D. Committee Reports.

There were no reports.

E. Government Relations Report.

Council Liaison Snyder was not in attendance.

President Achen provided a report on behalf Council Liaison Snyder:

- The 2026 budget planning process is ongoing.
- New parking regulations have gone into effect in the Downtown business district.
- The City Council recently approved registration for one retail cannabis business.

F. Board Member Comments.

Member Witham referenced the top five selling 2025-2026 shows, per Director Dow's earlier report. He asked about shows with disappointing ticket sales so far. Director Dow commented that things are looking good. She added that ticket sales for later season shows are slow, noting that this is not unusual. She stated that ticket sales for the season-opening Judy Garland tribute show have not been selling as well as she had hoped but noted that tickets for the Duane Betts show are selling very well. She stated that grant funding was awarded for a play, which will help offset anticipated lower ticket numbers. She reported that ticket sales for the Bluebird Improv show are picking up. Ticket sales for the Atlanta Rhythm Section, Orleans, and Colleen Raye were discussed.

Member Witham asked about marketing strategies, and Director Dow provided information in this regard. She suggested marketing to Amtrak passengers traveling between the Twin Cities and Chicago. Member Bell and Director Dow suggested that Board Members share social media posts and tag other organizations. It was suggested to invite Associate Director Stewart to provide training during a future meeting. Member Witham referenced information that was provided by Meyer Beckner from Downtown Main Street during the June meeting with regard to data tracking.

Member Witham suggested working with the vendor on a new paper towel dispenser in the restroom. Director Dow indicated that she is aware of this issue. Members commented regarding the trend toward air dryers and away from paper towels. Director Dow commented regarding sensory challenges relating to the noise made by air dryers.

Member Christenson encouraged Board Members to help spread the word about the pre-concert event on October 4. Director Dow stated that an electronic flyer will be forwarded to Board Members. The ticketing process for this event was discussed.

Director Dow reviewed plans for a new youth theater program, with \$226,758 in grant funding recently approved by the Red Wing Area Fund to cover theater

director expenses for the first two years of the program. It was suggested that the Sheldon Board send a thank you note to the Red Wing Area Fund.

President Achen reported that Director Dow will be providing information to the City Council about the youth theater program during the next Council meeting.

9. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 6:21 p.m.