Momentum, Community Impact & A Regional Partnership for 2027/2028

Delegation Presentation to the Municipality of the District of Shelburne (MODS) Council
November 2026 | Presented by the Board of Directors, Osprey Arts Centre

Proven Turnaround & Organizational Momentum (2023–2026)

Disciplined growth achieved before requesting an expanded District partnership

Financial Turnaround (Without Bailouts)

- **2023:** -$30,000+ operating deficit on $97K revenues
- **2024:** Balanced accounts on $195K revenues
- **2025:** Balanced accounts on $249,000 revenues
- **2026:** on track to match 2025 results
- **Lean Execution:** Led by 1 full-time Executive Director backed by hands-on show-night volunteers.

Audience Nearly Quadrupled in 3 Years

- **2023:** Under 800 annual attendees
- **2024:** 2,000+ annual attendees
- **2025:** 3,000+ annual attendees across 70+ overall events (30+ live shows)
- **2026:** 3,000+ annual attendees across 70+ overall events (30+ live shows)
- **Per-Show Draw:** Averaging ~80+ patrons per live performance

Key Takeaway for Council

- **We righted the Ship First:** The Osprey has already eliminated deficits, quadrupled attendance, and positioned itself to climb from $30K to ~$50K/year in provincial CCTH operating grants. We are asking MODS to invest in proven momentum.*

*The organization does have ongoing annual debt service of approx. $6K from a COVID loan which is being reliably paid down.

Programming & Community Momentum in Action

High-demand sell-outs, local and youth partnerships, and external facility upgrades

Signature Sell-Outs & Local Community Engagement

- **Area 33 (World Premiere):** Professional theatre selling out 5 of 6 shows—unprecedented for rural NS. A prequel was mounted in 2026, selling a combined total of 538.
- **The Nutcracker:** Sell-out partnership with Yarmouth Dance Academy (returning for the third year in 2026)
- **Dockside Theatre Company:** Community theatre reborn—"I Hate Shakespeare" sell-out & 296 tickets sold for soap opera satire, "The Bold, The Beautiful and the Murdered" in 2026.
- **Expanded Concert Capacity:** Piano Men Tribute (expanded to 165 seats—sold out) & Rum Ragged (first on South Shore—sold out)



External Grants + Staff & Volunteer Sweat Equity

- **100+ Women Award:** $5,500 secured for facility & technical infrastructure
- **S4C Grant:** $6,700 secured for digital and social media audience growth
- **In-House Technical Upgrades:** Expanded stage lighting, improved booth & cinema projection, mobile baby grand
- **Volunteer Backbone:** Board volunteers staff front-of-house, box office, bar, audio, and lighting every show night



Verified Audience & Tourism Reach (5,375 Tickets)

Ticketpro billing postal/ZIP code data confirms a major regional & seasonal visitor draw

56.07% Local County Catchment

- **3,014 Tickets (B0T):** Serving residents across the Municipality of the District of Shelburne, Town of Shelburne, Lockeport & Barrington
- **Affordable Access:** Keeping live arts, cinema, and youth performances accessible close to home
- **Year-Round Gathering Space:** 70+ events across all 11+ months—including February through April

43.93% Out-of-County Visitors (2,361 Tickets)

- **16.41% Elsewhere in NS (882 tickets):** South Shore (326), HRM & Valley (368), Western NS (135), Northern NS & Cape Breton (53)
- **24.86% Other Canadian Provinces (1,336 tickets):** Tourists & seasonal second-home owners across every province & territory
- **2.66% United States (143 tickets):** 96 distinct US ZIP prefixes
- **Downtown Spillover:** Evening dining, fuel, retail & overnight stays in shoulder seasons

Municipal Support for PAC's Is Standard Across Canada

Even Canada's largest urban theatres rely on recurring multi-level government operating support

National Non-Profit Performing Arts Reality (Statistics Canada, Jan. 2026)

- **-2.4% Sector Operating Margin:** Canada's entire non-profit performing arts sector generated $1.13B in revenue against $1.16B in expenses in 2024—even with grants factored in. Accessible ticket prices cannot cover full venue costs alone.

Halifax: Neptune Theatre

- **80,000+ Patrons / $8.0M Budget:** Atlantic Canada's largest professional theatre
- **$560K/yr (7.0%) Cash Grants:** Recurring federal, provincial & municipal operating grants
- **~$482K/yr HRM Tax Relief:** Combined HRM backing equals 6.46% of operating budget

Toronto: TO Live & Harbourfront

- **$6.40M/yr Civic Subsidy:** 2026 City of Toronto net operating subsidy for 3 civic theatres
- **$6.50M/yr Federal Operating:** Ongoing federal operating funding for Harbourfront Centre

Vancouver: Civic Theatres

- **$3.05M/yr Rental Grants:** 2026/27 City of Vancouver subsidy across 4 downtown venues
- **Universal North American Model:** Federal, provincial & municipal partnership is permanent infrastructure

Local Support vs. Rural Nova Scotia Operational Benchmarks

The Town provides the tax-free building while MODS's cash support has always trailed rural peers

Eastern Shelburne County Today

- **Town of Shelburne:** Owns the building and provides it rent-free & property-tax-free (tens of thousands in avoided annual overhead)
- **MODS Current Support:** $2,500/year—just 1.00% of Osprey's $249,000 budget (up only $500 since 2010)
- **Policy Mismatch:** Capped inside Schedule A alongside small cemeteries and single-day events

Verified Annual Municipal Operating Grants (NS Peers)

- **Glasgow Square (New Glasgow):** $52,300/yr dedicated operating line
- **Marigold Cultural Centre (Truro/Colchester):** $15,000–$30,000+/yr combined + tax exemption
- **deCoste Centre (Pictou County & Town):** $15,000/yr County operating grant + Town grant + tax relief
- **Ship's Company Theatre (Cumberland):** Up to $10,000–$15,000/yr operational support
- **Astor Theatre (Region of Queens):** Rent-free municipal building + recurring annual operating grant

Advancing MODS's Economic & Strategic Priorities

A high-leverage investment in year-round tourism, downtown vitality & workforce recruitment

Alignment with Council's Core Goals

- **Downtown Water Street Vitality:** Reinforces MODS's Oct. 2026 economic study by driving evening foot traffic to local restaurants & shops
- **Shoulder-Season Tourism:** Activates the waterfront from October to May when summer visitors leave
- **Healthcare & Workforce Attraction:** Turnkey quality-of-life amenity for prospective doctors, nurses & families ($56.5K recruitment budget)
- **Provincial Funding Multiplier:** Supports Osprey's climb to ~$50K/yr in CCTH provincial operating support

Unmatched Return on Taxpayer Dollars

- **MODS Weekend Festivals:** $110,000/yr (~$35K/weekend) for three seasonal weekend festivals
- **Osprey Arts Centre:** Delivers 12-month programming across 70+ events
- **11.45-to-1 Leverage Ratio:** Even at $20,000/yr, Osprey generates $229,000 (92%) from ticket sales, sponsorships, donations & senior grants

The Proposal: $20,000/Year Regional Partnership

Reclassifying the Osprey Arts Centre under Policy 21, Schedule B & Economic Development / Tourism

Apples-to-Apples Budget Alignment

- **Requested Annual Partnership:** $20,000/year starting in 2027/2028
- **7.5% of Osprey's projected $275K Budget:** Matches Neptune Theatre's 7%–8% public operating benchmark
- **93% Self-Generated (255K):** Osprey continues to raise over 90% of its operating budget independently
- **8.0% of MODS Schedule B Pool:** Fits cleanly within MODS's $249,968 regional partnership framework

Four Annual Accountability Deliverables

- **1. Visitor & Audience Reporting:** Annual Ticketpro local vs. out-of-county visitor breakdown
- **2. Shoulder-Season Activity:** Tracking October–May performances & off-peak economic traffic
- **3. Regional Tourism Promotion:** MODS branding in seasonal brochures, digital ads & artist hospitality
- **4. Youth & Community Access:** School matinees, local group rentals, youth theatre camp and other family programming initiatives





A Win-Win-Win-Win-Win for all of Shelburne

1. Local Business Owners: Year-round evening foot traffic and October–May shoulder-season spending downtown.

2. Youth & Families: Access to world class performance arts close to home.

3. Healthcare & Workforce Recruitment: Vibrant year-round community life that helps close the deal on newcomers.

4. Municipal Taxpayers: $255,000 in outside revenue leveraged by a $20,000 investment—an 12-to-1 return.

5. Future Growth: Pairing the Town's rent-free facility contribution with a true District operational partnership.

PROPOSED TOURISM & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

To: Warden Penny Smith, Deputy Warden Heidi Wagner, and Members of Council, Municipality of the District of Shelburne (MODS)

From: Board of Directors, Osprey Arts Centre

Date: November 2026 (Advance Submission for 2027/2028 Budget Deliberations)

Subject: Establishing a $20,000/Year Regional Operational & Tourism Partnership for 2027/2028

Executive Summary

The Osprey Arts Centre serves as Eastern Shelburne County's primary year-round performing arts and community gathering venue. Over the past three years, the organization has executed a dramatic operational and financial turnaround — reversing a -$30,000+ deficit in 2023 into consecutive surpluses in 2024 and 2025 — growing revenues from $97K to $249K while nearly quadrupling annual attendance from under 800 to over 3,000 patrons.

Box-office postal code data across 5,375 tickets confirms that while 56.07% (3,014 tickets) serve Shelburne County residents, 43.93% (2,361 tickets) come from outside the county—including regional South Shore and Halifax visitors as well as seasonal second-home owners from across Canada and the United States.

Across Canada, Fom major urban venues in Halifax, Toronto, and Vancouver to rural Nova Scotia theatres, non-profit performing arts centres rely on ongoing multi-level public funding rather than 100% ticket self-sufficiency.

Locally, the Town of Shelburne provides substantial annual operational backing by owning the facility and leasing it to the Osprey rent and property tax-free, while MODS's direct cash contribution has risen by only $500 over the past 16 years (from ~$2,000 in 2010 to $2,500, or less than 1.0% of the organization's operating budget in 2026/27).

Reclassifying the Osprey Arts Centre from MODS's small-grant pool (Policy 21, Schedule A) into a $20,000/year Schedule B Partnership / Economic Development Service Agreement (7.5% of its projected operating budget) would align Shelburne with rural Nova Scotia peers, protect year-round tourism and downtown activity (especially following the 20% provincial arts grant cuts of February 2026), and reinforce Council's strategic priorities around economic growth and workforce attraction.

Proven Turnaround & Organizational Momentum (2023–2025)

Before asking the District for an expanded partnership, the Osprey focused first on internal sustainability, professional staffing, and audience growth:

- **Financial Recovery and Growth Without Municipal Bailouts.** Through disciplined management and expanded programming, the organization reversed a -$30,000+ operating loss in 2023 into balanced accounts in 2024 and 2025 on revenues of $197,000 and $249,000 respectively.
- **Nearly Quadrupled Annual Attendance.** Annual attendance grew from under 800 patrons in 2023 to 2,000+ in 2024 and 3,000+ in 2025 across 70+ total annual events (including 30+ live concerts, professional theatre productions, and community showcases).
- **High-Demand Programming & Youth Engagement.** Recent seasons have delivered unprecedented productions, including the world premiere of Area 33 (selling out 5 of 6 shows), expanded 165-seat concerts (Piano Men Tribute and Rum Ragged), the revival of local community theatre with Dockside Theatre Company (I Hate Shakespeare sell-out and 296 tickets sold in 2026), and youth partnerships such as The Nutcracker with Yarmouth Dance Academy and a theatre camp with Mersey Theatre Co.

- **Leveraging Outside Grants & Volunteer Labour.** Operating with a single full-time staff member backed by hands-on board volunteers running front-of-house, box office, bar, and sound/lighting operations, the Osprey has won competitive capital and digital awards ($5,500 from 100+ Women for facility upgrades and $6,700 from S4C for marketing) and has positioned itself to climb from $30,000 to ~$50,000/year in provincial CCTH operating funding in its next multi-year cycle. A $20,000/year partnership from MODS capitalizes directly on this momentum to stabilize core staffing and sustain year-round programming.

Ongoing Municipal Support Is Standard Across Canada

Unlike commercial businesses, non-profit community theatres intentionally keep ticket prices accessible for local families, seniors, and youth. According to Statistics Canada (January 2026), Canada's entire non-profit performing arts sector posted a -2.4% operating margin in 2024 ($1.13 billion in revenue against $1.16 billion in expenses). Even Canada's largest urban venues—with vast populations and corporate sponsors—cannot operate without ongoing multi-level government support:

- **Halifax (Neptune Theatre).** Drawing 80,000+ patrons annually on an $8.0 million budget, Atlantic Canada's largest theatre still requires roughly $560,000/year (7.0% of revenue) in recurring federal, provincial, and municipal operating grants—plus ~$482,000/year in HRM property tax relief (bringing HRM's combined municipal package to 6.46% of Neptune's budget).
- **Toronto (TO Live & Harbourfront Centre).** The City of Toronto provides a $6.40 million net annual operating subsidy (2026 budget) to run its three civic performing arts centres, while Harbourfront Centre receives $6.5 million per year in federal operating support.
- **Vancouver (Vancouver Civic Theatres).** Despite high ticket volumes across four downtown venues, the City of Vancouver commits $3.05 million per year (2026/27) in Theatre Rental Grants to subsidize local arts access.

In short, ongoing public partnership across federal, provincial, and municipal levels is the standard operating model across North America—not a temporary bridge to standalone commercial profitability.

Combined Local Municipal Support (Town + District)

Evaluating how Eastern Shelburne County shares this standard civic responsibility requires viewing the Town and District contributions together:

- **Town of Shelburne (Facility & Occupancy Support).** The Town provides $0 in direct cash operating grants, but absorbs the full cost of building ownership, structural maintenance, rent-free occupancy, and full municipal property tax exemption—representing tens of thousands of dollars in avoided annual overhead.
- **Municipality of the District of Shelburne (Cash Operational Support).** With the Town covering the physical building, MODS's role is cash support for programming, staffing, and visitor attraction. In 2026/27, Osprey requested $5,000 (the maximum allowed under Schedule A) and received $2,500 (1.00% of our $249,000 operating budget)—placing a year-round regional venue in the same funding tier as small cemeteries and single-day events.

Benchmark Comparison:

Verified Annual Municipal Operational Funding Across Nova Scotia

The table below compares verified annual municipal operational funding (excluding one-time capital rebuilds or construction grants) provided to peer rural performing arts centres across Nova Scotia, alongside historical 2010 baselines where cited in prior submissions:

Theatre & Location	Municipal Funder(s)		2025/2026 Verified Annual Operational Support	Operational Support Structure
Osprey Arts Centre (Shelburne)	MODS & Town of Shelburne		$2,500/yr (MODS cash) + Rent-free / tax-free Town building	Competitive Schedule A small grant from MODS; Town covers facility occupancy.
Glasgow Square Theatre (New Glasgow)	Town of New Glasgow		$52,300/yr	Dedicated annual operating line (Community Entertainment Service) in Town budget.
Marigold Cultural Centre (Truro)	Town of Truro & Municipality of Colchester		$15,000–$30,000+/yr (Combined)	Recurring annual operating grants from both Colchester County and Town of Truro, plus tax exemption.
deCoste Centre (Pictou)	Municipality of Pictou County & Town of Pictou		$15,000/yr (Pictou County) + annual Town of Pictou grant	Dual recurring operating grants from both rural county and host town, plus tax exemption.
Ship’s Company Theatre (Parrsboro)	Municipality of the County of Cumberland		Up to $10,000/yr (Previously $15,000/yr)	Dedicated annual operational support under Cumberland County's regional organization grant stream.

Tourism & Economic Development Alignment

In addition to its cultural mandate, the Osprey Arts Centre functions as an established economic and tourism engine that directly advances MODS’s Economic Development ($166,100) and Health Care Recruitment ($56,463) objectives:

- **Destination Anchor & Shoulder-Season Extension.** Ticketed evening performances give regional visitors and seasonal residents a concrete reason to dine at local restaurants, shop in downtown Shelburne, and book overnight accommodations—particularly during the fall, winter, and spring shoulder seasons when summer tourism tapers off.
- **Reinforcing Downtown Vitality.** Strengthening existing downtown cultural anchors directly supports the

findings of MODS's October 2026 economic readiness assessment, which emphasized protecting and enhancing downtown Water Street attractions.

- **Workforce, Physician & Newcomer Retention.** When recruiting doctors, nurse practitioners, skilled tradespeople, and remote workers to Shelburne County, quality-of-life amenities and live entertainment are key deciding factors. The Osprey provides MODS with a turnkey civic amenity without the municipality having to staff or program the venue itself.
- **Exceptional Return on Taxpayer Dollars.** Even at $20,000/year (8.03% of Osprey's $249,000 budget), the organization expects to continue to generate $90%+ from ticket sales, private sponsorships, individual donations, and federal/provincial arts grants—delivering a 12:1 return on municipal dollars across 12 months of the year, compared to roughly $35,000 per weekend spent on seasonal municipal festivals.

Verified Box-Office Reach & Proposed Accountability Metrics

Box-office billing postal/ZIP code data from Ticketpro (covering [insert date range, e.g., 2024–2026]) demonstrates the Osprey Arts Centre's dual role as both a local community hub and a regional/seasonal visitor draw:

Audience Origin (Ticketpro Billing Postal/ZIP Prefix)	Ticket Count	Share of Total Audience
Shelburne County (Local Catchment — B0T)	3,014	56.07%
Elsewhere in Nova Scotia (South Shore B0J/B4V/B0R: 326; HRM & Valley: 368; Western NS: 135; Northern NS & Cape Breton: 53)	882	16.41%
Other Canadian Provinces & Territories (Tourists & Seasonal Second-Home Owners — ON: 538; QC: 245; BC: 190; AB: 156; MB/SK: 120; Atlantic/North: 87)	1,336	24.86%
United States (Tourists & Seasonal Second-Home Owners — 96 ZIP prefixes)	143	2.66%
Total Verified Ticket Sales	5,375	100.00%

To ensure accountability for a $20,000/year operational and tourism partnership (funded via Policy 21, Schedule B Partnership Support and/or the Economic Development / Tourism budget), the Osprey Arts Centre will report annually to Council on four measurable benchmarks:

1. **Visitor & Audience Reach:** Annual ticketed attendance and breakdown of local vs. regional/seasonal visitor origin via Ticketpro postal code reporting.
2. **Shoulder-Season Economic Activity:** Number of live performances, film screenings, and community events staged between October and May to drive off-peak dining and retail traffic.

3. **Regional Tourism Cross-Promotion:** Inclusion of MODS tourism branding and regional visitor messaging across Osprey's seasonal print brochures, digital promotions, and touring artist hospitality packages.
4. **Community & Youth Access:** Number of local school performances, community group rentals, and subsidized/accessible ticket initiatives serving District of Shelburne residents.

Recommended Action for Council

> **That Council refer the Osprey Arts Centre's $20,000/year operational and tourism partnership proposal to the 2027/2028 Budget Deliberations for consideration under Policy 21, Schedule B (Partnership Support) and Economic Development / Tourism, recognizing the Town of Shelburne's existing rent-free and tax-free facility contribution.**