

# Community Survey

Aron Theatre Co-operative, May 2020

## Summary

Over three hundred people answered our online survey between May 8 and 12, 2020. People appreciated being asked for their opinions, they miss going to the movies, and they love the Aron Theatre Co-op.

Russ Christianson

Executive Summary.....	2
Introduction.....	3
<i>Heritage</i> .....	3
<i>Becoming a Co-Operative</i> .....	4
<i>The Pandemic of 2020</i> .....	5
Survey Respondents .....	7
Re-opening the Economy and the Theatre.....	8
Aron Theatre Co-op Membership .....	10
Going to the Movies and Streaming Movies at Home.....	13
Concluding Comments.....	15
Appendix 1: Aron Theatre Co-op Vision, Mission, Purpose and Values .....	17
Appendix 2: e-letter for Community Survey (May 8, 2020) .....	17
Appendix 3: Questionnaire .....	18

## Executive Summary

“The Aron” is a beloved institution in Trent Hills. It was opened as a purpose-built movie theatre on November 15, 1947. For 73 years, people have been enjoying films, concerts and other social events at the theatre. Ten years ago (June 30, 2010), the Aron Theatre Co-operative was incorporated, and on May 26, 2011, the not-for-profit Co-operative purchased the business.

*“I love movies, and this is a great little theater in my backyard!”* (Survey Response)

On March 15, 2020, the Aron Theatre Co-operative closed its doors in an effort to protect the health of its customers, volunteers and employees from COVID-19. Two days later, the Ontario Government declared a state of emergency, and ordered “non-essential” businesses closed and asked the people of Ontario to self-isolate at home.

In early May 2020, the Aron Theatre Co-op circulated an online survey to community members to find out their opinions on the theatre co-op, and the conditions under which they would feel safe to return to films and other events at the theatre.

*“I am happy to support the community co-op.”*

Over 300 people responded to the survey, representing a good demographic mix of the population of Trent Hills). People were asked to rate their level of concern about re-opening our economy and ending our social isolation, while ensuring we continue to practice physical distancing, hand washing, wearing masks, and cleaning surfaces. The average rating was fairly high at 7.2 out of 10, with a median of 7 and a mode of 10 (the most frequent answer).

Over half of the people expressed concern about opening too soon, not following physical distancing, the possibility of a second wave of infections, older people being more vulnerable, and needing to wait for a vaccine. About a quarter of people said they would be comfortable opening once the Ontario Government says it’s okay, and we follow the recommended public health precautions and safety practices.

The Co-op’s board of directors will not open the theatre until the Ontario Government says it’s okay to do so. And, the initial weeks of opening will require:

- Asking people to stay home if they are sick, with any cold or flu symptoms.
- Thorough cleaning of frequently touched surfaces at the theatre after each show.
- Physical distancing upon arriving at the theatre and a seating plan that provides at least 2 metres between people.
- Online and electronic ticket and concession sales, to avoid handling cash.

*“You are doing fine work. It is a social event (going to the movies) that we miss.”*

While most of the survey respondents are using streaming services for home entertainment during the pandemic, **9 out of ten respondents enjoy going to the Aron Theatre Co-op to see films as they meant to be seen: on a big screen with great sound, together with others in the community.**

## Introduction

The Aron Theatre is a well-loved cultural institution in Trent Hills. People of all ages strongly support the theatre, they miss going to the movies during this pandemic, and they are thankful for the efforts made by the board, volunteers and staff to improve the theatre and keep it going.

**“I love the Aron! Thank you for asking.”** 🌻

From May 8 to May 12, over three hundred people in our community responded to an online survey circulated by the Aron Theatre Co-op. The board of directors wanted to find out community members’ perceptions about the theatre and how it can map a safe and reasonable path to reopening the theatre, when the time is right.

## Heritage

Campbellford has a long history of coming together to enjoy movies. In the early 1900s, the Regent Theatre, now the Masonic Temple in Campbellford, offered black and white silent movies accompanied by a local pianist. In 1909, the Princess Theatre opened on Front Street North. In 1931, the owner, Joseph Hagerman of Belleville, offered a ten-year lease with an option to buy to Abe Rappaport of Toronto. Extensive renovations were undertaken and the theatre was renamed the Hollywood Theatre.

On Saturday, November 15, 1947, Mrs. A. Rappaport opened the newly constructed Aron Theatre. It’s interior sported soft cream walls with rich dark maroon carpeting on the floors. The upholstery of the three hundred and twenty seats matched the carpet and the furnishings were considered most modern and comfortable. The screen and sound equipment was installed by Perkins Electric of Toronto. The Royal Sound Master and projection equipment was considered to be the latest development in theatre equipment and was known as The Golden Voice of the Silver Screen. Bill and Charlotte Moon purchased the theatre in 1967 and renamed it The New Aron. Ten years later, Paul and Lynn Imperial took over the Aron and ran the business for over thirty years.<sup>1</sup>



People lining up for a Raffi concert in the 1970s.

<sup>1</sup> *New Life for the Aron Theatre*, Campbellford-Seymour Heritage Society Newsletter, Volume 15, No. 3, December 2011.

### Becoming a Co-operative

In 2009, the Aron was like hundreds of other small-town cinemas: ready to close its doors, faced with overwhelming competition from digital home entertainment and big-box movie complexes. The idea to purchase the theatre from the Imperials and turn it into a not for profit co-operative was spearheaded by Russ Christianson, the President of the Campbellford-Seymour Community Development Corporation. Russ crunched the numbers for a feasibility study, and presented them at a community meeting that was held at the Aron on November 18, 2009. About 140 people filled the theatre, and by the end of the night, 130 had purchased a \$20 memberships and made commitments to buy \$31,000 in Aron Theatre Co-op bonds.

The meeting included performances by local musicians Ken Tizzard and Ken Layton (who performed the song 'Sharing the Aron', written specifically for the event). The night also included presentations from the theatre's music director Todd Snar and a short speech from Paul and Lynn Imperial.

The co-operative was incorporated on June 30, 2010, with a founding board of directors, including Russ Christianson, Stasha Conolly, Ian Davis, Tanya Orr, Jana Reid, Kathryn Smit and Wanda Tucker. Over the last ten years, many different people have served on the board, and the current board members are Dornene Lin, Mary McTaggart, Martha Murphy, Dipak Patel, Wesley Szudy, and Mark White.



Ken Layton performs "Sharing the Aron," a song he created expressly to help generate enthusiasm to convert the Aron Cinema into a community not-for-profit co-op business. Sang Ken to the cheers of a large audience: "Sharing the Aron—because we're family and friends." Photo: Rolly Ethier



Rona crane and volunteers remove Aron marquee for repainting at Dave Carlaw's autobody shop, September 26, 2011

Once incorporated, a business plan was completed and a bond series was issued. The co-op raised \$137,000 in bonds, including a \$72,000 investment from the Campbellford/Seymour Community Foundation. And, Paul and Lynn Imperial took back a first and second mortgage to complete the financing for the purchase of the cinema for \$200,000. The

worn-out marquee was refurbished with a Community Foundation grant, money was raised for a digital projector, and a marketing plan was developed to drive outreach to the community.

Attendance began to increase as movie programming improved. The new digital projector and sound system (Bills Woods, a world-renowned speaker designer from Hastings, and Noel Parrott, a local carpenter from Norwood, built the speakers) made a big difference in the quality of the experience.



*People lining up for the first on-release digital movie - The Hunger Games - March 30, 2012*

People of all ages started coming back to the movies in Campbellford. The Aron Theater Co-operative is now serving as a community hub and cultural centre, working, for example, with local schools to show educational films.

### The Pandemic of 2020

On March 15, 2020, the Aron Theatre Co-op board of directors decided to close the theatre to protect the health and safety of its members, customers, staff and volunteers. On March 17, the Ontario Government declared a state of emergency and required all non-essential business and public gathering places closed.

Globally, there have now been 5.7 million reported cases of COVID-19, with 353,000 deaths and 2.5 million have recovered.<sup>2</sup> The United States has the highest infection and

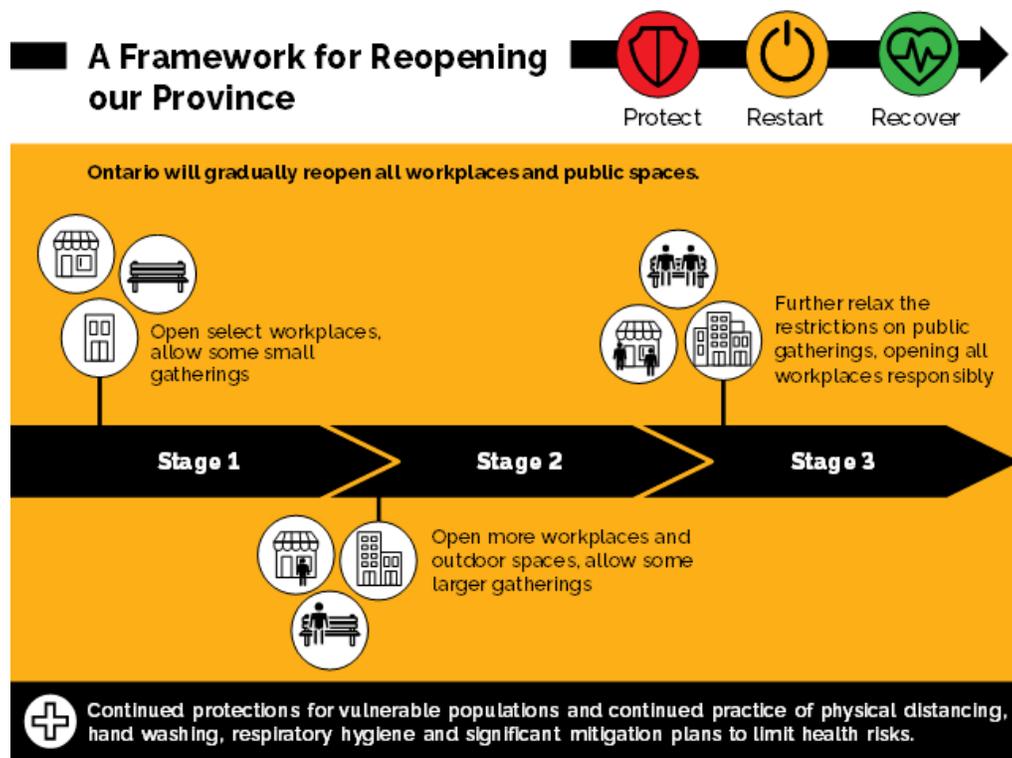
<sup>2</sup> <https://covid19statistics.org/>, updated Wed May 27 2020 10:30:59 GMT-0400 (Eastern Daylight Time)

death rates at 1.7 million and 100,755 respectively. Canada has had 86,647 cases and 6,639 deaths. Ontario has had 26,483 cases and 2,155 deaths, 63 percent of which occurred in long-term care homes.<sup>3</sup> In Northumberland County (population 108,000), there have only been 16 confirmed COVID-19 cases, all of which have been resolved, and there are no deaths.<sup>4</sup>

Like most Canadians, other than “essential” workers, people in Northumberland County have been self-isolating at home with their families, and have been following recommended health practices, including physical distancing (staying 2 meters away from others in public), thoroughly and frequently washing their hands, and doing their best to avoid touching their faces. And, more people are wearing face masks to protect others while in public.

The Ontario Government has a framework to reopen businesses, services and public spaces (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/framework-reopening-our-province>). This will be a three-stage process as shown in Figure 1, and we are currently in Stage 1.

**Figure 1: Ontario Government Framework for Reopening**



<sup>3</sup> How Ontario is responding to COVID-19, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-ontario-is-responding-covid-19#section-0>, updated on May 27, 2020, at 10:30 a.m.

<sup>4</sup> This is the cumulative data on confirmed COVID-19 cases in Northumberland County, part of the HKPR District Health Unit area. <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/>, Updated: May 26, 2020 – 11:30 a.m.

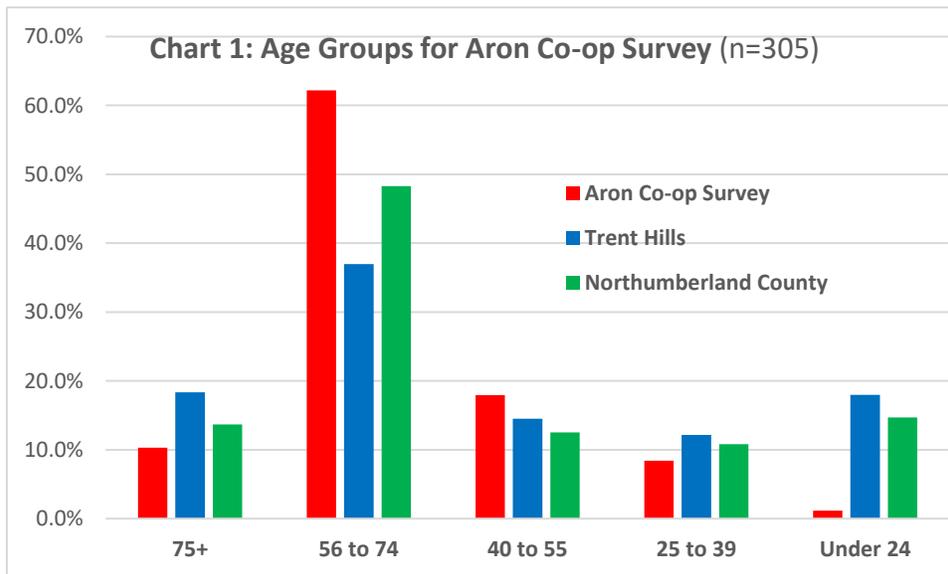
The Aron Theatre Co-operative will continue to monitor the public health notices locally, provincially and nationally to keep abreast of any updates, including a potential re-opening timeline and safety measures. At this point, the theatre will likely remain closed until the end of July 2020.

## Survey Respondents

A draft questionnaire was created and pretested with co-op members, and was then sent to board members for their feedback before creating a final online version.

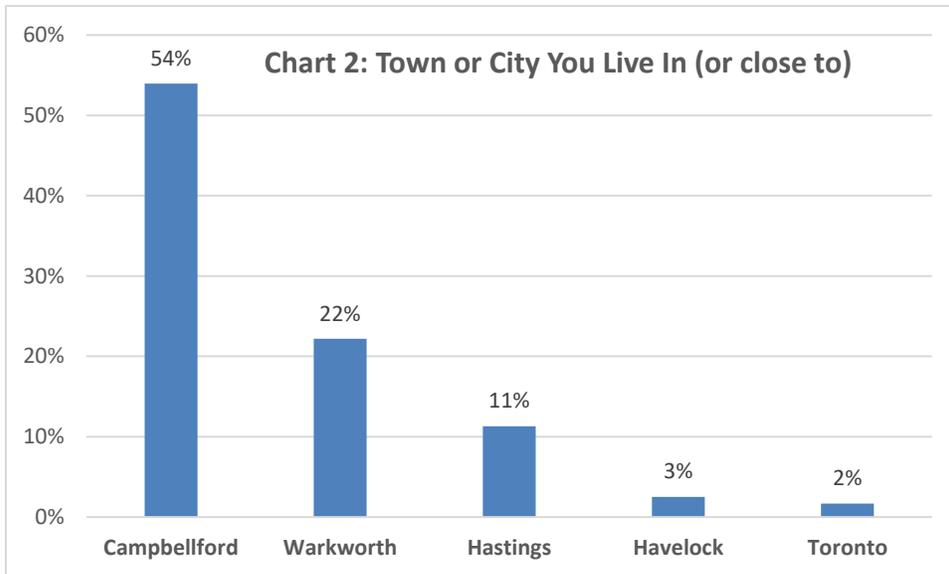
On May 8, the online survey link was e-mailed to 722 people via Constant Contact and posted on Facebook, and by May 12 there were 305 respondents. The previous community survey from May 2019, that helped the board of directors frame the strategic plan, had 227 respondents.

Chart 1 shows the age groups of the Aron Co-op survey respondents compared to the populations of Trent Hills (12,905) and Northumberland County (108,000).



Baby Boomers represent the largest population in each category, with 62% in the survey, 48% in Northumberland County, and 37% in Trent Hills (in Ontario, baby boomers are also the largest group, representing 27% of the population). The other age groups are comparable, and the under 24 group has a much smaller response rate in the survey. This points to the importance of more active outreach to our schools, and high school students in particular.

Chart 2 shows the main communities that survey respondents call home. Campbellford is the most frequent response, with Warkworth and Hastings following. There were a large number of other communities mentioned, including: Havelock, Toronto, Brighton, Stirling, Madoc, Norwood, Roseneath, Trent River, and Codrington. The main draw for the theatre is in the Trent Hills area (87%).



## Re-opening the Economy and the Theatre

The survey respondents were asked to rate their **level of concern about re-opening our economy and ending our social isolation** (where 1 is a low level and 10 is high), while ensuring we continue to practice physical distancing, hand washing, wearing masks, and cleaning surfaces. The average rating is 7.2 out of 10, with a median of 7 and a mode of 10 (the most frequent answer).

Chart 3 shows the reasons why they provided this rating. **Over half of the respondents expressed concern and fear about opening too soon**, people not following physical distancing, the possibility of a second wave of infections, older people being more vulnerable, and needing to wait for a vaccine. **About a quarter of people** said they would be comfortable opening once the Ontario Government says it's okay and we follow the recommended public health precautions and safety practices. Just over one in ten felt that there is a balance to be found between physical isolation and re-opening the economy, and felt the risk is low in our community.

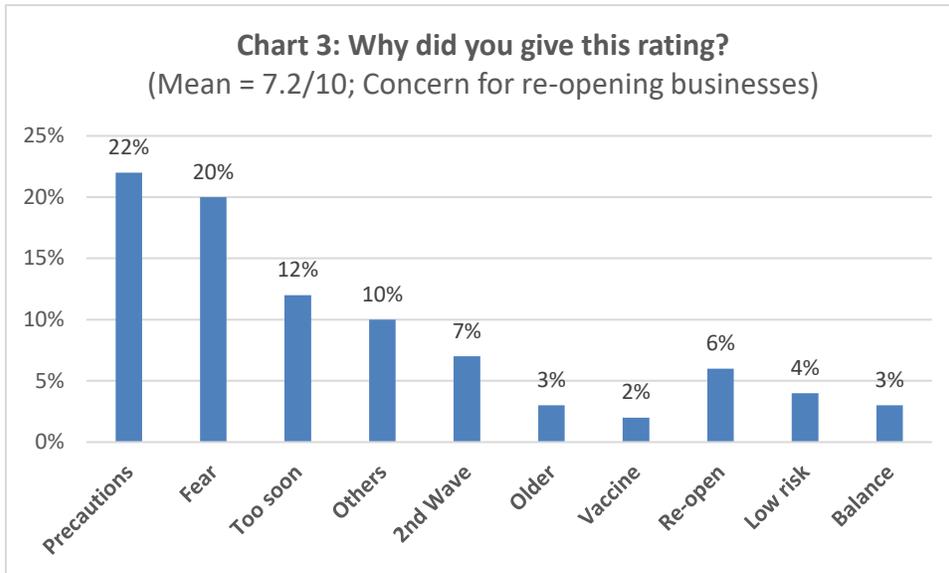
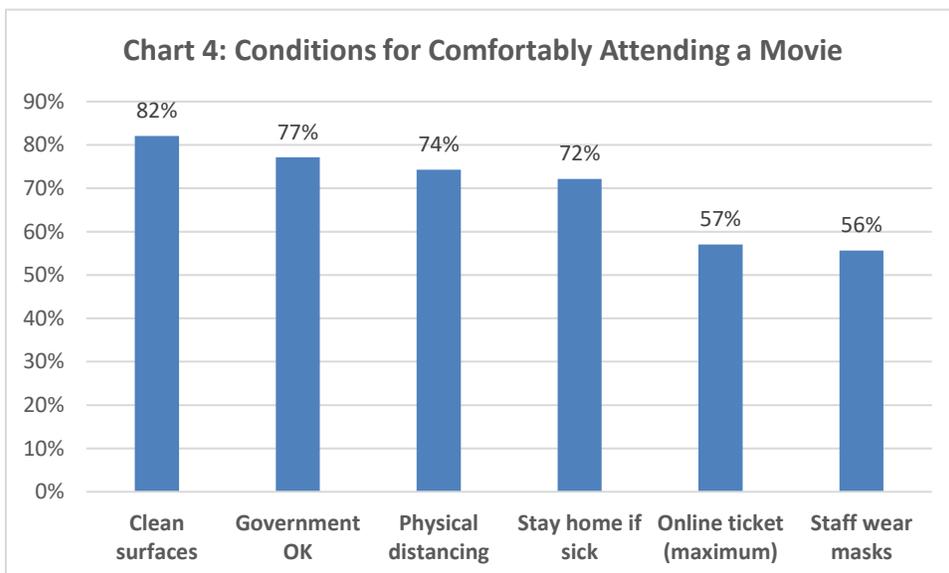


Chart 4 shows the conditions that people feel are the most important to be in place for them to feel comfortable attending a movie at the Aron Theatre Co-op. The Co-op’s board of directors will not open the theatre until the Ontario Government says it’s okay to do so. And, the initial weeks of opening will require:

- Asking people to stay home if they are sick, with any cold or flu symptoms.
- Thorough cleaning of frequently touched surfaces at the theatre after each show.
- Physical distancing upon arriving at the theatre and a seating plan that provides at least 2 metres between people.
- Online and electronic ticket and concession sales, to avoid handling cash.



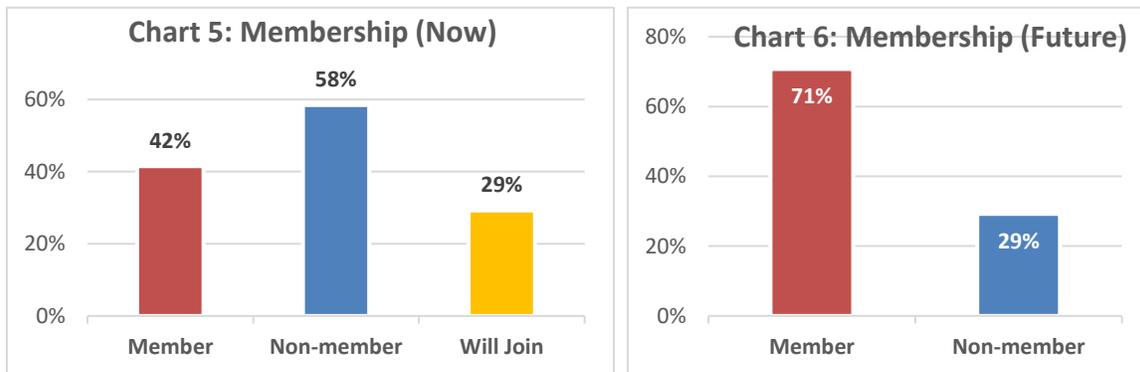
The idea of staff and volunteers wearing masks and face shields will also be considered, (particularly for their protection). Customers may also be asked to wear masks, and this will be determined based on best practices.

### **Aron Theatre Co-op Membership**

The following membership description was provided to the survey respondents before asking questions about membership in the co-operative:

The Aron Theatre Co-operative is a community owned, not-for-profit enterprise that uses a triple bottom line to measure its success: economic, social and environmental. **Membership costs \$20 for individuals and \$40 for families each year.** Buying an annual membership offers these benefits: **1)** Members own the theatre, which has assets of \$527,000; **2)** Members receive \$2 off the regular ticket price (\$10 for adults, and \$8 for seniors and children) and every 9th movie is free; **3)** Every member is equal, with one vote per member; **4)** There are many volunteer opportunities that help people feel socially connected; **5)** By working together, we are keeping our theatre open, and our community engaged and thriving.

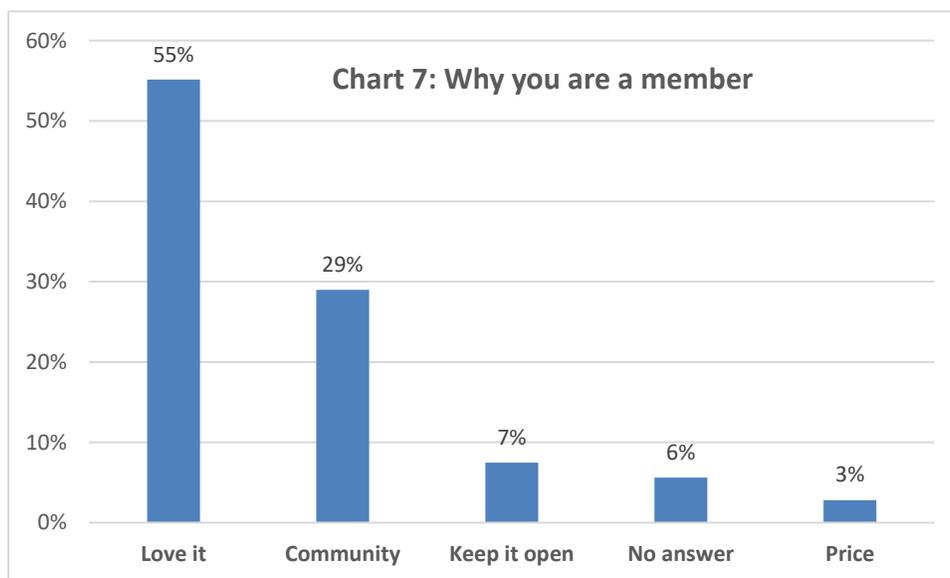
As shown in Chart 5, of this sample of 305 survey respondents, 42% are members and 58% are not members, and of these non-members, half would like to become members. Chart 6 shows the potential of attracting these new members to the co-operative, shifting 29% of current non-members to membership status.



People were asked why they are members, and why they are not members. Chart 7 shows the reasons people are members of the Aron Theatre Co-op. Here are some verbatim comments for the reasons **why people are members**:

- I love the co-op and it's a gem in our community
- I believe in co-operative organizations and I love films
- Love movies, and this is a great little theater in my backyard!

- I like going to movies on the big screen and I choose to not get Netflix! And I like to support the coop, community theatre.
- I love our little theatre and do not like the big, LOUD, impersonal ones in the city. Ours is the best, cozy, sense of belonging, price is right.
- Feel proud to be an owner of the coop.
- We are members to support our local community theatre and to help make sure we have a place to see movies close by
- I appreciate what the theatre does for our community and want to support it
- I am happy to support the community co-op
- I believe in community support and want to ensure the Aron's continued operation
- I am proud to support our wonderful community theatre, conference and performance space
- See good films at a reasonable price and enjoy a warm community atmosphere
- I like to see the show in our town. You do a good job in getting in current movies. The price is right.
- To make sure theater stays open
- I attend relatively few movies, but want to help ensure the theatre is there for everyone else and other events.
- It great way to support the theatre as I can't make it to many shows with my work schedule



Here are some verbatim comments for the reasons **why people are not members**:

- Former members planning to sign up again.
- Didn't renew this year. Maybe online renewal would help

- just procrastinating - have meant to many times
- I have no reason. I will now buy a membership to support the theatre
- Just haven't purchased but intend to. Is it possible to have email notification in early Spring with link by to online purchase?
- Will join now. Have been impressed by your communications :)
- Sign me up.
- I use to be a member, however life has changed and attending movies is not something we do anymore. I will continue to support in the future.
- We live outside of the Campbellford Area and just never took the effort to become a member.
- Just moved here recently and I have been to the theatre 3 times and have every intention of doing that.
- Would be interested in becoming a member, I've just never really been asked or gone out of my way to join.
- Always wanted to. Not open when I am in town.
- Don't have the opportunity to get out regularly.
- Not members because we attend rarely, and live half-an-hour away
- I am only a very occasional movie goer
- I was a member but as I attend the movies very irregularly and don't live in the community, I felt it unnecessary
- Don't watch a lot of movies and not one for crowds
- No desire
- NEVER BEEN ASKED
- Never knew about this
- Did not know it was so reasonable to support the theatre
- I didn't know it was an option

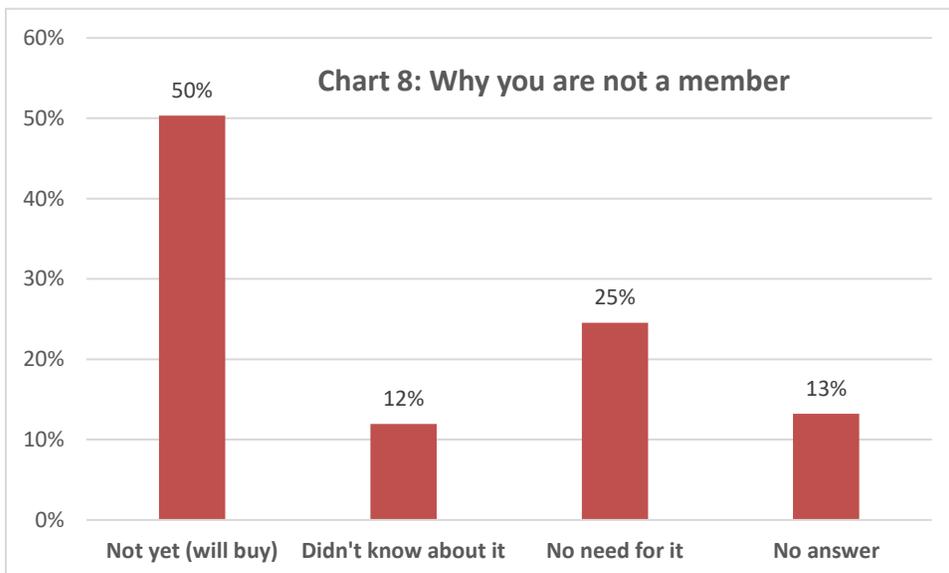
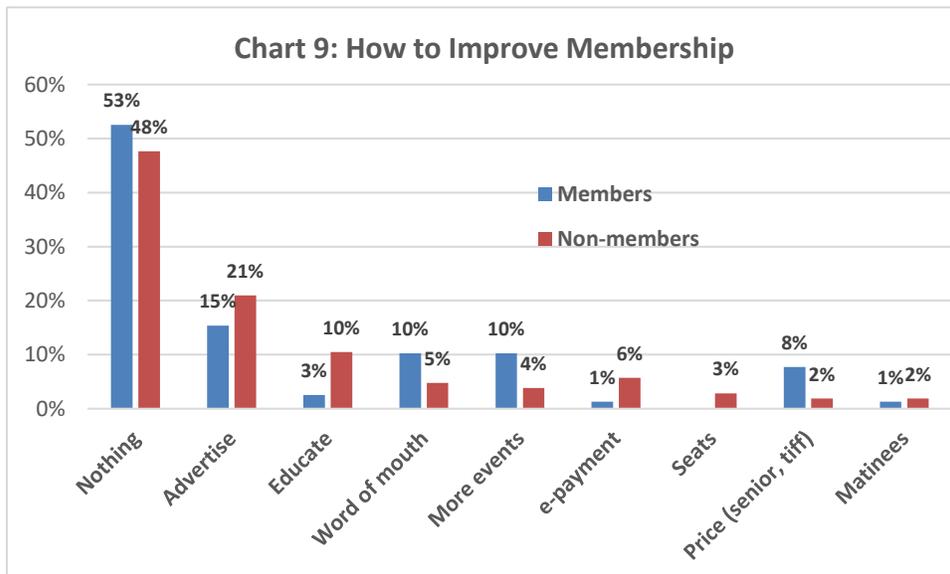


Chart 9 provides suggestions from members and non-members about **how to improve membership**. There is significant overlap between members and non-members, particularly in the perspective that there is “nothing” that can be done to improve membership.

Advertising, education and word-of-mouth are promotional suggestions provided by 28% of members and 36% of non-members. The co-op can do a better job in promoting its membership benefits and the importance of keeping the theatre thriving in our community. Members would also like to see more and different kinds of events (for example, concerts, lectures, live shows, special events for members). e-payments will also make it easier for people to renew or buy a membership either online or in the theatre.

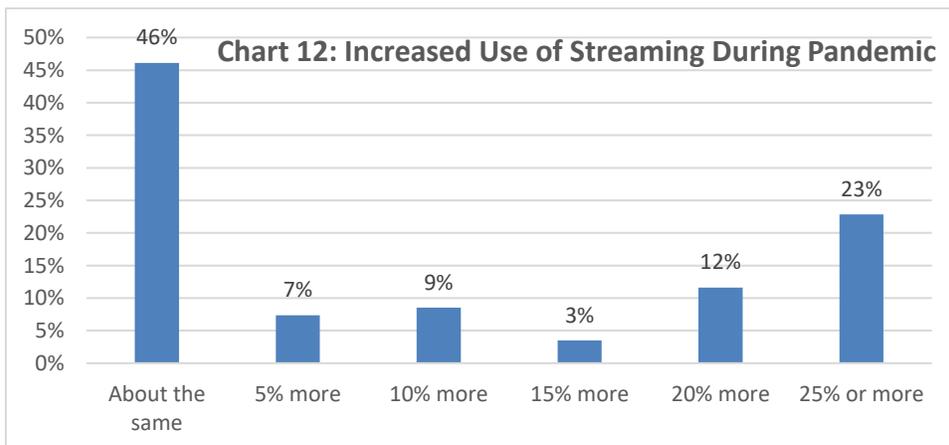
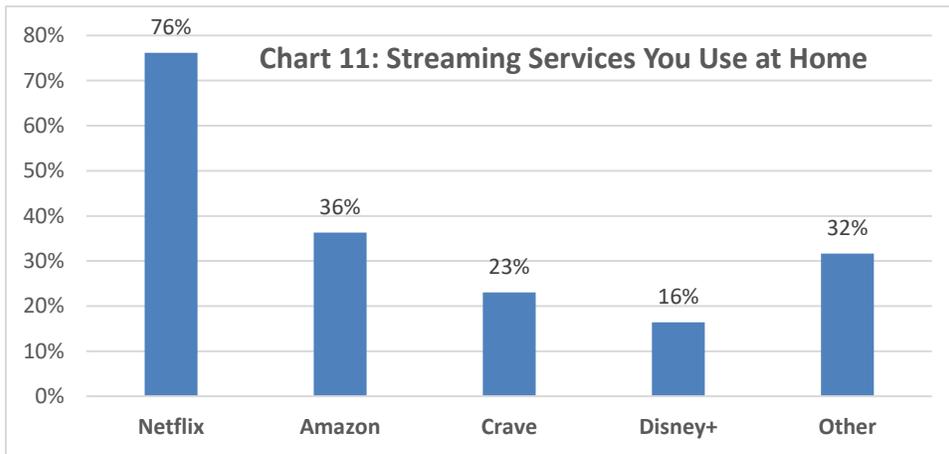
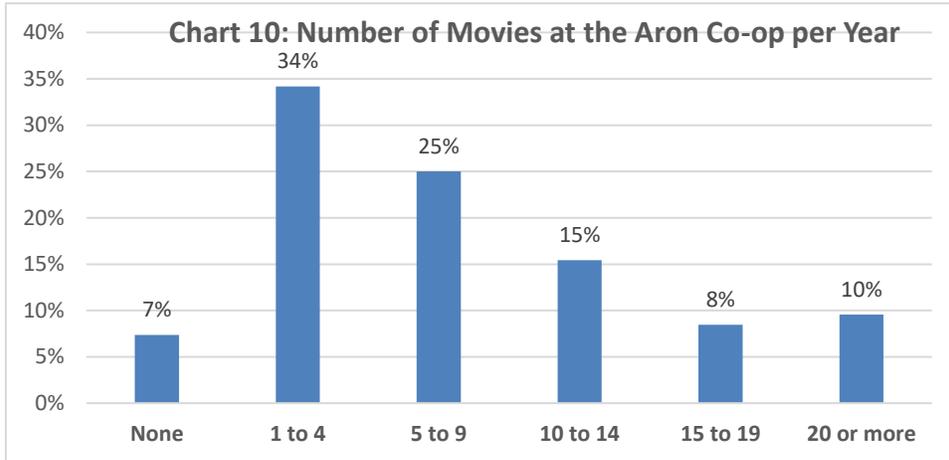


### Going to the Movies and Streaming Movies at Home

People were asked how many times they attend movies at the Aron Theatre Co-op each year. Chart 10 shows the breakdown. A third of people attend 1 to 4 times per year, a quarter attend 5 to 9 times, a quarter attend 10 to 19 times, and 10% attend more than 20 times per year.

Chart 11 shows the streaming services that the respondents use, with Netflix being the most popular, and Amazon, Crave and Disney+ following in that order. Chart 12 shows the use of streaming services during the pandemic, with about half of people saying they use these services about the same amount, and a quarter saying they have increased their use by 25%. In other words, while most people are using streaming services for home entertainment, **9 out of ten enjoy going to the Aron Theatre Co-op**

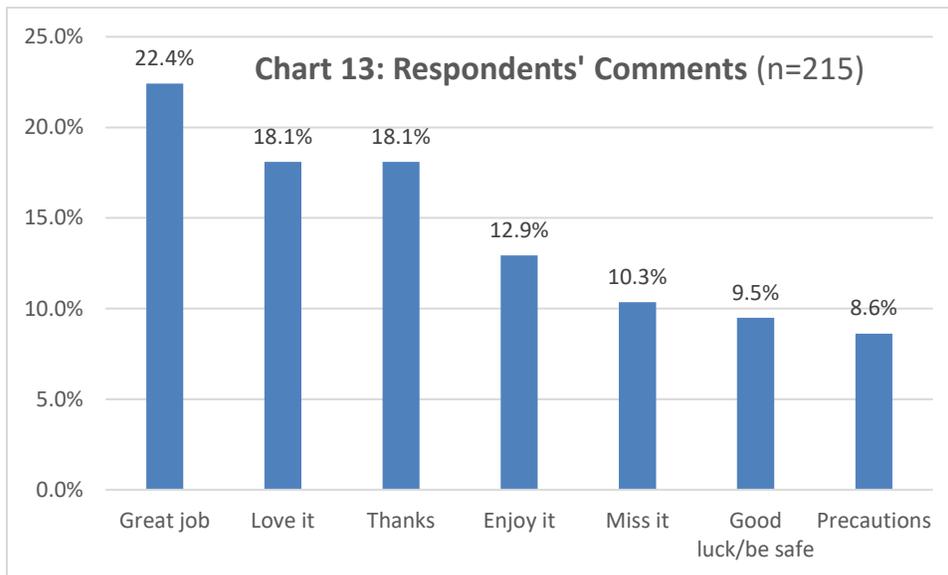
*to see films as they meant to be seen: on a big screen with great sound, together with others.*



## Concluding Comments

At the end of the survey, people were thanked for their support, and we asked if they had anything else they would like to share. Chart 13 shows a summary of the comments. **Nine out of ten people made positive comments about the Aron Theatre Co-operative**, reiterating that:

- They love the theatre co-op
- We're doing a great job
- Thanking us for our work and for asking them to complete the survey
- They miss coming to the theatre, and
- Wishing us good luck and good health.



Here is a selection of word-for word comments from respondents:

- Keep up the good work!!
- The Aron leadership and volunteers do a great job. Using the theatre for other events was a good move too.
- You are doing fine work. It is a social event (going to the movies) that we miss.
- This theatre has great potential and I am optimistic about the film series and the changes in staffing and direction
- Keep up the good work and I hope we can get through this thing financially.
- Very proud of the Aron, and the concept and the commitment of the people involved.
- I love the Aron! Thank you for asking. 🌻
- We love the Aron and will support it any way we can to see it stay viable
- I am so happy we have the theatre and we need to do all we can do to preserve it.



**Be part of the fun.**

## Community Survey May 2020

- Love our small town theatre & the different shows & things you do
- Thank you for asking the community for their thoughts!
- Thank you for all your work for the theatre and for this survey.
- Thank you for all you do, we're excited to come back to the theatre as soon as you're open!
- We will definitely be back when you open! We miss it.
- Cannot wait to get back to watching movies in a theatre
- PLEASE don't re-open prematurely!
- Fantastic venue and one of my top 5 activities I miss during the pandemic. Thanks for all you do.
- All the Best - hope you can open again soon!

## **Appendix 1: Aron Theatre Co-op Vision, Mission, Purpose and Values**

### **Vision**

Our vision is to transform the Aron Theatre into a sustainable cultural hub, open to everyone in our community.

### **Mission**

Aron Theatre Co-operative is a not-for-profit business owned and controlled by its members. Co-op members participate actively in organizing and successfully running artistic and cultural events. The Co-operative will operate with a triple bottom line, ensuring financial viability, community responsibility, and environmental stewardship.

### **Purpose**

Aron Theatre Co-operative brings people together to enjoy movies, music and other events.

### **Values and Principles**

Aron Theatre Co-operative is guided by the International Co-operative Values and Principles.

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

### **Values**

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

### **Principles**

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Co-operation among Co-operatives
7. Concern for Community

## Appendix 2: e-letter for Community Survey (May 8, 2020)



# Latest news from the Aron Theatre Co-op

### Aron Theatre Co-operative: Community Survey, May 2020

The Aron Theatre Co-op is a community owned not-for-profit enterprise. The theatre chose to close its doors on March 15 to do our part in fighting the spread of COVID-19. Our number one concern then, and now, is the health and safety of our community members and staff.

By working together, we can continue to minimize the impact of this pandemic. As of today, Northumberland County has only had 14 confirmed cases of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, and 13 of these cases have been resolved. Thankfully, there have been no deaths due to COVID-19 in Northumberland County <https://www.hkpr.on.ca/>

A number of countries, like the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand are considering opening movie theatres and other public gathering places to limited audiences in June or July. Of course, we will only do so with the Ontario government's permission and we will follow its recommended practices to ensure public health.

The board of directors of the Aron Theatre Co-op is asking for your help by providing us with your opinions on when and how we should open the theatre. Please take four or five minutes to fill out this anonymous survey. Depending on how things unfold, we may send one or two additional surveys to help us decide when and how we re-open the theatre.

Please click on this link to go to the survey: <https://www.surveylegend.com/s/29ju>

Thank you for your support of the Aron Theatre Co-operative.

### Appendix 3: Questionnaire

The Aron Theatre Co-op is a community owned not-for-profit enterprise. The Theatre chose to close its doors on March 15, to do our part in fighting the spread of COVID-19. **Our number one concern then, and now, is the health and safety of our customers, staff, and volunteers.** By working together, we can continue to minimize the impact of this Pandemic. Please take **four or five minutes** to fill out this **anonymous** survey. Depending on how things unfold, we may send one or two additional surveys to help us decide when and how we re-open the theatre.

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, rate your level of concern about re-opening our economy and ending our social isolation, while ensuring we continue to practice physical distancing, hand washing, wearing masks and cleaning surfaces.

\_\_\_\_\_ (where 1 is low and 10 is high)

2. Why did you give this rating?

- 
3. Under what conditions would you feel comfortable attending a movie at the Aron Theatre Co-op? **Please check all that apply:**

- 1. Public health officials and the Ontario Government say its okay
- 2. People are asked to stay home if they have any cold or flu symptoms, and are screened at the door
- 3. The theatre is set up for physical distancing (sitting at least 6 feet apart from others outside your household)
- 4. Ticket sales are limited to a maximum (44 out of 140 seats), and can only be purchased online
- 5. Surfaces are thoroughly cleaned before and after each show
- 6. Staff and volunteers wear masks and gloves
- 7. Other

---

The Aron Theatre Co-operative is a community owned, not-for-profit enterprise that uses a triple bottom line to measure its success: economic, social and environmental. Membership costs \$20 for individuals and \$40 for families each year. Buying an annual membership offers these benefits:

- Members own the theatre, which has assets of \$527,000.
- Members receive \$2 off the regular ticket price (\$10 for adults, and \$8 for seniors and children) and every 9<sup>th</sup> movie is free.
- Every member is equal, with one vote per member.
- There are many volunteer opportunities that help people feel socially connected.

- By working together, we are keeping our theatre open, and our community engaged and thriving.
4. Are you a member of the Aron Theatre Co-op? (\$20 for individuals and \$40 for families).
- Yes  No Why or why not?
- 

5. What would you do to help improve membership?

---

6. About how many times do you attend movies at the Aron Theatre Co-op each year?

- None  1 to 4  5 to 9  10 to 14  15 to 19  20 or more

7. Do you use any of these **streaming services** at home (**please mark all that you have**):

- Netflix  Amazon  Crave  Disney +  Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Approximately how much has your use of streaming services increased during the Pandemic?

- About the same  5%  10%  15%  20%  25% or more

**Here are a few questions about you:**

9. Which town or city do you live in (or closest to)?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. What is your age? (**Choose one**)  Under 24  25-39  40-55  56-74  75+

11. Do you have anything else you would like to share?

**Thank you for supporting the Aron Theatre Co-op by filling out this survey.**