The idea for the Walgreen Drama Center and Arthur Miller Theatre originated in 1997 when then University President Lee Bollinger proposed it to the Board of Regents, saying, “This is a community that loves the word, that loves performance. This is vital to what we are as a community and as an institution.”

In 2000, Arthur Miller sent a simple postcard to the University giving his alma mater permission to name the theatre to be built in the Walgreen Drama Center after him, making it the only theatre in the world to bear his name. The project was further sealed by a gift of $10 million from Charles Walgreen, Jr. a 1938 graduate of the College of Pharmacy.

In October of 2000, a symposium, Arthur Miller’s America: Theater and Culture in a Century of Change, was held in Rackham Auditorium. Because of an injury, the honored guest was unable to travel to Ann Arbor, but through a remote connection to Miller’s Connecticut home, the symposium went on as planned. Miller’s image was projected onto three large screens in Rackham, where U-M Professor of English and Theatre, Enoch Brater, was able to converse with him and moderate the proceedings. A portion of the symposium’s opening ceremony recognized the plans for the Arthur Miller Theatre; President Bollinger unveiled a plaque to be installed in the theatre upon its completion.

The location on North Campus was encouraged by former School of Music Dean Karen L. Wolff who saw the versatile theatre’s potential as a tool for training the School’s drama students while also creating a venue for both traditional and cutting-edge theatre. It is the hope that the move will allow for a new synergy, by virtue of close proximity, between the School and its departments of Theatre & Drama and Musical Theatre who will soon make the Walgreen Drama Center their home.

In 2004, the Regents approved the construction of the Walgreen Drama Center and Arthur Miller Theatre on North Campus. Mary Sue Coleman, University President, was quoted as saying, “The arts play a vital role on our campus, and in the entire Ann Arbor community. The Walgreen Drama Center and Arthur Miller Theatre represent new assets for our academic program and students, and further enhance our commitment to the performing arts in the region.”