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Town of Aurora  
**Committee of the Whole Report**  
No. CMS24-016

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**Subject:** 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan

**Prepared by:** Phil Rose, Manager of Cultural Services

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** May 7, 2024

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS24-016 be received; and
2. That Council approve the 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan.

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan.

- The Cultural Action Plan is the foundation for the Town's cultural planning efforts.
- Extensive engagement informed the development of the plan, including several conversations with key partners in the cultural sector.
- The Cultural Action Plan includes nine Objectives that are paired with numerous Key Results that will help track progress toward achieving each Objective.
- To monitor implementation, staff will use Viva Goals, a digital platform that provides real-time insights, fosters collaboration, and enables agile decision-making.
- For each year of implementation, annual work plans will be created and reported publicly to ensure progress is being actively communicated and celebrated.

## Background

The development of Aurora's first Cultural Plan started in August 2013 with a research phase that examined various Town plans and strategies and their connection to cultural planning.

From late 2013 to early 2014, the Town hosted a series of community engagement sessions that included face-to-face interviews, focus groups and a visioning session with key partners. The feedback gathered during this phase was translated into the Cultural Plan's Strategic Directions and Actions.

The initial cultural planning process concluded when Council endorsed the Cultural Plan on June 10, 2014, when they passed the following resolution:

"THAT Council endorse the Cultural Master Plan and specifically approve Section 5 of the Plan being "Strategies and Actions.""

Between 2014 and 2019, the Town was moderately successful implementing the Cultural Plan. Of the Plan's 53 Actions, 20 were either in progress or completed by 2019. The Town's inability to fully implement the Cultural Plan was due, in part, to the absence of a Cultural Services Division and the staff necessary to implement its Strategic Directions and Actions on behalf of the municipality.

The 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan (CAP) builds on the first plan and refocuses the Town's cultural planning endeavors. Like the first plan, the latest CAP is a result of extensive engagement with the community, the Town's Cultural Partners, Mayor and Council, and Town staff. With the creation of the Cultural Services Division in 2022, the Town is better situated to successfully implement the new Plan over the next five years.

## Analysis

**The Cultural Action Plan is the foundation for the Town's cultural planning efforts.**

The CAP provides a strategy to leverage local cultural resources to improve quality of life, support economic development, bolster community cohesion, and nurture an energetic engagement with our diverse population.

The role of the Cultural Services Division is to provide strategic leadership for municipal cultural development guided by the Council approved CAP.

Key priorities for the Cultural Services Division include:

- Implementation of the Cultural Action Plan and Council approved policies and strategies aimed at nurturing, sustaining, and preserving the diversity of cultural elements that enrich the life of Aurora.
- Shared oversight of the Community Partnership Grant, which provides funding to community groups and individuals to assist in the implementation of culture or recreation-based initiatives, build capacity, further their mandate, benefit the community and support the Town's strategic plan.
- Operational management of Aurora Town Square and the Aurora Museum & Archives, including arts, culture, and heritage program delivery.
- Support for the Town's Cultural Partners and the broader cultural sector, building organizational capacity through funding and various formal and informal learning opportunities.
- Grow and develop the municipal public art portfolio through development and implementation of the Public Art Plan, contributing to Aurora's identity as a creative place for residents, visitors, and business.
- Integrate culture-related considerations into planning and decision making across a wide range of issues facing the municipality.
- Leverage Aurora's cultural resources to support business investment, accelerate downtown revitalization and grow tourism.

**Extensive engagement informed the development of the plan, including several conversations with key partners in the cultural sector.**

Between 2021 and 2023, Cultural Services staff interviewed seventeen representatives from various local cultural organizations and members of Council. The purpose was to better understand the current state of culture in Aurora and begin to define the Town's strategic vision for arts, culture, and heritage. Interviewees identified various trends, challenges and opportunities that informed the development of the CAP.

In addition to the seventeen interviews, the draft CAP was presented to nine Cultural Partners for review and comment, with a particular focus on the CAP's Objectives and Key Results. Overwhelmingly, the Cultural Partner representatives were supportive of the CAP and believe it provides a solid footing that will positively benefit Aurora's cultural community.

These important conversations made it clear that culture in Aurora is fluid and multifaceted, and that the CAP must be as inclusive and adaptable as possible to adequately reflect this diversity.

**The Cultural Action Plan includes nine Objectives that are paired with numerous Key Results that will help track progress toward achieving each Objective.**

Forward looking and leading organizations utilize Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) to effectively manage their goals, strategic alignment and performance.

OKRs are a goal-setting approach designed to establish measurable targets, foster alignment, and emphasize desired outcomes. Within the Cultural Services Division, the following Objectives (the "What") delineate our mission-supporting goals and outline deadlines for their achievement. These Objectives serve as a roadmap, offering specificity, measurability, and alignment with the Town's overarching strategic direction.

Accompanying each Objective are Key Results (the "How"), providing a clear path for attainment. These Key Results function as benchmarks against which staff will gauge and monitor progress.

The CAPs Objectives include:

1. Align the implementation of the CAP with the Town's Truth and Reconciliation efforts.
2. Develop program and place-based Creative Innovation Opportunities to support local artists and creative entrepreneurs to create, network, share resources and foster collaboration.
3. Use Culture Days to increase awareness of local cultural groups and demonstrate their value to Aurora.
4. Map the cultural resources (people, places, and organizations) that comprise Aurora's cultural sector.
5. Position Aurora as an arts, culture, heritage, and tourism destination within York Region.
6. Increase the capacity of the local cultural sector.
7. Ensure the CAP remains strategically aligned with other related corporate plans.
8. Use Cultural Services' resources to support downtown revitalization and create a distinct sense of place.
9. Demonstrate that arts, heritage, and culture play an instrumental role in enhancing Aurora's quality of life and supporting a vibrant town.

**To monitor implementation, staff will use Viva Goals, a digital platform that provides real-time insights, fosters collaboration, and enables agile decision-making.**

The CAP will continually evolve to address emerging needs and opportunities during its cyclical implementation phase. It should be seen as a flexible document that matures in tandem with the dynamic nature of the cultural sector and the evolving realities of our communities. To propel tracking and implementation efforts forward, staff will utilize Viva Goals, an innovative, forward-looking digital platform. This tool empowers all staff to be accountable for CAP implementation by providing real-time insights, fostering collaboration, and enabling agile decision-making. With Viva Goals, staff can anticipate challenges, seize opportunities, and drive meaningful progress toward the Town's cultural objectives.

**For each year of implementation, annual work plans will be created and reported publicly to ensure progress is being actively communicated and celebrated.**

The CAP will be implemented over a five-year period, beginning this year. The Cultural Services Division will monitor and evaluate the impact of the Town's cultural planning endeavors by garnering qualitative and quantitative data from local cultural groups by the end of each calendar year. With this data, staff will publish an accessible Cultural Impact report that shares recent accomplishments and the status of ongoing CAP implementation efforts.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

Staff conducted targeted engagement with the community through online surveying, as well as interviews with numerous local arts and culture organizations that comprise Aurora's cultural sector.

## **Legal Considerations**

None.

## **Financial Implications**

If approved, the 2024-28 Cultural Action Plan's delivery will be funded through a previously approved Capital Project No. GN0102: Cultural Services Master Plan. Should any additional funds be required in support of this plan, an increase to the capital project budget would be required.

## Communications Considerations

Communications will work with Cultural Services to share the 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan to inform the public and the two teams will work closely over the next four years to develop communications plans for each of the initiatives outlined in the CAP.

## Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations in this report do not impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation.

## Link to Strategic Plan

The Cultural Action Plan supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives:

**Supporting an exceptional quality of life for all** in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Invest in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encourage an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community

**Enabling a diverse, creative, and resilient economy** in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- Promoting economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business.

## Alternative(s) to the Recommendation

1. Council may provide further direction.

## Conclusions

This report provides an overview of the 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan and recommends that Council approve the Plan to be implemented over the next five years.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 – 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan

## **Previous Reports**

PR14-022, Cultural Master Plan, June 3, 2014

CMS19-025, Cultural Master Plan Status Update, October 15, 2019

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on April 18, 2024

## **Approvals**

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer