

Town of Aurora

Cultural Action Plan 2024-2028



Land Acknowledgement

The Town of Aurora acknowledges that the Anishinaabe lands on which we live and work are the traditional and treaty territories of the Chippewas of Georgina Island, as well as many other Nations whose presence here continues to this day. As the closest First Nation community to Aurora, we recognize the special relationship the Chippewas have with the lands and waters of this territory. They are the water protectors and environmental stewards of these lands, and as a municipality we join them in these responsibilities.

We further acknowledge that Aurora is part of the treaty lands of the Mississaugas and Chippewas, recognized through Treaty #13 as well as the Williams Treaties of 1923.

A shared understanding of the rich cultural heritage that has existed for centuries, and how our collective past brought us to where we are today, will help us walk together into a better future.

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1.0 Executive Summary

The Cultural Action Plan (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 Town's first Cultural Plan was approved in 2014, which marked the municipality's initial efforts to recognize cultural planning as an essential pillar of a thriving community. The 2024-2028 CAP builds on the first plan and refocuses the Town's cultural planning endeavors. Like the first plan, the latest Cultural Plan is a result of extensive engagement with the community, the Town's Cultural Partners, Mayor and Aurora Town Council, and Town staff.

The CAP includes 9 Objectives that describe the Cultural Services' mission-supporting goals. These Objectives are paired with Key Results, which are the benchmarks against which we will track our progress toward achieving each Objective.

The CAP will be implemented over a five-year period, beginning in 2024. For each year of implementation, annual work plans will be created and reported publicly to ensure progress is being actively communicated and celebrated.



2.0 Definition of Culture

Poet David Whyte describes the Soul as “the indefinable essence of a person's spirit and being” (The Heart Aroused). Similarly, if we understand our community, and the neighbourhoods we call home, as living entities, then we see Culture as the “soul life” that animates our collective spaces and shared experiences. Culture reflects the depths of our people, grants us with a sense of belonging, and ignites our imaginations.

This definition of Culture is consistent with UNESCO's, which interprets Culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics).

Guided by these framings of Culture, we believe that the responsibility of the Town's Cultural Services Division is to cultivate the cultural soul of our community by linking the creative gifts within our borders to community betterment, creative expression, and an enhanced standard of living. As a key player within the cultural sector, the Town must also work to remove barriers that inhibit creativity and innovation wherever possible.

To adequately nurture our collective culture resources, a concrete plan built on a foundation of strategy and continuity is required. The CAP provides such a foundation and guides the Town's efforts to channel the shapeshifting and dynamic nature of culture into tangible positive results for the communities we serve.



3.0 Other Terminology

Municipal Cultural Planning is the consultative process that the Town undertakes to assess and implement our cultural aspirations.

The Province of Ontario defines cultural planning as a “place-based” approach to planning and development, as well as a process to determine how cultural resources will be integrated across local government planning and decision making, to achieve the community’s goals.

Cultural planning also identifies how culture can support economic prosperity, social equity, environmental responsibility, and cultural vitality, all of which are pillars of a sustainable community.¹

Cultural Resources – municipal cultural planning embraces a broad definition of cultural resources that includes creative cultural industries, cultural spaces and industries, cultural spaces and facilities, natural and cultural heritage, festivals and events, and community cultural organizations.

Cultural Mapping is the process of identifying and mapping a community’s cultural resources to help support decision making, raise awareness, increase access to Aurora’s cultural resources, and support tourism and economic development.

Adopting a “Cultural Lens” involves establishing processes to integrate culture as a consideration across all facets of municipal planning and decision-making.

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/cultural-planning>



Figure 1. Cultural Ecosystem

Aurora’s Cultural Ecosystem is an interconnected system comprised of numerous related internal and external forces and players.

Source: <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/vancouver-culture-shift.pdf>

4.0 Our Philosophy

4.1 Vision & Mission

To drive successful community connections by creating a sense of place that showcases the past and fosters new experiences. We will achieve this by:

- Engaging responsively to the communities we serve.
- Evoking emotions through our efforts to preserve, conserve, educate and inspire.
- Employing cross-sector strategies to support collaboration between the municipality, our Cultural Partners, and the community.
- Working at the grassroots level to find equitable solutions that benefit our Cultural Partners, key collaborators, and the community.
- Facilitating culture in a sustainable manner that considers the environmental and social impact of the creative sector.

4.2 What We Stand For

- Our behaviour will come from a place of compassion and caring for one another and the community.
- We will act with respect, accountability, kindness, and professionalism.
- Our work will be creative, innovative, and proactive.
- Communication and active listening will allow us to generate responsive outcomes with an emphasis on equity and deepening community connections.

5.0 The Town's Role

The Cultural Services Division within the Community Services Department provides strategic leadership for municipal cultural development in Aurora and is 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 businesses.
- 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.



Figure 2. Cultural Services Division Organizational Chart

6.0 What We Heard

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.

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.

6.1 Trends

Interviewees identified the following trends impacting the arts and culture sector in Aurora and beyond:

- The local cultural sector has progressed significantly, and there is exciting potential and room to continue to grow with the appropriate support.
- Collaboration is necessary to address sector-wide issues and the quality of the partnerships developed will determine culture's impact locally.
- Post pandemic, the demographics of those most eager to return to in-person cultural functions skew younger while most current cultural opportunities in Aurora are geared to an older demographic. Town Square provides an opportunity to address this disconnect with new programming that appeals to a younger and more diverse audience.
- There has been a positive recent shift to focus on traditionally underrepresented populations in the arts, which should be encouraged, expanded, and enhanced.
- Cultural diversity is increasing in Aurora, which means there is a need for marketing and communication in multiple languages. There is a corresponding need to develop more programming that reflects the changing face of our communities.
- The way in which the community consumes information is transforming, and the cultural sector needs to adapt to maximize its reach and participation.



6.2 Challenges & Opportunities

Although many interviewees believe the Town places a strong emphasis on arts, culture, and heritage, evidenced by its financial commitment and support for numerous cultural initiatives and organizations, they also highlighted various challenges and opportunities, such as:

- More marketing and communication support is needed to raise awareness of arts, culture, and heritage programming within and outside Aurora.
- The Town and local cultural organizations should look beyond Aurora to grow their audiences and increase program participation.
- The physical inaccessibility of some cultural spaces limits who can access the full breadth of local cultural initiatives.
- There is a need to meet community groups where they are, within their own neighbourhoods, to reduce isolation and encourage community cohesion.
- Limited funding and resources can lead to fatigue among the volunteers that support our cultural organizations. Beyond the need for more stable funding, it was noted that the Town could assist with greater in-kind support, including enhanced access to affordable space and expanded marketing and communication support.
- The Town's regulations, bylaws, guidelines, and processes can be challenging for some cultural organizations to navigate and should be streamlined where possible.
- Competition among some events and activities can dilute participation for all. The Town has a role to play in supporting collaboration and communication for mutual benefit, with Culture Days being a good example of successful collaboration.



6.3 Key Takeaways

Based on an analysis of the interviewees' feedback, the following key takeaways were identified:

- A focus on policy development and legislation can better inform decision-making moving forward. Culture should be integrated into other Town priorities in order to realize a greater impact.
- Artists should be consulted appropriately when new initiatives, activations and programming is developed. Fair compensation for their participation is equally important
- The Town should provide venues where artists can practice, display their creations, and connect with others. A focus on supporting the growth of emerging artists is imperative.
- Beyond greater access to physical space, there is a need for more mentorship opportunities for younger and newer artists, and cultural professionals as a whole, in order to support the development of the industry.
- Collaboration should happen more consistently, be as inclusive as possible, and include organizations beyond the usual players.

6.4 Additional Engagement

In addition to the seventeen interviews, the draft CAP was presented to 9 Cultural Partners for review and comment, with a particular focus on the 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.

7.0 Objectives & Key Results

Forward looking and leading organizations utilize Objectives and Key Results (OKRs) to effectively manage their goals, strategic alignment and performance and we are proud to be among a select few municipalities, and more specifically cultural services divisions, to adopt this methodology.

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 we will gauge and monitor our progress.

Objective 1

Align the implementation of the Cultural Action Plan (CAP) with the Town's Truth and Reconciliation efforts.

Key Results

1. Provide quarterly updates to the Indigenous Relations Committee on CAP implementation.
2. Transition National Indigenous History Month and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation programming over to the Cultural Services Division by Q1 2025.
3. Commence establishment of an Inclusive Classroom at Town Square to host education programs focused on Diversity and Inclusion by Q2 2025. The Inclusive Classroom will include art created by diverse voices, histories, and stories.
4. Increase Indigenous participation in special events, programs, and exhibitions beyond designated Indigenous commemorative days and celebrations, such as National Indigenous History Month and National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.
 - a. Create up to 2 new Indigenous focused initiatives at Town Square by Q4 2025.
 - b. Incorporate Indigenous programming into at least 4 existing initiatives (e.g., special events, programs, and exhibitions) annually, commencing in 2025.

Objective 2

Develop program and place-based Creative Innovation Opportunities to support local artists and creative entrepreneurs to create, network, share resources, and foster collaboration.

Key Results

1. Undertake a feasibility study to determine the viability and need for local creative innovation opportunities by the end of Q4 2026.
2. Work with Economic Development to create a detailed creative innovation work plan based on the results of the feasibility study by the end of Q2 2027.
3. Work with key partners to implement the workplan and launch creative entrepreneurial learning opportunities for the community by Q4 2028.
4. Track and evaluate the success of the creative innovation opportunities by the end of Q4 annually.

Objective 3

Use Culture Days to increase awareness of local cultural groups and demonstrate their value to Aurora.

Key Results

1. Allocate up to \$10,000 from the Cultural Planning budget to support Culture Days.
2. Increase the number of heritage experiences offered during Culture Days by Q2 2024.
3. Review and evaluate Culture Days programming by the end of Q4 annually and revise accordingly.
4. Update the Culture Days Communications Plan that includes an engaging social media campaign to promote Culture Days by Q2 2025.

Objective 4

Map the cultural resources (people, places, and organizations) that comprise Aurora's cultural sector.

Key Results

1. Update the Cultural Resource Database and translate the data into a geographic information system (GIS) format by the end of Q4 2026.
2. Review and update 100% of outdated data and conduct user testing with up to 6 partner groups annually.
3. Increase the number of users accessing and using the database and map by at least 50% by Q4 2028.

Objective 5

Position Aurora as an arts, culture, heritage, and tourism destination within York Region.

Key Results

1. Achieve an average fill rate of 70% in Cultural Services programs by Q4 2025 and a fill rate of 80% by Q4 2028.
2. Leverage partnerships with businesses and local organizations to create up to 4 Cultural Tourism Experience Packages by Q1 2026.
3. Achieve a 70% survey response rate from participants to track impact of Cultural Tourism Experience Packages by Q4 annually.
4. Participate in at least 1 national or provincial arts, cultural and heritage initiative annually (e.g., CONTACT Photography Festival, CreateSpace Public Art Residency).

Objective 6

Increase the capacity of the local cultural sector.

Key Results

1. Create up to 6 opportunities for local cultural groups to build their capacity, including:
 - a. An annual Cultural Symposium beginning in 2026.
 - b. A Cultural Partners associate membership program by Q2 2025.
 - c. Quarterly networking and knowledge sharing opportunities for cultural partners beginning in Q3 2024.
2. Continue to facilitate monthly Aurora Arts, Culture and Heritage Network meetings with Cultural Partners and affiliated groups.

Objective 7

Ensure the CAP remains strategically aligned with other related corporate plans.

Key Results

1. Ensure all relevant corresponding plans are up to date and aligned with the Cultural Action Plan.
 - a. Update Aurora Town Square Business Plan by Q4 2025.
 - b. Update Museum Plan, 2021-2025, Growing a Robust and Relevant Community Museum by Q4 2026.
 - c. Update Public Art Plan by Q4 2028.
 - d. Review alignment with Economic Development Strategy, Corporate Strategic Plan and Official Plan by Q4 annually.



Objective 8

Use Cultural Services' resources to support downtown revitalization and create a distinct sense of place.

Key Results

1. Introduce 1 public art project to the Cultural Precinct by Q2 2027.
2. Contribute to the Promenade Streetscape Redevelopment design process.
3. Meet with the economic development and downtown business community at least once annually to ensure Town Square is aligned with downtown revitalization efforts.

Objective 9

Demonstrate that arts, heritage, and culture play an instrumental role in enhancing Aurora's quality of life and supporting a vibrant town.

Key Results

1. Participate in the Municipal Cultural Statistics Survey program with Creative City Network of Canada annually.
2. Monitor and evaluate the impact of culture locally by garnering qualitative and quantitative data from local cultural groups by Q4 annually.
3. Publish an accessible Cultural Impact report to be shared with partners, the public, and Council by Q2 annually.
3. Conduct ongoing evaluation of all arts, culture and heritage programs, events and initiatives provided by the Cultural Services Division.



8.0 Implementation and Monitoring

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 our tracking and implementation efforts forward, we will harness the power of Viva Goals, an innovative, forward-looking digital platform. This tool empowers all staff accountable for CAP implementation by providing real-time insights, fostering collaboration, and enabling agile decision-making. With Viva Goals, we can anticipate challenges, seize opportunities, and drive meaningful progress toward our cultural objectives.



9.0 Conclusion

The refreshed CAP builds on the Town's initial cultural planning efforts while also strengthening the foundation upon which culture can continue to flourish within our municipal boundaries. The CAP is an essential link between the creativity and imagination that animates our communities and the cultural planning process that determines how best to allocate our finite cultural resources. It provides a strategic approach to managing culture that makes room for creativity and passion that are the hallmarks of a robust community. We are excited to get to work implementing the CAP, and in the process make culture a more central part of our shared experiences.



10.0 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the residents, artists, cultural professionals, arts, culture and heritage organizations, Mayor and Council, and staff who contributed to the development of the CAP.

We are especially indebted to our Cultural Partners for their insight and support: Aurora Cultural Centre, Aurora Farmers' Market, Aurora Historical Society, Aurora Public Library, Aurora Seniors Centre, Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, Pine Tree Potters' Guild, Society of York Region Artists, and Theatre Aurora.

11.0 Feedback

Your feedback is welcome. Please let us know what you think about the Town of Aurora's 2024-2028 Cultural Action Plan. To request a copy of the CAP in a different format, or to send us your comments, please contact us at:

Email: infotownsquare@aurora.ca

Mail: 50 Victoria Street, Aurora ON L4G 1R3

To view the CAP online, please visit [aurora.ca](https://www.aurora.ca)

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