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Town of Aurora
Committee of the Whole Report
No. CMS25-011

Subject: Public Art Strategy

Prepared by: Phil Rose, Manager of Cultural Services

Department: Community Services

Date: May 13, 2025

Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS25-011 be received;
2. That the Public Art Strategy (Attachment 1) be approved; and
3. That staff be directed to develop a corresponding Public Art Policy for Council review and approval.

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Public Art Strategy.

- The Public Art Strategy will direct the development and implementation of a successful public art program in Aurora from 2025 to 2029.
- The Town may fund public art initiatives using three primary sources: Municipal Funding, Developer Investments, and Not-For-Profit Collaborations.
- The Cultural Services Division is responsible for the administration of the public art program, but the effective management of the Town's public art program requires a collective approach that includes cross-departmental collaboration.
- The public art acquisition process involves acquiring artwork for public spaces through various methods, often involving a jury or committee to ensure transparency and quality.

- To create a robust public art program that differentiates and highlights Aurora's uniqueness, it is important to prioritize sites where public art can be placed.
- In implementing the Public Art Strategy, staff will utilize various public outreach strategies to ensure the community is meaningfully engaged throughout the public art process.
- A system of ongoing feedback and assessment will be implemented throughout the public art process to allow for adjustments and improvements based on input from artists, mentors, peers, and community members.

Background

The Cultural Services Division began the process of developing the Town's first Public Art Strategy in 2022.

Cultural Services staff began the process of developing Aurora's first Public Art Strategy in March 2022, when it hosted a Public Art Forum at The Armoury. Organized in collaboration with the Town's Public Art Working Group and STEPS Public Art, the forum brought together public art professionals, artists, and the community to learn about innovative public art examples and best practices from other municipalities.

Staff issued a post-forum report that provided an overview of what was heard at the forum. It summarized attendees' perceptions, hopes and priorities related to public art in Aurora and provided direction to staff in preparing the Public Art Strategy.

Analysis

The Public Art Strategy will direct the development and implementation of a successful public art program in Aurora from 2025 to 2029.

The Public Art Strategy includes prioritizing potential sites and opportunities for new public art practices within our municipal boundaries. It also establishes transparent processes for the administration and implementation of public art projects that foster strong partnerships, embrace diverse perspectives, showcase artistic creativity, and prioritize accessibility.

The Public Art Strategy defines Public Art as art in any medium created for and placed in the public realm. Examples of spaces where public art can be situated include parks, streetscapes, intersections, underpasses, facilities, or any other publicly accessible

space. Public art can take multiple forms, including street furniture, art pavilions, murals, temporary or permanent sculptures, living art using integrated technology, and more.

More specifically, Public Art refers to original works of any medium that is:

- a) Planned in alignment with the Town's Public Art Vision and Values.
- b) Informed through established processes that gain community feedback through a range of online and in-person engagement tools.
- c) Created by one or more Professional Artists, with priority given to Artists with relevant knowledge of the Town, its diverse communities, and its histories.
- d) Planned and executed for the specific purpose of being placed and experienced in a public space.
- e) Relevant to the site or context in which it is placed and experienced by the public.
- f) Acquired using the Town's established processes and community engagement channels.

The Town may fund public art initiatives using three primary sources: Municipal Funding, Developer Investments, and Not-For-Profit Collaborations.

Municipal Funding: The Town's Official Plan recognizes the importance of public art to Aurora's built environment and its ability to promote tourism and contribute to the economic vitality of the Town. Furthermore, it states that "Council will promote the creation of public art that reflects the Town's cultural diversity and heritage."

The Town may utilize the public art reserve and maintenance and conservation budget to (a) establish community engagement programs related to public art, (b) assist with artist selection and public art acquisition, and (c) maintain, conserve and deaccession public art.

Developer Investments: Private funding for municipal public art often comes from developers or commercial investments. The Town's Planning and Development Services Department works to secure public art contributions through the development application review process. To help frame the review process, the Town shall encourage the inclusion of public art in significant developments in line with the objectives of the Town's OP. The inclusion of public art in developments provides community benefits by enhancing the public realm and streetscape.

Not-for-Profit Collaborations: Collaborating with cultural not-for-profit organizations on grant funding opportunities may allow the municipality to access additional funds for public art initiatives typically unavailable to government entities.

Annual Operating Budget: Relying predominantly on developer investments to fund public art means that some neighbourhoods will lack public art relative to others where development and growth is more prevalent. To ensure there is an equitable distribution of public art across Aurora, an annual operating budget is recommended to support public art in areas where no new developments or developer investments are planned.

The Cultural Services Division is responsible for the administration of the public art program, but the effective management of the Town's public art program requires a collective approach that includes cross-departmental collaboration.

Cultural Services staff will prepare annual workplans for Council approval with recommendations regarding potential opportunities for public art, including preferred site locations, public engagement strategies, selection panel membership, funding sources, and more.

As required, the Cultural Services Division will seek input from various other municipal divisions to provide feedback on certain topics related to public art. Some examples include:

- Negotiations with developers regarding public art funding (Planning)
- Advising on upcoming plans and projects and reviewing potential public art sites (Parks, Roads, Facilities)
- Program budgeting and implementation of municipal capital projects (Finance)
- Reviewing potential public art sites in streetscapes and transit corridors (Transportation, Planning, Economic Development)
- Reviewing public art maintenance procedures and assisting with collection assessment (Facilities)
- Preparing artist contracts (Legal)
- Record keeping and documentation (Records Management)
- Marketing and communication strategies related to call to artists, public art unveilings, etc. (Corporate Communications)

As the public art program matures, the Town may consider establishing a Public Art Advisory Committee (PAAC) composed of diverse community partners, including residents, artists, business owners, and municipal representatives. The PAAC would help the Town staff oversee the public art program to ensure it reflects diverse perspectives and addresses various community needs.

The public art acquisition process involves acquiring artwork for public spaces through various methods, often involving a jury or committee to ensure transparency and quality.

There are various public art acquisition methods available to the Town, including commission, purchase, loan, lease and donation.

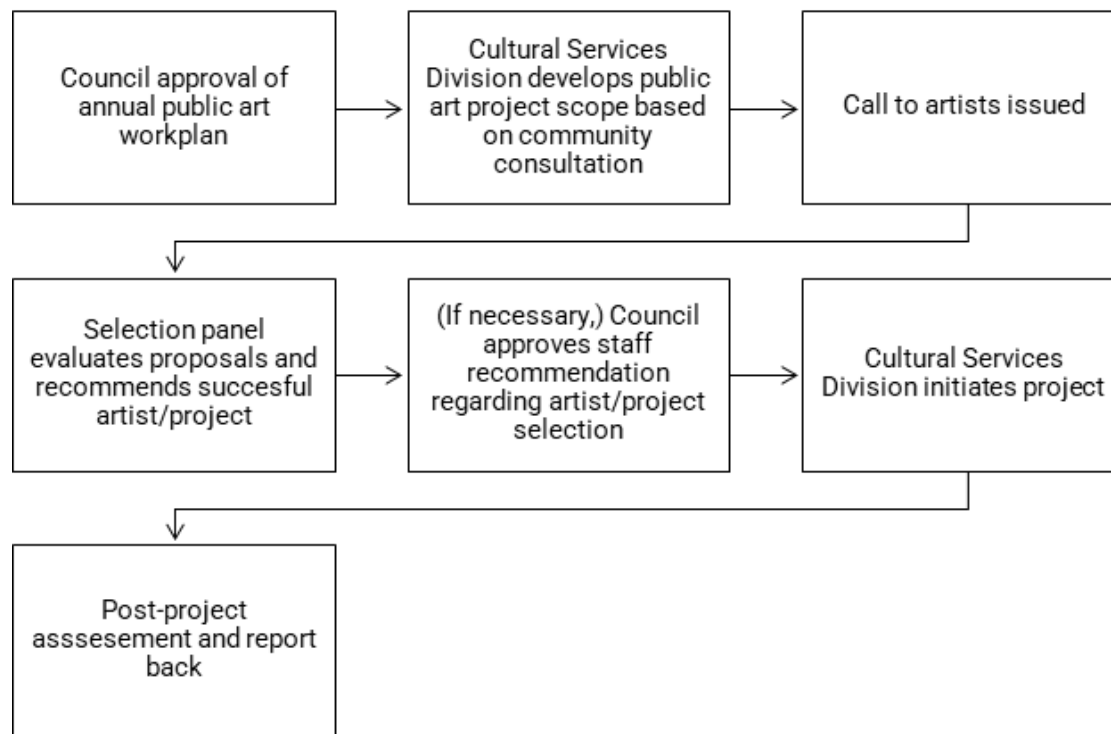
When purchasing art, staff will issue Request for Proposals and Call to Artists that align with the Town's Procurement By-law and reflect the Town's unique community dynamics. Many municipalities use a jury composed of art professionals, community members, and subject matter experts to evaluate and select artwork.

The Town will use the following evaluation criteria to when considering public art donations:

- Connection to Aurora
- Artistic merit
- Condition
- Material
- Size
- Storage factors
- Future conservation requirements
- Provenance

If the donation meets the Town's criteria, the accession process would begin. If it does not, the individual is informed in writing of the Town's decision not to accept the donation.

The following diagram identifies the typical process to be followed for municipal public art projects:



To create a robust public art program that differentiates and highlights Aurora’s uniqueness, it is important to prioritize sites where public art can be placed.

To highlight Aurora’s unique character, 8 public art site categories have been identified:

1. Key Civic Sites, such as Aurora Town Square, Aurora Town Hall, as well as parks and other municipal facilities on highly visible sites.
2. Gateways into Aurora, such as Highway 404 and Wellington Street, Yonge Street and Henderson Drive, and Yonge Street and St. John’s Sideroad.
3. Heritage Areas, such as Northeast Old Aurora Heritage Conservation District, and Historic Yonge Street.
4. Parks and Trails, such as Sheppard’s Bush Conservation Area, Oak Ridges Trail, and Fleury Park.
5. Major Private Developments, such as Addison Hall Business Park, SmartCentres Aurora North, Aurora Centre. Some municipalities set minimum square metre thresholds to determine which new private development sites will receive public art (e.g., 100,000 square metres and over).

6. Transit Hubs and Corridors, such as Regional Arterial Roads, Major Transit Station Area, and Yonge Street Multi-use Path.
7. Streetscapes within Intensification Areas, such as Aurora Promenade, Cultural Precinct, and Downtown Aurora.
8. Sport and Recreation Facilities, such as Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex, Aurora Family Leisure Complex and Aurora Community Centre.

Public art sites will be selected based on the following evaluation criteria:

1. Accessibility: is the site accessible by various modes of transportation within Aurora.
2. Visibility: is the site easily visible and is it in proximity to high pedestrian activity.
3. Relationship to proposed artwork: does the location possess unique architectural and/or natural features and will the addition of public art enhance the overall environment and public experience of this location.
4. Capacity: does the site possess the physical qualities and prominence that are conducive to hosting public art.

In implementing the Public Art Strategy, staff will utilize various public outreach strategies to ensure the community is meaningfully engaged throughout the public art process.

A strategic approach to public art creation should incorporate the community in cultivating art calls, selecting artists, and ensuring that mentorship opportunities exist throughout the project pipeline. Staff will utilize various public outreach strategies, including, but not limited to:

Art Ambassadors: these dedicated community members will promote public art, gather feedback, and engage with residents. Their role is vital for bridging gaps between the public and artists, fostering broader community participation, and strengthening the connection between residents and art projects.

Open House Meetings: these meetings will be held in the community to allow residents to discuss their vision and provide feedback at certain public art project milestones, such as upon artist selection, early art concept development, and final art proposal before fabrication begins.

Education and Programming: organizing art events and festivals and adding public art to existing events will highlight public art and make it more accessible to the community at large. Artist-in-residence programs, workshops, demonstrations, public art tours and talks, as well as pop-up installations, are some of the tools to be used to educate the community and support artists.

The Town will also provide several additional support mechanisms for artists, such as the use of mentors, training and learning opportunities, networking and resource sharing, and pilot projects.

A system of ongoing feedback and assessment will be implemented throughout the public art process to allow for adjustments and improvements based on input from artists, mentors, peers, and community members.

Surveys, questionnaires, and interviews are some of the evaluation tools to be used to determine the successes and challenges of each public art project, and this feedback will be used to refine future processes.

By adhering to a comprehensive feedback framework, the Town can create a public art landscape that enhances its physical surroundings and resonates deeply with the community it serves. Through transparent processes, diverse collaborations, and inclusive practices, the Town will seek to cultivate a vibrant and representative public art scene that enriches the lives of all residents.

The Town's Public Art Strategy will be evaluated at the five-year mark, with recommendations made on ways to strengthen the program.

Advisory Committee Review

Town staff attended the February 12, 2025 meeting of the Accessibility Advisory Committee and the March 20, 2025 meeting of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. Each Committee's comments have been taken into consideration when writing this report.

Town staff will continue to consult with the Accessible Advisory Committee, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, and any other advisory committee as required for comment on future public art projects.

Legal Considerations

Legal Services will be involved in reviewing the policy, preparing any related agreements associated to the program, and reviewing the applicability of any legislative codes and requirements.

Financial Implications

The Town currently has \$367,989 in the public art reserve, \$60,000 of which has been allocated from the 2025 budget for the creation of exterior sports banners for the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex and a further \$12,500 in the operating budget for 2026 to support public art maintenance and conservation.

The Public Art Strategy recommends that \$100,000 of the Public Art Reserve be earmarked to fund the Town's first official public art project in 2026. A project to this effect will be included in the 2026 capital budget for consideration.

Communications Considerations

Communications will work with Cultural Services to share the Public Art Strategy to inform the public and the two teams will work closely to develop communications plans for each public project developed over the next five years.

Climate Change Considerations

The recommendations in his report do not immediately impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation. If approved, when implementing the Public Art Strategy, green infrastructure and green procurement will be considered to minimize the impacts of a changing climate.

Link to Strategic Plan

The Public Art Strategy 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 Public Art Strategy and recommends that Council approve the Strategy to be implemented over the next five years.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Town of Aurora Public Art Strategy

Previous Reports

None.

Pre-submission Review

Agenda Management Team review on April 24, 2025

Approvals

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer