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Town of Aurora  
**Committee of the Whole Report**  
No. CMS25-032

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**Subject:** Aurora Town Square Business Plan Update

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

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** November 11, 2025

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## Recommendation

1. That Report No. CMS25-032 be received; and
2. That the Aurora Town Square Business Plan, 2026-2027 be approved.

## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the Aurora Town Square Business (ATS) Plan, 2026-2027.

- The Business Plan outlines how this dynamic community space will operate over its initial years of operation and reflects Aurora's commitment to fostering a vibrant, resilient, and connected community through the strategic development and stewardship of ATS.
- Section 1 provides an overview of ATS's Vision, Mission, Strategic Context, and the need for ATS.
- Section 2 examines Aurora's changing demographics, culture-related Census data, and identifies ATS's target audience and competitors.
- Section 3 summarizes Town staff roles and responsibilities.
- Section 4 provides information about programs and services the Town offers at ATS.
- Section 5 includes information about the ATS Marketing Plan, which guides the execution of marketing and communications activities that demonstrate ATS's long-term value for arts and cultural experiences, as well as community connection in Aurora.
- Section 6 outlines the key strategies and activities necessary for the successful day-to-day functioning of ATS.

- Section 7 provides financial projections for 2026 and 2027.
- Section 8 pinpoints several potential risks that may negatively impact ATS and how these risks can be mitigated.
- Section 9 highlights evaluation and benchmarking metrics that will be used to sustain or improve ATS's performance.

## Background

On July 11, 2023, Council passed a resolution stating, "that the Aurora Town Square operating plan be brought before Council prior to budget 2024 deliberations, including the Aurora Cultural Centre's (ACC) programming and staffing plan."

On September 25, 2023, staff presented the 2024-2026 ATS Business Plan during a Special Meeting of Council. The Business Plan was received by Council.

ATS officially opened to the public on September 21, 2024. Staff have updated the ATS Business Plan to reflect the reality of operating this vibrant community facility over the last year. Given that ATS is still in the ramp-up period, during which time additional programming and revenue opportunities are being maximized, the latest ATS Business Plan focuses on 2026 and 2027. The plan will be updated again for 2028 and will provide a longer-term, 5-year, focus for ATS operations.

## Analysis

**The Business Plan outlines how this dynamic community space will operate over its initial years of operation and reflects Aurora's commitment to fostering a vibrant, resilient, and connected community through the strategic development and stewardship of ATS.**

Key objectives of the ATS Business Plan include:

- **Community Impact:** Reinforcing ATS's role as a cornerstone of community engagement, inclusion, and cultural vitality. The facility is positioned to meet diverse community needs through accessible, inclusive programming and spaces.
- **Space Utilization:** Detailing the intended uses of each space within ATS, including cultural venues, gathering areas, and flexible programming zones. The plan identifies target user groups ranging from residents and local organizations to regional visitors.

- **Operational Management:** Solidifying the governance and staffing model to ensure efficient day-to-day operations, fiscal responsibility, and alignment with municipal priorities. Financial projections and resource allocations are included to support long-term viability.
- **Risk Mitigation:** Identifying potential operational, financial, and reputational risks, along with proactive strategies to mitigate each. This includes contingency planning and adaptive management practices.
- **Performance Measurement:** Defining success metrics and evaluation tools to monitor progress, assess impact, and inform future decision-making. Regular reporting will ensure transparency and accountability to stakeholders.

**Section 1 provides an overview of ATS's Vision, Mission, Strategic Context, and the need for ATS.**

ATS is a visionary project that is transforming the landscape of our community by bringing together arts, culture, heritage, economic development, innovation, and creativity to actively support downtown revitalization, build a strong cultural sector, and expand strategic partnerships that contribute to a greater quality of life.

#### Vision

ATS is not just a building - it is a cultural nexus where creativity, talent, and innovation converge to create unforgettable experiences. Our vision is to establish ATS as a leading destination where artists, educators, researchers, audiences, and enthusiasts come together to celebrate the magic of arts, culture, and community. We will cultivate an environment that transcends boundaries and genres, evokes emotions, inspires change, and promotes learning.

#### Mission

Within a well-managed, high integrity environment that is fiscally responsible, ATS supports the community to:

- Create meaningful, quality experiences that inspire the community
- Inspire community connection through shared experiences and cultural exchange to create a place of belonging
- Encourage community reflective/grassroots participation that embraces the tapestry of voices, lived experience, histories, and stories to foster diverse opportunities

## Strategic Context

ATS supports the Town's Strategic Plan, Economic Development Strategic Plan, and Cultural Plan by contributing to an exceptional quality of life for residents and visitors alike. As a strategic investment in sustainable infrastructure, ATS celebrates and promotes culture, encourages an active healthy lifestyle, strengthens the fabric of our communities by building on established partnerships, and promotes economic opportunities and resiliency while positioning Aurora as a desirable place to do business.

## Demand for ATS

As Aurora's population continues to grow, so too has interest and participation in arts and cultural events. Recent national indicators show that while the GDP of Canada's culture sector grew modestly by 0.2% in early 2025, there is a notable increase in engagement with visual and applied arts, reflecting a shift toward more immersive and relevant cultural experiences.

Locally, Aurora has seen a steady expansion in cultural and community programming. ATS presents a timely and strategic opportunity to meet the diversifying cultural interests of Aurora and the broader York Region. It is well-positioned to leverage the public's favourable perception of culture and the evolving philanthropic landscape to drive meaningful community impact.

## **Section 2 examines Aurora's changing demographics, culture-related Census data, and identifies ATS's target audience and competitors.**

Aurora is home to a diverse and growing population of 62,057, based on the most recent census data. This represents an 11.9% increase from 2016, significantly outpacing both the provincial (5.8%) and national (5.2%) growth rates. The Town spans 50 square kilometers, with a population density of 1,241 people per square kilometer. As of 2025, Aurora has 22,253 private dwellings, with 21,506 occupied by residents.

Aurora's cultural sector continues to thrive. While specific per capita cultural spending data for 2025 is pending, Ontario's culture sector contributed \$26 billion to the provincial GDP in 2022, supporting 270,000 jobs, with nearly half of Canada's cultural economy centered in Ontario. Aurora, as part of York Region, benefits from this robust cultural infrastructure and is well-positioned to expand its local cultural workforce and offerings.

ATS represents a strategic investment in community and cultural infrastructure, aligning with Aurora's demographic trends, economic strengths, and growing demand for inclusive, relevant cultural and community programming.

**Section 3 summarizes Town staff roles and responsibilities.**

ATS continues to require an adaptive operating structure that reflects its multi-functional capacity, diverse programming roster, and allows for the expansion of performing arts, visual arts, recreation and heritage services offered by the Town and its partners, including the Aurora Cultural Centre (ACC) and Aurora Public Library (APL). During the start-up period, spanning the first 3-5 years of operations, the Town will be strategic in determining which staff positions are needed in the short term and which ones can be onboarded as external demand for space and programming continues to increase in year two and beyond.

The following Town staff currently work out of ATS:

Cultural Services Division:

- Manager, Cultural Services
- Cultural Services Coordinator
- Collections and Exhibitions Coordinator
- Collections Technician

Cultural Services staff lead the development and implementation of Town programs at ATS.

Recreation Services:

- Contract and seasonal staff/instructors to run various programs, including summer camps.

Business Support Services:

- Customer Service Representative (2)
- Customer Service Representatives (PT)

In addition to the CSR positions, a Facility Bookings Administrator is dedicated to ATS and is responsible for booking ATS for use by internal and external user groups.

Facilities:

- Crew Leader
- Maintenance Person (4)
- Maintenance Persons (PT)

Based on proven need, business cases for the following additional staff may be brought forward in future years:

- Venue Manager
- Program Instructors
- Cultural Services Program Assistant
- Contract and seasonal support staff

In addition to the staff listed above, the Town also relies on volunteers for various programs and event.

**Section 4 provides information about programs and services the Town offers at ATS.**

ATS features a well-rounded calendar of cultural, heritage and recreation programs and events, including art exhibitions, live performances, workshops, lectures, film screenings, cultural festivals, and more, that cater to a wide range of interests.

In 2025, the Town delivered over 50 cultural, heritage and recreation experiences from ATS, including 7 film screenings, 10 concerts, 16 programs, 8 events, 5 rotating exhibits, and more.

The following Town Special Events have or will be hosted at ATS in 2025:

- Mayor's Levee – January
- Arctic Adventure – Hybrid with Town Park – Family Day Weekend, February
- Aurora Performing Arts Festival – June
- Multicultural Festival – Hybrid with Town Park, September
- Aurora's Christmas Market – December
- Menorah Lighting Ceremony – Hanukkah – December/January
- Family First Night – December

Programming also includes the ongoing development of education programs for local school groups that will be supported by the Museum.

As co-located organizations, the Town, ACC and APL have formed a Collaborative Programming Working Group that meets monthly, or as required, to ensure the public

receives a range of complementary programs geared to various skill levels and life experiences.

ATS has presented opportunities for the Town to work more closely with its Cultural Partners and other local organizations and businesses to provide exciting and enriching experiences. These programs have included: Black History Month Paint Night with Aurora Black Community Association; Aurora Pride Festival with the Aurora Community Band, Borealis Brass Band, and York Pride; Great Canadian Songbook on Vinyl with Dave's Vinyl Party; Emancipation Day with Aurora Black Caucus; Doors Open Aurora with numerous local partners; Rocky Horror Picture Show 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary screening with Marquee Theatrical Productions; We Lend a Hand film screening with Aurora Film Circuit, and more.

**Section 5 includes information about the ATS Marketing Plan, which guides the execution of marketing and communications activities that demonstrate ATS's long-term value for arts and cultural experiences, as well as community connection in Aurora.**

ATS's Marketing and Communications Strategy continues to evolve from its initial focus on launch and awareness to a sustained, data-driven approach that builds long-term community connection, audience loyalty, and destination visibility. Following a successful grand opening and first year of operations, the strategy now focuses on audience retention, program participation, and measurable engagement growth across digital and in-person channels.

The 2026–2027 Marketing and Communications Strategy reflects shifting trends and audience expectations, ensuring authentic, inclusive, and impactful outreach. Short-form video, social storytelling, and user-generated content will continue to drive engagement and community pride, while hyperlocal and geotargeted campaigns convert awareness into attendance and extend reach regionally.

Accessibility and inclusivity remain central, with marketing materials reflecting Aurora's diversity and encouraging broad participation. Data-driven insights from the 2025 audience survey and digital analytics will refine key messages, content formats, and promotional timing to strengthen engagement and maintain relevance.

All activities align with the ATS brand identity introduced in 2021, integrating social media, e-newsletters, website content, media relations, and storytelling initiatives. Collaboration with the ACC, Aurora Museum & Archives, and APL will continue to expand promotional reach and reinforce ATS's role as a shared civic and cultural hub.

- Strengthen awareness and attendance across all program areas
- Enhance digital engagement through platform-specific strategies
- Leverage analytics and audience insights to optimize messaging and timing
- Support Aurora’s economic and cultural vitality by positioning ATS as the heart of downtown

As ATS enters its next phase of growth, marketing and communications will balance creativity with analytics—driving participation, sustaining momentum, and deepening community connection.

**Section 6 outlines the key strategies and activities necessary for the successful day-to-day functioning of ATS.**

The following areas of expertise are required to operate ATS successfully:

- Facility Maintenance
- IT Services
- Programming and Event Planning
- Collections and Exhibitions Management
- Customer and Visitor Services
- Marketing and Communications
- Technical Production Services
- Audience Management

The Town is responsible for facility maintenance, IT service delivery, customer service, bookings and rentals, box office administration, program registration, heritage services and museum management, and programming, including community events.

Production Services and Audience Management, including Front of House responsibilities, have been contracted to the ACC. ACC invoices the Town periodically throughout the year for providing these services to the Town and third party user groups.

**Section 7 provides financial projections for 2026 and 2027.**

The 2024-2026 Aurora Town Square Business Plan identified an additional required increase of \$350,000 which will be fully phased onto the tax levy as part of the recently tabled 2026 operating budget. The updated 2026-27 Aurora Town Square Business plan’s financial projections continue to assume an approximate ramp-up period of three to five years over which the Town will maximize the opportunities that exist for

additional revenue generation and added cultural and community activities within the expanded facility. The updated financial projections do not identify any further incremental budget requirements beyond what has previously been phased onto the tax levy.

**Section 8 pinpoints several potential risks that may negatively impact ATS and how these risks can be mitigated.**

The Risk Analysis section identifies several potential risks related to Marketing and Community, Market Trends and Community Demand, Technology, Health and Safety, Reputation, the Economy, and Long-term Sustainability. This section also identifies mitigation strategies for each risk.

**Section 9 highlights evaluation and benchmarking metrics that will be used to sustain or improve ATS's performance.**

Measurement and evaluation play a pivotal role in executing effective marketing strategies. Detailed data on target audiences, their preferences, and engagement patterns will continue to inform our tactics and marketing channels to maximize our impact and ultimately increase ATS brand visibility and community participation. Measuring ROI for marketing expenditures ensures that resources are allocated to initiatives that deliver tangible results.

Based on post-event surveys, the Town has received an average rating of 4.8 out of 5 for programs at ATS. These surveys ask respondents to gauge their satisfaction with the quality of ATS programs, the diversity of program offerings, the customer service and box office experience and facility impressions.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

Not applicable

## **Legal Considerations**

None.

## **Financial Implications**

As of the tabling of the 2026 operating budget, a total of \$1,070,000 in incremental funding requirements have been phased onto the tax levy in support of the ATS' ongoing

operations. \$720,000 of this amount was phased in over the period of 2020-2023; the remaining \$350,000 in identified incremental funding was phased in over 2024-2026.

The 2026-2027 ATS Business Plan does not identify any further incremental funding needs for the Aurora Town Square.

## **Communications Considerations**

The ATS Marketing and Communications Strategy is the foundation upon which all current and future marketing efforts will be built. It leverages ATS branding that was established in 2021, ensures alignment across Town of Aurora and ATS communications, and creates long-lasting recognition amongst target audiences. Through the Marketing and Communications Strategy – which includes a variety of communications tools, channels and tactics – the Town will inform the public about its own special events, rental opportunities, and the various the initiatives of our cultural partners.

## **Climate Change Considerations**

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

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

Aurora Town Square supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives:

- Supporting an exceptional quality of life
- Investing in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community
- Enabling a diverse, creative, and resilient economy
- Promoting economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

1. Council can provide further direction.

## **Conclusions**

This report summarizes each section of the updated 2026-2027 ATS Business Plan.

## **Attachments**

Attachment 1 – Aurora Town Square Business Plan Draft, 2026-2027

## **Previous Reports**

CMS23-038, Aurora Town Square Business Plan, September 25, 2023

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on October 23, 2025

## **Approvals**

Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services

Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer