

Guelph Culture: Everywhere. Everyday. Everyone.

Culture Plan 2030
October 2023

Territorial Acknowledgement

This place we call Guelph has served as traditional lands and a place of refuge for many peoples over time, but more specifically the Attiwonderonk, and the Haudenosaunee. This land is held as the treaty lands and territory with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Guelph lies directly adjacent to the Haldimand Tract and is part of a long-established traditional hunting ground for the Six Nations of the Grand River. Many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples who have come from across Turtle Island call Guelph home today.

The City of Guelph commits to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. We must do more to learn, share and support truth and healing.

Culture Plan 2030

Introduction

Guelph has long enjoyed a reputation as a cultural hub; a community rich in arts, heritage, and creative industry; a community that has nurtured aspiring and world-class musicians, painters, writers, dancers, storytellers, filmmakers, actors, and creators in all disciplines. Indeed, arts and culture are deeply woven into the Guelph identity.

The City has invested significantly in cultural facilities, public art, cultural programming, and grant funding for artists and arts and heritage organizations. Guelph has benefited from a return on this investment through citizen satisfaction, tourism, talent attraction, creative industry development, profile, and reputation.

While there is a solid foundation for culture in Guelph, members of the creative community have expressed concerns about the lack of affordable studio, rehearsal, exhibition, and performance space; limited representation and opportunities for equity-deserving community members; difficulties attracting community support and audiences; and low income and inflated cost of living driving artists from the community. These challenges existed pre-pandemic and were exacerbated during the pandemic as event cancellations, closures, isolation, and lockdowns had an oversized impact on the culture community. The culture economy was the first to close due to emergency measures and the last to reopen after the state of emergency was lifted.

Culture Plan 2030 articulates a long-term municipal and community strategy to stabilize and advance arts, heritage, and creative industry in Guelph. The plan identifies conditions and opportunities for the local culture sector to survive and thrive as we nurture a community ecosystem that ensures culture is present everywhere, every day, for everyone.

Purpose

The Province of Ontario describes cultural planning as “a place-based approach to planning and development. It is a process for identifying and leveraging a community’s cultural resources, strengthening the management of those resources, and integrating those resources across all facets of local planning and decision making.”

For Guelph, this Culture Plan is intended to guide investment, collaboration, promotion, and growth aspirations of the local culture sector. During this time of post-pandemic recovery, there is an opportunity to regenerate the local creative sector, while firmly establishing culture as a sustainable driver of community

vitality, social equity, environmental responsibility, and economic prosperity in Guelph.

A Case for Culture

Vibrant, healthy, and safe communities

Culture contributes to the development of a vibrant society, providing pathways to bring community together, create a sense of belonging, define our unique shared identity, confront inequalities, collectively celebrate and mourn, commemorate our history, and envision our future together. Creative expressions define who we are, connect us to each other, and provide new perspectives. Culture increases understanding, empathy, and acceptance, and enhances quality of life.

Innovative workforce and industry

Culture nurtures innovation and creative skills key to advancing industry and enabling businesses to successfully compete in the 21st century. From design and advertising to science and technology, creative thinking, originality, and invention are essential.

In Ontario, 65% of business leaders and skilled workers surveyed indicated that a thriving arts and culture scene is something they look for when considering moving or attracting top talent to a new community (Nanos Research, 2016).

Welcoming, engaging destination

Creating an engaging and welcoming destination gives visitors opportunity to experience a city's unique features and provides a glimpse at local heritage, art, traditions, and aspirations. In 2019, tourism, culture and heritage activities directly contributed approximately \$28.1 billion to the Ontario economy. (Financial Accountability Office of Ontario, 2020)

Vision

Guelph Culture: Everywhere. Everyday. Everyone.

When we talk culture, we talk about experiences, engagements, and expressions that foster a sense of belonging, contribute to a collective identity, and spark inspiration, connection, comfort, and joy. We envision a Guelph where all citizens feel welcomed and represented, and where they are enveloped in culture wherever they live, work, and play; morning, noon, night; weekdays and weekends; year-round. Through this plan, we are committed to creating conditions for culture that is everywhere, every day, and for everyone.

Mission

Working together — with a collective vision and collaborative efforts — to support community vitality, equity and inclusion, environmental responsibility, and economic prosperity in and through culture.

Strategic themes

Cultivate capacity and a solid foundation upon which culture contributors can build, create, survive, and thrive.

Connect culture contributors, City resources, and community – locally and beyond.

Champion the people, organizations, places, and events that create a sense of Guelph.

Objectives

Cultivate

Invest in Culture.

- By 2030, be among the top two comparator municipalities in total per capita spending on culture, and be above median in per capita spending on culture grants.
- Adequately fund anchor culture sites and service organizations, including Guelph Museums, River Run Centre, Art Gallery of Guelph, Guelph Public Library, and Guelph Arts Council, with expectation that anchor sites will uplift the broader culture community.
- Invest in public art acquisitions and commissions through a regular capital budget allocation, Community Benefit Charges, provincial and federal grants, sponsorships, and donations.
- Consider modifications to the municipal community investment programs to provide distinct funding programs for arts and culture that are adjudicated by members of the culture community.

Increase access to affordable space for artists to create, rehearse, perform, and exhibit.

- Identify and build capacity for culture activities at municipal properties, including upgrading of amenities as required.
- Explore opportunities to increase community access to River Run Centre resources.
- Establish and maintain inventory and mapping of public and private culture spaces and services.
- Through programming and capital building and upgrades, create culture spaces and presence throughout the City, including the South and West neighbourhoods.
- Develop co-presenting program through Museums & Culture to provide use of municipal spaces for priority culture activities.
- Identify potential new culture spaces, including performance spaces for audiences of 100 to 600 people and rehearsal, studio, and exhibition spaces, and consider public-private partnerships for development opportunities.
- Support culture uses for the Drill Hall and Ontario Reformatory lands.
- Work with the community to develop gear-sharing/lending program (e.g. sound equipment, artist materials)

Uphold Truth and Reconciliation by supporting Indigenous community members to reclaim, exercise and share their cultural practices.

- Work with Indigenous community members to enhance June 21 event, balancing an occasion for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis community members to gather and celebrate with an opportunity for public education.
- Eliminate barriers and increase access to public spaces for Indigenous ceremony and cultural practices, including sacred fires, drumming, and smudging.
- Continue dialogue with Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and urban Indigenous community members to identify opportunities to strengthen relationships and representation.

Prioritize equity-deserving artists and audiences in municipal culture programming and space allocation.

- Engage programming advisors and producers from equity-deserving communities as standard operating practice.
- Work with Recreation department to ensure facility use policies and practices are inclusive and culturally responsive.
- Review and update Artist in Residence program.

Incentivize development of culture programming in winter months.

- Work with community partners to develop new indoor and outdoor programming that meets community need for cultural experiences from November to February.

Model and support environmentally sustainable practices in culture programming

- Recommend increases to available equipment to support sustainable practices at culture events of all sizes, including availability for the Water Wagon and bike racks.
- Work with the community to develop waste reduction strategies for events.
- Encourage public and active transportation to culture events.

Adopt Culture-friendly bylaws, policies, and practices.

- Review and recommend amendments to municipal bylaws identified as presenting barriers to the culture sector, including but not limited to the noise control bylaw and sign bylaw.
- Work with Economic Development and Tourism, Recreation, and local film industry representatives to assess opportunities for film-friendly policies and practices.
- Work with Planning to identify and recommend levers that support infusion of culture in City building.

Eliminate barriers to participation in Culture.

- With community partners, develop and expand subsidy programs, rush ticket arrangements, and free admission opportunities.
- Develop culture programming in neighbourhoods where there is a deficiency in culture spaces and experiences.
- Employ principles of universal design, technology aids, and accommodations such as relaxed performances, audio-described performances, open captions, and ASL interpretation to engage artists and audience members with disabilities.
- Work with Guelph Transit and Guelph Active Transportation Network to encourage and incentivize use of public transportation, biking, and walking to culture activities.

Address gentrification of Guelph and the resulting culture drain, as artists and culture contributors relocate to more affordable or more lucrative communities.

- Consider artists and culture workers when setting and advocating for affordable housing and poverty reduction strategies.
- Advocate for basic income opportunities for artists and culture workers.
- Study successful models in other communities for affordable access to housing and creative spaces.

Connect

Improve communication between the City and the culture sector, amongst the culture sector, and between the culture sector and community.

- Appoint Manager, Museums & Culture as key liaison between culture sector and the City.
- Develop and maintain a digital Guelph Culture hub, including a collective Culture Calendar supported by a marketing and promotions strategy.

Nurture collaboration within culture sector.

- In partnership with Guelph Arts Council, establish quarterly gatherings for the culture community (including artists, culture workers, and public and private Culture organizations), to serve as information exchange, networking, and professional development.
- Strengthen relationships with arts and heritage-related departments at local school boards and post-secondary institutions.
- Establish relationships with equity-deserving community groups.
- Support the development and growth of community-engaged art initiatives.
- Create and coordinate Culture Familiarization (FAM) tours for City staff, culture workers, tourism operators, and adjacent sector operators with aim to develop Culture Champions within the City and the community.

Engage growing and diverse audiences.

- Shift programming approach from presenting diverse programs for traditional audiences to presenting programs which appeal to equity-deserving audiences.

Foster collaboration between the Culture sector and adjacent sectors.

- Work with all City departments to develop and support placemaking strategies.
- Work with Economic Development and Tourism to develop culture experience packaging with hotels, restaurants, attractions, and events.
- Work with Economic Development and Tourism and equity-deserving community groups to develop tourism marketing strategy targeted at equity-deserving visitors, centered on culture experiences.
- Work with Recreation to support intersection of culture and sport.

Champion

Develop a comprehensive recognition strategy that ensures local Culture sector contributors are seen and appreciated.

- Identify opportunities for recognition by City Council.
- Develop social media strategy for broadly spotlighting Culture activities and achievements.
- With community partners develop, support, or organize recognition events.
- Be present at culture activities.

Work with community to identify and support opportunities to seek designations for key cultural industries.

- Explore potential for UNESCO Creative Cities Network application.
- Research other designation opportunities.

Work with Economic Development and Tourism and community partners to identify and support attraction of culture-focused conferences, meetings, and events.

Embrace Guelph's bicentennial in 2027 as an opportunity to commemorate heritage and inspire collective community aspirations through culture.

- With community, present celebratory and reflective culture programming.
- Pursue legacy public art initiative.



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