

Comment to City Council

Dear City Council,

Thank you for considering this comment related to the use of the Drill Hall for arts and culture. My name is Amy Kipp, I am a PhD Candidate in the Social Practice and Transformational Change Program at the University of Guelph. My research focuses on social infrastructures of care in an urban context, specifically looking at the role collective artmaking can play in creating more caring futures in the city; so, the issue of using the Drill Hall as a gathering space for arts and culture is one that I have a keen interest in.

When the first RFEOI for use of the Drill Hall was published by the City last year, I immediately imagined how the space might be activated to support community care in the city through arts and culture. Research shows the importance of creative hubs in cities; for example, in a Canadian context Luka (2022) describes the contributions of such spaces, including “building local and community identity and cohesion and advancing the livability of a city or region” as well as “enabling communities - including marginalized, dissenting, or underrepresented voices - to come together in more inclusive and sustainable ways.”

The importance of spaces for arts and culture are also clear in the City’s Culture Plan, which I’ve read closely over the last six months as I have worked to describe the importance of artmaking for community care within my own research as well as in my work with Art Not Shame, a leader in Guelph for community-engaged arts. Among many other priorities, the Culture Plan has emphasized:

- the need for affordable and accessible space for arts and culture in the City;
- to Uphold Truth and Reconciliation by supporting Indigenous community members to reclaim, exercise and share their cultural practices;
- to prioritize equity-deserving artists and audiences in municipal culture programming and space allocation; and
- to nurture collaboration within the culture sector and between the culture sector and other sectors, establishing relationships with equity-deserving community groups and supporting the development and growth of community-engaged art initiatives.

I am writing this comment not just to reiterate these very important priorities, and my full support of using the Drill Hall to achieve them, but to raise my concerns with the process that unfolded at the Committee of the Whole on June 24th. As outlined in a letter by a group of community members and artists, which I have also signed, I believe that there is a need to reconsider how the Drill Hall may be activated for such use and who is leading this process.

I am particularly concerned with the agreement outlined in Motion 1, that “staff will work with GCVA (Guelph Centre for Visual Arts) to explore alternative funding opportunities.” A memo from staff highlights what these potential financial scenarios could be in partnership with the

GCVA. As someone who cares deeply about equity in process, I am concerned that these different financial scenarios were not presented to the public in the initial RFEOI. Additionally Motion 6 directed City staff to allocate “up to \$10,000 from the unspent 2024 Community Investment Strategy account, to be paid to the GCVA, and used towards conducting a formal feasibility study for the potential future use of the Drill Hall...” This funding for a feasibility study was also not available in the initial RFEOI.

I wonder what other organizations might have considered responding to the RFEOI if they were aware of the potential financial scenarios the City would consider exploring or that \$10,000 was available to them to conduct a feasibility study. I am concerned that the City has only made these options available to the GCVA after they put forward an application that did not meet the RFEOI. To ensure equity in process and outcome - i.e. a space for Arts and Culture, centring equity and accessibility - these options need to be available to the public.

I believe strongly in the importance of community engagement and participatory decision-making, and have seen the value of such approaches to community building and knowledge creation. More community engagement is needed in this moment, to ensure that this is an equitable process and that, if the Drill Hall is to be used for Arts and Culture purposes, it is guided by and representative of the voices of equity-deserving groups and artists.

Thank you very much for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Kipp". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amy Kipp, PhD Candidate, MA

