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Town of Aurora  
**Information Report**  
No. CMS21-030

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**Subject:** Cultural Master Plan – Status Update

**Prepared by:** Phillip Rose, Manager of Aurora Town Square

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** October 19, 2021

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**In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any Member of Council may request that this Information Report be placed on an upcoming General Committee or Council meeting agenda for discussion.**

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides an overview of the initiatives undertaken since November 2020 to update the Cultural Master Plan.

- In developing the refreshed Cultural Master Plan, staff are following CoCreative’s Collaborative Innovation Roadmap
- Since expanding its membership from nine to twelve members, the Collaborative Leadership Team has met four times in 2021.
- Several Key Themes have been identified from the research, engagement, and analysis undertaken to date.
- The Town and its partners will continue to make progress on the refreshed Cultural Master Plan and will return to Council with another update in the new year.

## **Background**

The Town is undertaking a review and update of its Cultural Master Plan (CMP). The current CMP Plan was adopted by Council in June 2014 and is now in the process of being updated to help guide the Town’s growth and development of the local cultural sector over the short, medium, and long term.

Council received the last CMP status update in November 2020, at which time approval was given to expand the CMP's Collaborative Leadership Team by three members to include under-represented cultural groups and a youth perspective.

## **Analysis**

### **In developing the refreshed Cultural Master Plan, staff are following CoCreative's Collaborative Innovation Roadmap.**

The roadmap identifies the key stages of a multi-stakeholder collaborative innovation process, including Aligning, Connecting, Learning, Designing, Making, and Scaling. The CMP development has passed through the first two stages of the process (Aligning and Connecting), which involved forming and expanding the Collaborative Leadership Team (CLT) and setting a strategic intent for the team's work.

The current focus is on learning about the system by pinpointing the local and regional networks that animate Aurora's cultural landscape. The team is also trying to better understand the current experiences of cultural groups, cultural professionals, and patrons of arts and culture within the system. By defining the current state of culture in Aurora, the Town can identify a baseline which to maintain or build upon. Mapping the existing system also allows the Town and its partners to recognize the critical shifts and actionable items necessary to nurture the creative sector in the future.

Staff continue to gather data on cultural statistics relevant to Aurora, and the Town recently joined the Cultural Statistics Strategy, which is a partnership program with the Department of Canadian Heritage and Statistics Canada that sources and compiles data on Culture's economic and qualitative impacts at the municipal level. This data will give the Town a clearer picture of the economic contribution of culture to GDP and information on local culture-related occupations.

Staff have also begun to interview members of Council to gain their perspective as leaders on the current state and future aspirations for culture in Aurora. Out of this phase of the project will come a State of Culture report to be shared with Council in early 2022.

### **Since expanding its membership from nine to twelve members, the CLT has met four times in 2021.**

The expanded CLT includes representatives from the following organizations:

1. Aurora Cultural Centre

2. Aurora Farmers' Market
3. Aurora Film Circuit
4. Aurora Historical Society and Hillary House National Historic Site
5. Aurora Public Library
6. Aurora Seniors Association
7. Aurora Sports Hall of Fame
8. Marquee Theatrical Productions
9. Music Aurora
10. Pine Tree Potters' Guild
11. Society of York Region Artists
12. Theatre Aurora
13. Town of Aurora/Aurora Museum & Archives

A local singer-songwriter also sits on the CLT as a Youth Advisor.

The first CLT meeting of 2021 was held on March 2 and focussed on aligning on the intent and purpose of the team's work and reviewing progress to date.

During the second and third meetings, the CLT began to define Aurora's cultural landscape to gain a shared knowledge of structural conditions that support or challenge arts and culture in Aurora. The CLT also identified the need for various subcommittees to advance the work of the CLT between meetings. Once established the subcommittees will focus on developing strategies for engaging with diverse identities and viewpoints as an integral part of the cultural planning process and formulating evaluation methods to support the cultural planning process once the plan is complete.

The fourth meeting concentrated on public engagement with a specific focus on developing a list of top individuals and groups to invite to a Cultural Forum to be held in fall 2021 or winter 2022.

**Several Key Themes have been identified from the research, engagement, and analysis undertaken to date.**

From the work undertaken to date, staff have identified various emerging themes that are summarized as follows:

1. The Town can leverage its (financial and in-kind) support for local cultural groups to make progress on important issues such as social equity, diversity and inclusion, climate change, and more. This can be done by creating robust municipal policies and procedures so that municipal support for cultural groups is tied to the delivery of positive social and environmental outcomes.

2. One way to accomplish this is by updating the Recreation and Culture grant program or creating stand-alone grants geared specifically to the cultural sector.
3. There is increasing evidence of a link between culture and cultural experiences and community health/wellbeing. This positive relationship between place-based arts practices and social cohesion, sense of belonging, and civic engagement has become more pronounced, partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, cultural groups have become more strategic and innovative by embracing new technologies that challenge or build upon their traditional business models.
5. Town staff need greater data literacy training to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to read, analyze, interpret, visualize, and communicate data, as well as understand the use of data in decision-making. This will contribute to more meaningful public engagement and help make more compelling cases for supporting arts and culture.

**The Town and its partners will continue to make progress on the refreshed Cultural Master Plan and will return to Council with another update in the new year.**

Staff and the CLT will continue to develop the CMP over the coming weeks by focussing on the following tasks:

- Undertake further public engagement, including focus groups, one-on-one interviews, online surveying, and the coordination of a Cultural Forum late this year or early 2021.
- Continue to map the current system and identify critical shifts necessary to advance the local creative sector.
- Continue to draft the State of Culture report that provides an assessment of the current state of culture in Aurora.
- Consider how the cultural mapping data compiled since 2014 can best be used to build a stronger knowledge base for planning and decision-making in cultural development, as well as provide greater marketing exposure for local cultural assets.

## **Advisory Committee Review**

The Manager of Aurora Town Square previously attended the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to gain feedback about the CMP and committed to attending future meetings to provide updates when certain project milestones are reached. In addition to the CAC, staff will engage with other relevant advisory committees/task forces as part of the CMP's public engagement strategy.

## Legal Considerations

None

## Financial Implications

Presently, the Town has approved a total of \$180,000 to date in support of the Cultural Master Plan development and implementation. Of this amount, approximately \$44,100 remains unspent; these funds are forecasted to be fully spent by the end of 2022.

An important component of the updated Cultural Master Plan will be the development of a financial strategy that will outline how the plan is to be funded over its next implementation period. As per the Town's recently approved Fiscal Strategy, staff will ensure that the new financial strategy is aligned with the Town's long-term capital and operating budget plans. This alignment will be critical in ensuring sufficient funding availability for the delivery of all desired master plan actions.

## Communications Considerations

The Town will continue to provide updates to Council and the community on the Cultural Master Plan refresh by way of the Town's website, CLT meetings, and social media. When the Cultural Master Plan refresh has been completed, this will be promoted to the community by way of a media release as well as other mechanisms including the Town's website and social media accounts, as well as direct marketing to stakeholders.

## Link to Strategic Plan

The Cultural Master Plan supports the following Strategic Plan goal of celebrating and promoting our culture in its accomplishment in satisfying requirements in the following key objectives within these goal statements:

- **Develop a Cultural Master Plan that includes heritage, music, and art to promote more cohesive and coordinated cultural services**
- **Expand opportunities and partnerships that contribute to the celebration of culture in the community**
- **Actively promote and support a plan to revitalize the downtown that includes culture**

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

1. Council may provide further direction.

## **Conclusions**

This report provides an overview of ongoing efforts to update the Cultural Master Plan and highlights next steps to be taken by the Town and its cultural partners.

## **Attachments**

None

## **Previous Reports**

CMS19-025, Cultural Master Plan Status Report, October 15, 2019

CMS20-027, Cultural Master Plan Status Report, November 3, 2020

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on September 30, 2021

## **Approvals**

**Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services Department**

**Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer**