



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF WINDSOR

June 25, 2020

Re: COVID-19's impact on the Culture and Heritage sector

Dear Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs;

Culture is vital to the prosperity of Ontario communities. Through the lens of respect, sharing and inclusiveness, residents of Windsor have embraced its diverse multi-cultural community. Windsor prides itself on its many voices, history, performances, and cuisine that has shaped the business corridors, developed unique neighbourhoods and provides a unique quality of life embraced by all.

As Windsor re-defined itself after the last economic down turn, artists and creative thinkers found a place for themselves with publishing houses, media and design studios, art studios, and so much more. These businesses are changing and diversifying the economy not just of Windsor but of the region.

The City of Windsor supports many cultural organizations and institutions—from large organizations such as the Windsor Symphony Orchestra and the Art Gallery of Windsor to smaller community groups such as Windsor Dance Xpress and Media City Film Fest. Funding for Arts Culture and Heritage has been achieved through decidedly Made In Windsor opportunities.

Local artists and grassroots organizations have access to municipal funding through the Arts Culture and Heritage Fund which provides project funding through a juried applications process twice a year. This year's second round was released early as an "Enhanced Covid-19" round with the Mayor and Council approving additional funds, and an earlier funding date in order to provide early support to the Cultural community being impacted through the pandemic. This funding round took place online—providing artists, performers and storytellers a unique opportunity to explore new audiences through digital technologies.

This early release of funding was very much in response to known need for support within this segment of the small business community. Early in March, the gig economy came to a halt with the closure of the restaurants, bars and coffee shops. Theatre seasons, the Symphony season, exhibit and gallery openings all stopped leaving artists scrambling to refocus their energies. Many local theatre companies along with the Symphony have ended their season and will be re-grouping in 2021.

Working together, Tourism partners, small business owner/operators and entrepreneurs have developed a number of programs—#Takeout Tuesday, #Wine Order Wednesday, #Fill Up Friday, and #ShopYQG to keep customers connected. In no way do these small programs equal regular attendance at any of the venues.

Our region has worked hard to both strengthen and diversify our tourism product. As we move forward out of the pandemic, the Tourism industry which parallels our creative industry also has a long road to recovery. We have begun a re-imagining of possibilities. We are encouraging our local residents to come and explore their community. The challenge is that many of these small venues have halted their season leaving a large hole in the entertainment scene.

The City maintains a number of cultural venues for the community at large to both appreciate and use. From the Cenotaph, to monuments and memorials, Mackenzie Hall in old Sandwich Towne to the Ojibway Prairie complex, Windsorites have access to a vast array of public spaces—all of which are

closed. Many of the venues are in repurposed facilities. From a heritage perspective it is fabulous that these venues are still playing an important role.

- Heritage facilities are not able to provide social distancing, large bathrooms, self-opening doors, or seating that can be sanitized between performances making it challenging for community groups to continue to produce and perform in these spaces. As a result it is anticipated that many of the community spaces will remain closed for some time.
- Organizations have pivoted to performing through new technologies. There has been a move to provide online activities—Natural World Bingos, colouring pages, spoken word projects—creativity flows through the community. Unfortunately online experiences are not the same as LIVE experiences.
- Internet connectivity to produce new performances is inconsistent across the region limiting creative opportunities.
- Our artists are feeling the affects of limited audience engagement. Musicians, actors, storytellers thrive in a live environment. Mental health concerns are growing in this segment of the population.

The City of Windsor has invested a significant amount into the cultural fabric of the community. It is necessary for all levels of government to foster an environment in which arts, cultural industries, cultural and heritage thrive in the community. It is time for the Province of Ontario to assist in supporting Windsor's cultural fabric by:

- Partnering with networks and organizations to create new resources, tools, professional training and provide knowledge sharing opportunities.
 - Additional funding of course is the quick and easy answer. Reality is additional funds cannot just continue to come in to play.
 - It is time to evaluate opportunities to provide support through other means. Perhaps an adjustment in HST exemptions might come in to play to support restoration of heritage buildings or further tax relief for those participating in sponsorship of cultural activities could be developed.
- Funding at all levels of government is focused and it would be inappropriate to download any of the existing services and supports to the municipal government.

Culture is different in every community in Ontario. It is essential for local governments to have the tools they need to evaluate the cultural activities that take place within their community. Tools could include:

- New data collection mechanisms,
- Access to new digital technologies,
- Opportunities to encourage participation in cultural activities,
- And workshops lead by a provincial representative to assist both municipalities and organizations learn new skills.

It is important the silos within all levels of government work together cooperatively to develop the sense of place of each Ontario community. In these times of tight fiscal reality, greater cooperation between Ministries and the inter-connectedness of projects will be advantageous to residents.

Culture creates jobs, animates local spaces, while making communities more attractive places to live. Investment in culture is being recognized by municipal governments across Ontario as a better practice in developing a robust business environment and dynamic quality of place. All levels of government have a role in helping promote the public value of culture.

Yours Sincerely,

Cathy Masterson
Manager of Cultural Affairs