

**STATEMENT TO ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BY MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC, CITY OF
KITCHENER – JUNE 29, 2020**

**ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE
ON FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS:
CULTURE AND HERITAGE**



**SUBMISSION BY
MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC
CITY OF KITCHENER**

JUNE 29, 2020

**STATEMENT TO ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BY MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC, CITY OF
KITCHENER – JUNE 29, 2020**

(Check against delivery)

**STATEMENT TO ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BY MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC, CITY OF
KITCHENER – JUNE 29, 2020**

Chair and Members of the Committee – let me begin by thanking you for inviting us to participate in the Culture and Heritage consultation process.

COVID-19 has impacted our city, our region, and the province as a whole, and that includes our Culture and Heritage sector. Like many other cities and towns, Kitchener normally has hundreds of live performances, events and exhibitions every year. From the Kultrun World Music Festival, to original productions from MT Space Theatre Company, to the Contemporary Art of Kitchener and Area public art biennial, and many more, the diversity and quality of these arts, culture, and heritage productions in Kitchener fuels our innovative economy, and is big part in creating a strong sense of place for our residents.

However, the arts, culture, heritage, and creative industries rely on gatherings for the purposes of creating and consuming culture, and this pandemic has halted artists and organizations in their tracks.

This has resulted in significant losses. On the income side: no gigs, ticket sales, workshops, camps, fundraising events, or sponsorships. As an example, some local musicians would normally perform at restaurants to earn an income. We are hearing that is no longer happening as restaurants have limited seating capacity due to distancing and other measures. So the space restaurants may have used for musicians is now seating for dining customers.

For the City of Kitchener, we have lost revenue from venue rentals, workshops and other programming. On the expense side, there are additional costs due to PPE, distancing, and monitoring measures.

In response to this adversity, many organizations and artists have pivoted, developing and delivering digital programming and performances, while managing significant resources constraints.

In Kitchener's case, and as a way of fostering community connections and supporting artists and many organizations, we have responded in a number of ways:

- The City initiated a program called #KitchenerSaysThanks, which livestreamed musical performances and children's programming twice a week. This program has cost \$5,000 and is an unbudgeted cost, but we felt it was the right thing to do for our community.
- We also started the Active At Home program, which is a virtual programming series to empower residents of all ages and abilities to participate in online classes and activities, like virtual cooking tutorials and home and garden programs, while physically distancing from home.

**STATEMENT TO ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BY MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC, CITY OF
KITCHENER – JUNE 29, 2020**

- The Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony musicians offered livestreams of performances from their homes.
- The Kitchener Public Library quickly translated their many in-person programs into digital offerings.
- The City of Kitchener has partnered with area municipalities and CTV in doing a virtual Canada Day television program, which will include various performances.
- You may know that Oktoberfest in Munich, Germany has been cancelled for 2020. But our very own Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest, which showcases our area's rich German culture and heritage, has decided to try to move forward, but under a significantly different set-up. They are considering things like a virtual keg-tapping and opening ceremony.

While we are all trying to be innovative, all these measures are temporary solutions, to try to bridge the gap to a “new normal”. By no means do they cover significant financial losses. They just try to minimize losses, to make sure there is something there next year, and try to lift the spirits of residents, like we know arts, culture and heritage can do!

In these uncertain times, our local arts, culture, and heritage sectors need to see their stories reflected to the community, so we create opportunities for connection, belonging, and well-being.

With all of this in mind, we are asking the following from this Committee, and the Provincial Government:

1. We recommend additional provincial funding are needed to support municipalities, artists, arts, culture and heritage organizations and facilities so that all can develop and execute alternate operating models. Municipalities don't have this financial capacity, and the financial benefits of these events and festivals are largely derived by the provincial and federal governments through progressive taxes like income and sales taxes. These additional resources are even more important now, as these organizations operate with constrained financial resources during the best of times. Their challenge now is to deliver their mandates in new, different and sustainable ways going forward.
2. Further, we recommend making additional grant funding available to artists, arts, culture, and heritage organizations, and municipalities so we can find creative ways to safely and cost effectively bring back some of these events and festivals, whether live or online. This grant stream would prioritize initiatives that offer programming and infrastructure that supports alternative ways of creating and sharing cultural and heritage productions. For example, providing funds for the equipment required to

**STATEMENT TO ONTARIO STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
ECONOMIC AFFAIRS BY MAYOR BERRY VRBANOVIC, CITY OF
KITCHENER – JUNE 29, 2020**

mount live performances in an outdoor venue, or initiatives that offers highly experiential digital programming.

3. Further, we recommend additional funding to subsidize the use of cultural facilities and performance venues. These funds could be used to cover the expenses related to facility rental in order to mitigate lost revenues related to lower attendance due to distancing and other measures.
4. Finally, we recommend the provincial government find creative ways to get revenues into organizations or reduce their costs. Right now, it likely isn't worthwhile and safe to have performances in half-full, or less, venues. But if costs can be reduced, potentially by way of making the HST fully refundable or exempt on these events, it may help make these events more cost effective for the venues, performers and organizations. We would need to ensure any HST cost saving are fully transferred to patrons, performers, venues, or organizations only who need the help.

As the economic recovery begins, we cannot forget the value we place on the performers, organizations, and their creations, the connections they create in our community, and how they support our economy. It is our duty to nurture our culture and heritage organizations back to health as well.

We hope you will take these ideas and recommendations into consideration. Thank you.