

Ottawa Cultural Alliance: Response to City of Ottawa 2023-2025 Term of Council Priorities

More space needed for culture in Council's priorities

Ottawa's arts, culture and heritage animates our city and generates significant economic and social benefits. In addition to internationally renowned festivals, national museums and galleries, or Parliament Hill that draw in important tourism dollars, culture at all levels is an important part of the everyday lives of residents, workers and visitors.

We agree with the City, as indicated in the Official Plan, that access to culture has a direct impact on quality of life and a sense of well-being for the one million residents of Ottawa. It is the foundation for making Ottawa a vibrant, liveable city—especially important for the capital of a G7 country that also has a role on the international stage.

We are pleased to see references to culture in Council's priorities for the 2023-2025 term, however culture-related priorities and performance indicators could better articulate the needs of arts and culture and acknowledge the contribution of the sector in performance across many priorities.

We urge you to view culture through its own lens as it relates to the growth and resilience in our city.

Culture is a key part of a city's brand

Culture is essential both as an asset and a tool for a city and its economy to recover and grow post-pandemic. Further, cultural tourism plays an essential role in supporting our City's brand as part of Ottawa's Place DNA™. The Term of Council Priorities is missing important opportunities to imbue and leverage the arts and culture sector more strategically. Culture has been given limited consideration as its own stand-alone priority and/or left out of some performance indicators entirely.

Culture is not just a subset of parks and recreation—an extension of where cultural programming sits within the corporation of City Hall. Arts and culture is far reaching, generating economic benefits for businesses and contributing to the wellbeing of residents; it stands as a beacon of civic imagination and helps to conceptualize dynamic alternatives to economic and social conditions.

A cultural lens on all priorities, programming and initiatives is critical in achieving results for residents.

Culture needs investment

Culture Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in Ottawa in 2016 was estimated to be more than \$3.4 billion. In 2022, the City provided over \$11.7 million in funding through 368 allocations through cultural funding programs. We estimate this to be at \$10.42 per capita. While this sounds like a big investment, we know there is incredible pressure on the cultural funding envelope as local arts, heritage, festival/events and cultural groups are rebuilding and rebounding from an incredibly difficult 3 years.

Cultural sector needs an ambassador at the Council table

While Ottawa needs more physical cultural spaces of all sizes, we also need a voice at the Council's table in order to advise and help achieve Council's goals, and to create more opportunities for residents to participate, experience and contribute to culture. Creating an alluring, sustainable cultural ecosystem will contribute fundamentally to the attraction and retention of talent across multiple sectors.

The Arts, Culture, and Recreation Advisory Committee is currently under Council Governance Review. Without any update on its status, or resurgence, City Council is left without effective culture representation at the table.

While we applaud the creation of a Commissioner of Nightlife by the City, the Ottawa Cultural Alliance is concerned that it is narrow in scope. It does not address the wider opportunities for the arts and culture sector in Ottawa, and what the sector can contribute beyond the traditional nightlife economy.

As the Ottawa Cultural Alliance identified in the 'A Liveable City For All: A New Cultural Roadmap for Ottawa 2019-22', a City Councillor assigned the role of 'Cultural Commissioner' would champion for culture within the City organization and on City Council. They could more effectively advocate for culture, raise the profile of culture in liveable city-building, help apply a cultural lens to decision-making, and collaborate with cultural sector partners.

Conclusion

Ottawa is not boring—the trope is—and this Council's term priorities and the cultural sector can help address that reputation. We can change that narrative by making investments and including culture more in decision-making around revitalizing our city and post-pandemic recovery.

From film and festivals, to heritage talks and walks, rural museums, visual art exhibitions, theatres, Indigenous art forms, ethnocultural community celebrations, neighbourhood pop-up concerts, major cultural venues and more, culture defines, enlivens and unites our city. Give

culture the voice and recognition it deserves in making Ottawa a great city to live, work and play.

Cultural Considerations for Council’s Term Priorities

We urge City Council to view all term priorities through a cultural lens, particularly in the areas that don’t immediately come to mind. From transit initiatives that could include murals along tracksides, musical concerts at stations, photography and poetry displays, to raising awareness on the importance of a green and resilient city through eco-friendly art installations, performances and exhibitions that stimulate dialogue and drive positive change in how we interact with our environment.

In addition to the priorities above, we would like Council to consider the following objectives in greater detail.

A City that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all

We know City Council shares our belief that arts and culture build strong communities.

A 2021 Hill Strategies Study shows cultural attendance and active arts participation have been found to have a positive impact on mental health. Culture already plays a fundamental role in partnership with many social service organizations in Ottawa. This is present in cultural programs directly within and supporting social services throughout the city.

Objective 8: Make recreation and cultural programs available to more residents Objective 9: Align parks, recreation and cultural facilities with populations growth
--

The City identified a key achievement of its Official Plan will be to “create spaces and places for culture to live, grow and innovate” and “promote the arts as an important element of placemaking”. To that end, culture could be better reflected in this priority, expected results and performance in several ways:

- Culture and cultural spaces can and should be part of affordable housing project planning and implementation
- The reuse and adaptive reuse of heritage buildings will preserve Ottawa’s unique architectural history and reduce the environmental impact of urban development and densification
- More physical spaces of all sizes (permanent, temporary and through partnerships) for cultural events and installations need to be created, showcased and experienced in all parts of the city

- Need places where artists and cultural workers can afford to work and live in our city; many of whom don't earn a living wage themselves.

Across the City, many community arts groups provide recreation and cultural programming to residents. These community groups provide key services to residents. Missing from these performance indicators is how vital cultural not-for-profit groups are as service providers in these areas as the city reaches many more residents through cultural funding. To meet these metrics, the City should:

- hire more artists and cultural facilitators to do city-led programming,
- increase funding for arts groups offering community arts programming, and
- improve access so that more seasonal permits can be held by arts groups for more parks programs.

The arts are an invaluable pillar of our community. Data shows that there is a pressing need for spaces that are affordable, accessible, and reliable. Surprisingly, it has been 14 years since a new City cultural space was opened outside of the downtown core. It's time to identify where new spaces are needed and where existing ones can be upgraded. We have an opportunity to leverage existing spaces across the city and make them even more vibrant.

Despite parks, recreation and culture being so intertwined in city management, there exists an urgent need for cultural activation in recreational centers, ensuring that culture becomes an integral part of their renewal. This can include murals adorning walls, gazebos in parks transformed with electricity to host cultural activities, and multipurpose recreational spaces that incorporate exhibitions by local artists and heritage displays.

The performance metrics indicate both new and renewed cultural facilities. We are looking forward to seeing this enacted.

A city with a diversified and prosperous economy

Ottawa culture is the Ottawa brand, and inherent in the work of our artists and cultural workers is amplifying the brand. Culture is a key economic driver and can be a key partner in meeting this priority.

- | |
|--|
| Objective 22: Stimulate growth in special economic districts with secondary plans
Objective 23: Reimagine the downtown and ByWard Market
Objective 24: Enhance traditional and commercial main streets
Objective 25: Diversifying our economy and amplifying our region's brand |
|--|

Culture is what will position Ottawa as a destination of choice to live, work, play, invest, learn and visit. “Strengthen the economic impact of the creative and cultural industries”* is what the City has identified as one of its four goals for Culture in the Official Plan. We suggest a few ways the City can do that in these objectives.

Culture is a key part of many of the secondary plans, for example “local production and entertainment” is a key part of the The Orléans Corridor Secondary Plan, and the Nightlife Action Plan recently approved at Council. But, there are no arts, heritage or culture performance indicators. If culture is a driver, can we measure it? We suggest adding the following to performance indicators:

- Number of new and existing cultural activities and groups with economic viability; special festivals and events

The built heritage of downtown and the ByWard Market, and the artists creating and presenting in it, play a key role in the reimagining of this area. Is an increase of cultural activities a result desired by Council? We suggest adding the following to performance indicators:

- Number of new and existing cultural spaces, events and businesses (including non-profits) in the Downtown core and ByWard Market

Culture is a big reason why people visit traditional main streets and small businesses support artists’ work. We suggest adding the following performance indicator:

- Number of new and existing cultural spaces, events business (including non-profits) on traditional main streets

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight the important contribution that arts, culture and heritage makes in our City.

Sincerely,

The Ottawa Cultural Alliance,
comprised of:

Arts Network Ottawa
Ottawa Arts Council
Ottawa Museum Network
Ottawa Festivals Network
Capital Heritage Connexion
Ottawa Music Industry Coalition

Sources - English

Official Plan: Section 2: Strategic Directions; 2021; City of Ottawa. Pages 38-40.

https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/section2_op_en.pdf

The Orléans Corridor Secondary Plan, Community Planning Unit, City of Ottawa. Page 31-32.

<https://pub-ottawa.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=96802>

2022 Cultural Funding Summary Report; Cultural Funding Support Unit, Arts and Heritage Development Branch, City of Ottawa.

https://documents.ottawa.ca/sites/documents/files/2022_cultural_funding_summary_report.pdf

A Liveable City for All: A New Cultural Roadmap for Ottawa 2019-22; Ottawa Cultural Alliance

<https://ottawaculture.ca/cultural-roadmap/>

Accelerating building reuse would help Canada meet its climate targets.

<https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2021/accelerating-building-reuse-would-help-canada-meet-its-climate-targets/>

What makes Ottawa, Ottawa? Understanding what defines us and being able to talk about it with confidence helps enhance our reputation as a world-class city.

https://ottawatourism.ca/sites/default/files/media/documents/2022-02-Ottawa-Brand-Storybook_1.pdf

NOTE

2022 per capita cultural funding was estimated by the Ottawa Cultural Alliance for this report and used a method consistent with City of Ottawa per capita reporting; *“Per capita means ‘for each person’ and per capita measurement expresses data as a measure per person within a defined geographic area. City of Ottawa cultural funding per capita measurement divides total municipal investment in cultural funding programs (grants to the cultural community managed by the Cultural Funding and Support Unit) by annual year-end City of Ottawa population. To be consistent with national per capita best practice reporting, major cultural facility capital grants... are not included.”* as defined most recently in the 2019 Cultural Funding Summary Report.

Hill Strategies

Engaging in cultural activities such as attending concerts, visiting museums, or participating in artistic endeavors has been linked to reduced stress, improved mood, and increased overall

well-being. These experiences provide opportunities for self-expression, social connection, and personal growth, which can contribute to enhanced mental health outcomes