

Delegation of the Advocacy Committee of the Kingston Arts Council

to the City of Kingston Standing Committee on Arts, Recreation and Community Policy

27 April 2006

[1] The Advocacy Committee includes representatives from across artistic disciplines including: visual and media art, music, film, theater, craft, and writing. It aims to be a voice for the arts in Kingston. We wish to impress upon this Committee the urgent need for a coherent, rational and forward-looking arts policy, and programs of substantial support for the arts in Kingston.

[2] Culture was made a priority in the City's Strategic Plan of 2001, ironically the very year in which City support for the operating expenses of arts groups was eliminated. Likewise, the Kingston Arts Board, a mechanism of communication and participation of the arts community in City arts policy and grant dispersal, was disbanded.

[3] This report touches on some of the **major problems** in the City's arts community and points to **model solutions** in the form of the programs in comparable municipalities. We draw from these **core recommendations** that must shape the City's approach to nurturing a strong arts sector in this city, and further, we call for immediate steps towards implementation of intelligent and forward-looking support for the arts.

[4] Present municipal support for the arts in Kingston is piecemeal: problems tend to be looked at in isolation – responding to crises, as we see in the case of the J.K. Tett Centre in the search for a creative solution to years of neglect. This situation has exposed the vulnerability of even very well-established, valuable arts organizations, who inexplicably find themselves marginalised, rather than appropriately valued. The recent history of City hostility to the arts is perhaps exemplified by the abrupt announcement that the City will cease garbage pickup for Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre. The lack of positive engagement with the arts community is demoralizing and damaging to the arts infrastructure, and puts artists and arts groups in Kingston at a disadvantage relative to those in peer communities. We hope for better leadership from our City given that the arts are a crucial sector shaping the quality of civic life.

call for action

[5] The City's Strategic Plan for culture needs to be implemented with adequate attention to the arts (artists and arts presenters), distinct from recreation, heritage and social services: Council should ensure that an immediate audit of existing arts services and funding forms the basis for substantial program and operating support for arts groups in this City. Is a review of facilities and programs underway, per the City of Kingston web site?

Regarding the need for **specific consideration for the needs of the arts**, we note that the lack of clarity has created a public perception that the Healthy Community Fund brings financial support to the arts. Sadly, the fund pool has been winnowed down in successive years since its creation – indeed, **the efficacy of this Fund must be assessed**. Furthermore, according to Cultural Manager Robin Etherington, the 2005-2006 HCF grants amounted to approximately \$93,000 total for all the arts, an embarrassingly low figure.

[6] We note the presence of an accumulating backlog of ignored studies including the Cultural Facilities Needs Assessment Study (2003), the Cultural Framework Strategy for the City of Kingston (City staff, 2004 and 2005), and the Capacity Building in the Arts for Mid-size Communities Study (2005). We hope current consultation re arts facilities with Artscape will have a better fate. The time for action is here: we call for considered, rational nurture of the sector. The arts community deserves no less.

The emphasis placed on Culture in the City Strategic Plan was based in part on a clear understanding of the economic multiplier effects of arts investment – public support of arts groups and their presence in the community acts as a powerful catalyst for economic development. This is obvious in relation to Cultural Tourism – in which arts activities are key attractions – but is even more vital in making the City of Kingston a viable setting for the health, education, and high tech, research-based ventures that are the basis of much present economic vitality and hope for future growth. A dynamic arts environment would give Kingston competitive ballast, for example, in the delicate recruitment of talented university faculty, medical specialists in our hospitals, or start-up companies.

the crisis

[7] City inaction is crippling Kingston's art community. A recent poll of non-profit arts groups in the City documented the urgent need for a coherent approach and program of sustained support. The sector is experiencing gross erosion of the social and physical infrastructure, missed opportunities, waste and inefficiency:

(i) Arts groups who are tenants in City-owned properties are hamstrung by uncertainty, which cripples their ability to plan, and to obtain and spend grants.

Examples: especially fraught in relation to Tett Centre tenants – e.g. Potter's Guild Trillium Grant can't be spent, for innovative small theaters, for community-level art and craft exhibition.

Community arts facilities put in place during the 1970s have fallen into neglect, and/or now serve additional purposes, to the point that they are woefully inadequate.

Example: One cited example is the Wilson Room of the Kingston Public Library, which has served as a sometimes art venue for community groups and the Rotunda of the Tett Centre.

(ii) Anchor arts organizations are undermined and put at a disadvantage in competition for a range of grants (federal, provincial, and private foundations) by the absence of operating support from the municipal level, hindering their ability to provide leadership and service. Funders always ask for accounting of municipal support and absence of municipal funding for operations implies a damning lack of support from the community. It is harder to attract and leverage other funding sources when this key piece is missing. Loss of operating funds undercuts programs but also the crucial advertising and promotion of those programs, thereby reducing the capacity of arts groups to reach and serve residents.

Examples: The Kingston Symphony and the Agnes Etherington Art Centre – key contributors to Kingston's artistic quality of life – professional staff and volunteers are consumed with need to raise funds, face difficulty of finding resources to support fundamental programs such as school tours. Dedicated and talented staff struggle in a stressful context of increasing expectations and reduced means.

solutions

[8] We point to several **models for support** of a vibrant arts sector, looking at examples of mechanisms of delivery, sustained fiscal support, and visionary projects in peer cities in Ontario. These cities have put in place programs responding to studies defining the positive economic, social and quality of life benefits of a healthy arts sector. [9] Of vital importance, such programs include **meaningful avenues for input and participation of artists and arts professionals**.

We note the heartening presence of models of positive cultural strategies and programs in peer cities, programs that recognize the contribution of a healthy arts sector to quality of life and future growth. These are characterized by **higher levels** of arts funding and **considered balance** among the disciplines.

[10] Kitchener

Arts and Culture Budget \$3.7 million (2005)

KWAG \$154,000

Kitchener Symphony \$161,000

Plus capital projects support, wide spectrum of support

Public art program: % for art of new building projects: they express a powerful and positive vision of place of the arts in the City.

[11] St. Catharines

Stated Cultural Policy and a Plan, includes statement of the principle of self-determination for the cultural community, and financial support through fee-for-service contracts.

[12] Peterborough

Arts & Culture Budget \$3.7 million (2005)

Art Gallery \$500,000

Strong statement re the importance of quality of life in the City.

A 2.8% tax levy for Arts & Culture

Plans for public art program – arts professionals on City Committee

[13] London

2004 Creative City Task Force, supported by a Working Group of arts professionals

Strong vision of leadership recognizing the role of arts and culture in a vibrant and growing city.

Note their common recognition of the role of the arts community through Boards, Task Forces and Work Groups to have input at various levels: non-profit arts groups have the knowledge, skills, experience and active involvement of committed volunteer cadres to help shape effective, high quality programs for the whole community.

In Kingston, we have been largely shut out of the discussion for the past 5 years, since the dissolution of the Kingston Arts Board. The City of Kingston should make avenues for **meaningful participation of the artistic community in shaping programs and allocating funds**. The City must take advantage of this expertise, use the skills and knowledge of artists and presenters who have well-developed understanding of the artistic quality of programs, organizational capacities, vision and direction of contributors to the scene.

key recommendations

[14]

1. **Adequate amounts of funding** be provided – **both program and operating** – to support both infrastructure and expertise stability for anchor arts organizations, and the flexibility for new groups and programs.
2. Ensure **considered and balanced allocation of resources** among artistic disciplines, between performing and material arts forms, and across the spectrum of expertise from professional to learning and passionate amateurs.
3. Produce **avenues of consultation and input from the arts community** – artists and arts professionals and dedicated volunteers who have expertise and are dedicated to highest standards: give them **a real voice in the form and allocation of support**.
4. Recognize the **vital role of non-profit arts organizations** in stimulating and sustaining the arts sector. These groups have an enormous capacity to serve artists, to raise and leverage funds, to galvanize volunteers and connect with audiences; they should be treated as partners and should be recognized by the City as **the most effective vehicles for arts programs and as a consultative resource for shaping arts programs**.
5. Restore the confidence of the arts community in this City by establishing **short, medium and long term goals**, and by committing to a **course of action** that supports production and participation in the arts.

respectfully submitted on behalf of the Advocacy Committee of Kingston Arts Council,
Jan Allen, Committee Chair