Supporting a Culturally Rich and Diverse City

Culture. It’s one of those words that we use a lot, but it has many different meanings, depending on who you ask. Ask a scientist about culture and they may refer you to what’s growing in a Petri dish. Ask an anthropologist and they may define it as society and organized social behavior and how they are shaped by human interactions and evolution.

Ask a Londoner, and they may define culture as the arts, sports, and the many experiences that we share as residents of London. Culture is as much an idea, concept, or experience as it is a “thing”. Our culture is most often defined as our common behaviours and shared experiences, and that often means “things” like festivals, concerts, sporting events, places and built and natural heritage or “just the way we live.”

Whatever culture is to you, it’s clear that Londoners like it, London has it, and London wants more of it.

The idea that culture is linked to prosperity is something that we have heard from you. If we use the definition of culture as those things that are both tangible (things) and intangible (ideas, experiences, or behaviours) that are unique to us as Londoners, then the link to prosperity is clear - prosperity is tied to our quality of life, and our quality of life reflects our culture. But culture is also fundamentally intertwined with the success of many local businesses, and from a business point-of-view, its role in London’s economy may surprise you.

In 2011, culture contributed over $540 million to the City’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). That translates to a contribution of $1,475 per Londoner.

London’s cultural sector also employs 7,700 cultural workers, and another 6,000 people are enrolled in cultural programs at Fanshawe College and Western University.

In 2011, there were 1,300 cultural enterprises, many of them small businesses, and approximately 9,000 cultural resources in the City of London. Culture
It includes city-wide built, natural, and cultural heritage, cultural assets, tourism, diversity, libraries, food and agriculture, arts, sports, educational institutions, talent, cultural corridors (Downtown, Richmond Row, and Old East Village) and neighbourhoods.

— Cultural Prosperity Plan

Here’s What We Heard...

Throughout the ReThink process, we heard a lot of positive comments about the significance of culture. Many Londoners also identified a number of areas that present opportunities for improvement. You place a high importance on festivals, libraries, and museums, particularly Museum London and the Children’s Museum. Budweiser Gardens, Labatt Park, schools that are active in their neighbourhoods, heritage buildings and architecture were all sources of civic pride. Along those same lines, you identified the London Knights and the Western University Mustangs football team as examples of important civic fixtures. Sports teams are an important element in culture, and are rarely mentioned, however, you acknowledged them. Lastly, the Downtown was specifically mentioned a number of times as the centre of culture in the City, and a large number of you thought that was something important to recognize.

Here are some of your ideas about how we could better promote culture in the City:

- create spaces for artists to display their work
- create affordable mixed-use housing or live-work units for artists
- support artist lofts
- build a Downtown performing arts centre
- support Downtown murals
- nurture further development of Downtown culture, and the Downtown as an entertainment hub
- update and expand museums, including longer hours
- allow for more projects along the Thames River
- host an Air show
- better connect educational institutions and the City
- better promote London’s music scene
- design more public spaces for better interaction within community
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Strengthen culture to build economic prosperity
Support cultural programming
Leverage London’s cultural assets
Celebrate and promote culture

Where We Are Now...

As in the other reports, it is important to understand the current state-of-affairs and some of the noteworthy initiatives related to culture that are happening in London. The following is a snapshot of some of the things that are underway that are about increasing the role and profile of culture in London.

London’s Cultural Prosperity Plan:
This Plan was approved by Municipal Council in March 2013. The Goal of the Plan is: To recognize the role of culture at the heart of our thriving and vibrant city, in building economic and community growth, attracting and retaining talent, informing municipal decision-making processes and elevating the profile of London as a regional cultural centre.

The Plan sets out four Strategic Directions to support the Vision that was developed for the Cultural Prosperity Plan: “Culture is at the Heart of our Thriving and Vibrant City”. The four strategic directions include:

- increase public awareness of cultural events
- create the “cool” factor
- enhance the City’s historic neighbourhoods
- encourage the City’s historic neighbourhoods
- encourage outdoor concerts at Western
- support artists, composers, performers
- provide greater recognition of people in sports, arts & culture
- establish an art market
- produce a video of multiculturalism in London
- encourage inclusiveness/equity

Under each of these directions are listed a series of objectives and actions that are intended to implement the Plan. This Plan builds upon previous work undertaken by the City related to culture to advance and improve the City’s economic competitiveness through culture, and to explicitly acknowledge the link between culture and prosperity.
Downtown Master Plan:
The Downtown Master Plan is intended to bring many of the recent initiatives and strategies regarding moving Downtown forward together, and to set the stage for the next phase of Downtown’s evolution. A key element of this Plan is reiterating Downtown’s role as the “hub” for arts, culture and entertainment centre for the City.

The Master Plan will also describe the next set of ‘Game Changers’, or projects that will set Downtown on its course for the next number of years. Many of these projects are related to arts and culture: the creation of high quality public spaces, including the re-imagining of Dundas Street, the development of the River’s edge to link Soho to the Downtown, animating and activating the Forks and the River’s edge, and a new Performance Centre.

Economic Prosperity Plan:
The Investment and Economic Prosperity Committee identified five areas of focus that are needed to grow the City’s economy. These five areas are:

- Business retention, growth and attraction
- Retain and attract talent
- Develop our labour force
- Community economic development
- Visitor attractions

It’s easy to see how rethinking Culture and Diversity lines up with these areas that Council has identified as key to the future economic prosperity of London. A strong and vibrant Downtown, a thriving cultural scene, quality facilities and built and natural heritage, a “City for Everyone”, and quality parks and open spaces and recreational facilities are all elements of a diverse and prosperous City.
Ontario Immigration Strategy

The City is a partner in the Province’s immigration strategy. Some of the objectives of this strategy are:

- Attracting a skilled workforce and building stronger economy.
- Helping newcomers and their families achieve success.
- Leveraging the global connections of these diverse communities.

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What We Have Learned... Official Plan Best Practices

London is not alone in recognizing the many benefits of a healthy and active culture sector within our City. Other cities are not only investing in arts and culture, but they also recognize that this will attract and retain the very same people that we are targeting. Here is a sample of what other cities are doing related to Culture within their Official Plans.

York Region – VISION 2051

Guiding Principal: Accessible and Inclusive – Programs and services that are available to all, regardless of location or personal abilities and the inclusion of all, regardless of age, gender, ability, income, culture or faith.

Goal – A Place Where People Can Thrive – In 2051, York Region’s diverse population can thrive in an environment that fosters healthy living, is safe, accessible, inclusive and supportive.

Goal – Livable Cities and Complete Communities – 2051, York Region’s diverse urban form provides a variety of interesting and exciting places to live, work and play. Communities are people first, and designed for healthy, active living and social inclusion, and are the heart of business, arts and culture, community and life services.

Actions:
- A place where people achieve optimum health – social inclusion
- An integrated network of community support – diverse population
- Celebrating our culture, heritage and diversity
- An accessible region
- A vibrant City-Region
- Complete communities
- Integrated Urban System – place making
- A living city.


The key focus of Edmonton’s Plan is to “Strengthen the Downtown as the centre of art, culture, entertainment employment and transit for the City and region”.

Vancouver – City Plan

Vancouver’s Vision: “Sense of Community” states that Vancouver residents want a City where people of all ages, incomes, cultures and abilities feel a sense of belonging, caring and safety, and have access to services that they need.

Here’s Where We are Headed...

Communities like London already include culture into their Official Plan. It is reflected in various sections including heritage building protection, downtown revitalization, flexible zoning to allow live-work spaces and studios, public art and urban design requirements.

London’s Official Plan presently includes many of these same types of policies, and also includes policies related to the Creative City. These policies serve as a foundation to build on those things that you told us we should include as part of ReThink London.

Here’s what you’ve told us:

- London needs to elevate its profile as a Regional Cultural Centre
- Economic growth can be achieved through cultural sustainability
- Culture is a life experience for everyone
- Culture is valued as a component of economic growth and employment
- Culture benefits all residents of London as it is in our neighbourhoods, schools, community centres, libraries, etc.
- Creativity fostered through cultural programming, promotion and communication
- Cultural capital assets need to be maintained
- London needs to have greater awareness of existing cultural assets
- London needs to have continued investment in culture to yield long term reward - Invest in the cultural product, marketing and employment in the cultural sector
- There is value for the City to invest in our community so that leveraging can occur and culture can grow
Based on all of this, here are some of the things that we might see in the new Plan for London.

**Economic Prosperity/Capturing Tourism Potential**

- Become a cultural leader, creating bold new partnerships including new collaborations between the public and private sector.
- Provide greater support to cultural production – get people involved locally.
- Support economic spinoff for a small investment.
- Continue to offer grants and incentives to leverage culture-related outcomes.
- Promote retention of heritage structures.

**Support Cultural Programming**

- Activate streets and parks through Festivals and Events.
- Develop linkages with local food culture, both locally and regionally.
- Connect children & youth to cultural education.
- Differentiate London from other centres by celebrating London’s identity.
- Work with cultural organizations to identify ongoing opportunities for tourism and marketing.
- Work with cultural organizations to enhance cultural programming along and at the Forks of the Thames.
- Leverage London’s Public Libraries and community centres as important cultural hubs.
- Promote participation in recreation and amateur sports.

**Diversity and Inclusion**

- Better engage and communicate with all Londoners.
- Create livable and sustainable communities.
- Provide different ways of living, housing, working and education.
- Support, celebrate and strengthen London’s diversity - our different and shared beliefs, values, morals.
- Attract and retain talent, including youth, new immigrants and creative professionals.

**Cultural Asset Feasibility Planning**

- Encourage the development of creative cultural industries.
- Develop a Cultural Feasibility Plan, which would meet the needs of the culture sector, such as developing more affordable artist spaces.
- Cultural Heritage – explore a consolidated cultural centre, including a museum and archives.
- Promote London’s Natural Heritage assets such as its parks and trails.
- Encourage more bonusing for public art.
- Continue to develop and maintain cultural asset mapping databases.

**Maintenance / Preservation of Cultural Assets**

- Develop strategies to promote the adaptive re-use of existing built heritage assets.
- Ensure maintenance, revitalization and funding of municipal heritage structures and facilities are a municipal priority.
- Develop a strategy for emergency management/risk standards to be carried out for City owned historic buildings and properties.
- Engage the community in the advancement of community heritage conservation.
- Promote and encourage conservation of heritage neighbourhoods by developing a heritage conservation strategy.
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Creative Spaces - Cultural Corridor Enhancement

- Create a vibrant Downtown as the cultural centre for the region.
- Recognize Downtown, Richmond Row, and Old East Village as important Culture Districts in the Official Plan.
- Promote adaptive repurposing of historic buildings.

Celebrate and Promote Culture

- Encourage tourism by building community awareness of our cultural assets.
- Leverage our location as the centre of southwestern Ontario.
- Develop a comprehensive marketing and communications plan to promote the City’s cultural sector to both visitors and residents.
- Promote marketing and communications of the cultural sector using technology.
- Enable local food producers to get food from the field, to the truck, to our tables.

The following summarizes the direction that we’re headed, based on what we’ve heard from you, and the research we’ve completed to date.
More of this...

- Promote culture as a prosperity tool to attract and retain talent.
- Leverage London’s cultural assets and promote them to the world.
- Protect our built and cultural heritage to promote our unique identity and develop links to arts and eco-tourism in the London region.
- Do more to establish public art to strengthen London’s strong and unique identity; revitalize Downtown, our urban neighbourhoods and the community; and promote London’s image at important locations along corridors and at gateways to the city.

Less of this...

- Consider culture a non-critical factor in economic development and prosperity.
- Build a City that is functional and operational, but not enticing to live in.
- Consider arts and culture investment a frill, rather than an important part of retaining and attracting people to London.
- Build bland, faceless new public spaces and disregard the potential and need to continually invest in our identity.
Promote Downtown prosperity by reinforcing Downtown’s role as the cultural hub of the city, together with its surrounding residential neighbourhoods.

Develop affordable housing providing a support network that attracts diversity to the city; quality affordable housing regardless of age, ability, ethnicity, or socio-economic status; and a variety of housing choice, including live/work opportunities.

Promote, protect and provide for cultural facilities that increases access to arts, recreation and other cultural facilities and foster a culture of innovation.

Foster eco-tourism opportunities through community groups and neighbourhoods, and by collaborating with our regional partners to benefit from interconnected regional trail systems.

Allow Downtown to deteriorate, undermining our “calling card to the world”.

Do not consider and plan for the unique needs of some people.

Focus on short-term needs without thinking of our long-term prosperity.

Do not consider the long-term social, economic and environmental considerations of our City-building activities.