

# PUBLIC ART POLICY

## Project Framework

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Sir William Stephenson, a Man Named Intrepid, Celebration Square, 2021

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# BACKGROUND

In fall 2018, the Town of Whitby retained a consultant (PROCESS) to undertake the development of Whitby’s first Culture Plan. In March 2021, Council approved the plan, Culture Connects Whitby, 2021-2031. Culture Connects Whitby contains five directions, 20 goals, and 75 actions items. The development of a Public Art Policy was identified as an action item in the Culture Plan, in alignment with the Town’s Official Plan, under Direction Three: Connecting Places, Goal 4, Action B, stating:

“Implement Official Plan Policy 6.2.3.19.5, ‘develop a Public Art Policy and guidelines, in consultation with the community, to guide the acquisition, funding, location, and integration of public art in public and private spaces in the community.’ Art policies and guidelines shall involve artists and the community in the decision-making process.”

From September 2022 to December 2022, the Town’s Creative Communities team conducted an Environmental Scan and Background Research to understand the current state of Whitby’s public art program and connections to relevant municipal strategies, and plans including the Official Plan, Culture Plan, and existing Public Art Loan and Donation Policy. The Environmental Scan Report outlines project background, a review of Whitby’s existing public art inventory, alignment to key strategies, plans, and reports, and an overview of Town resources related to public art.

In conjunction with the internal Environmental Scan, a Comparators Analysis was completed from October 2022 to December 2022. Interviews with 17 individuals representing 14 municipal public art programs from across Canada were completed. The goal of the interviews was to provide insights into common practices related to the origin of public art projects, selection committees and boards, locations of public artworks, public engagement, budget, and overall learnings. The following communities participated in interviews:

- Ajax
- Barrie
- Burlington
- Durham Region
- Halton Hills
- Hamilton
- Kingston
- Mississauga
- Oshawa
- Ottawa
- Peterborough
- Pickering
- Toronto
- Winnipeg

# WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?

According to the Culture Plan, Culture Connects Whitby (2021-2031), public art is defined as “any media that has been produced by an artist for publicly-accessible space and is intended to engage the public. It can take the form of permanent, temporary or socially-engaged art”. Public art consists of participatory art, permanent art, and temporary art. According to the Town of Whitby’s Public Art Donation and Loan Policy (2011), public art “is referred to as visual works of decorative or functional purpose owned or managed by the Town of Whitby.” Medium and forms of art mentioned in the policy include but are not limited to sculptures, murals, mosaics, photography, paintings, graphic arts, landscaping, and tableaux, vignettes, or creative displays that interpret sites or buildings of heritage significance.

# THE PURPOSE OF A PUBLIC ART POLICY

Public art adds value to community by reflecting on the uniqueness of a given place. At its core, public art is free and accessible encouraging community members of different abilities, backgrounds, and identities to engage with art. Local pride, community identity, and a sense of belonging are strengthened through shared experiences of public art. Public art transforms the built environment inviting the community to connect with spaces in new and unexpected ways.

The purpose of a public art policy would be to support new commissions and grow the Town’s collection through projects that reflect Whitby’s history, culture, and contributes to identity of place in creative and symbolic ways. Public art would elevate and enhance the quality of life for Whitby’s residents while driving tourism and economic development. A Public Art Policy would support the development of a standardized process that outlines the lifecycle of public art projects for the Town of Whitby from the initial concept to selection, fabrication, maintenance, and deaccessioning (if needed).

The Town of Whitby has an existing Public Art Donation and Loan Policy however, the policy has not been updated since approval in 2011 and does not reflect contemporary public art donation and loan needs of the Town of Whitby. Further, the 2011 policy is limited to existing artworks that are donated (permanent) or loaned (temporary) to the Town and does not address new commissions or projects. As a result, public art projects are undertaken on a case-by-case basis with no formal or standardized process for new commissions, maintenance, and inventory tracking.

# PHASES OF THE PROJECT

There are four proposed phases for the development of the Public Art Policy, two of which have already been completed.

## **Phase 1: Environmental Scan (Q3-Q4 2022 – Completed)**

The Environmental Scan includes the current state of Whitby’s Public Art program analysing the links to key municipal documents with emphasis on those that referenced public art including:

- Official Plan, Office Consolidation, August 2021
- Culture Plan, Culture Connects Whitby, 2021-2031
- Public Art Loan and Donation Policy, 2011

In addition, the Environmental Scan involved review of the following:

- Whitby’s Art Trail & Public Art Inventory
- Arts and Culture Microsite Redevelopment
- Artworks on Loan to the Town
- New Commissions and Maintenance of Current Collection
- Temporary Art Projects: Roebuck Street Placemaking Project
- Staff Resources
- Municipal Budget and Funding Sources

Overall, the Environmental Scan showcased that the Town of Whitby does not have a formalized process for new public art projects, maintenance, or collection management. Further, the extent of Town owned and loaned works across all municipal facilities is unknown. Regarding funding sources, there has been no allocated budget for public art initiatives. Currently, public art funding is a decision of Council for the 2023 capital budget with \$375,000 proposed over a 10-year period.

## **Phase 2: Comparator Analysis (Q3-Q4 2022 – Completed)**

From October 2022 to December 2022, the Creative Communities team interviewed 17 individuals who represented 14 municipalities in Canada (with emphasis on those located in Ontario) to complete a Comparator Analysis. Communities that were interviewed include Ajax, Barrie, Burlington, Durham Region, Halton Hills, Hamilton, Kingston, Mississauga, Oshawa, Ottawa, Peterborough, Pickering, Toronto, and Winnipeg.

Consideration was given to municipalities located in Durham Region to understand the regional context and insights related to public art. A representative from Durham Region was interviewed as part of the Comparator Analysis as the Region is undergoing a similar process to establish a Public Art Program for region owned properties. On January 18, 2023, a Report was brought forward to Regional Committee of the Whole to endorse the establishment of a Regional Public Art Program to provide a framework for incorporating public art on Regional infrastructure. The Town will ensure that its Public Art Policy will align to the Regional Policy and that conversations and collaboration between the Town and Region regarding public art continue.

The interviews provided insights and key findings related to how public art is defined in policies, project initiation, locations of public artworks, the formation of boards, working groups, and juries, public engagement in the development of public art policies and projects, funding sources, and overall learnings.

## **Recurring Themes**

Based on the findings from Environmental Scan and Comparator Analysis, the following are recurring themes for the Town of Whitby to consider during the development of the Public Art Policy:

1. **Develop a standardized process for public art projects.** The Public Art Policy will help the Town of Whitby plan for public art projects proactively instead of responding to projects on an ad-hoc basis by outlining roles and responsibilities, key definitions, selections, maintenance, and funding sources.
2. **Track and maintain public art collection inventory.** The Town of Whitby does not currently have a comprehensive inventory of all Town owned public artworks. Artworks that are present along Whitby's Arts Trail are accounted for however, there is an estimated two works at Town Hall that are owned by the Town however this has yet to be confirmed. The extent of Town owned works located in other facilities remains unknown.
3. **Revisit the definition of public art, keep it broad, and omit timelines.** The definition of public art within the policy should be broad to include a variety of mediums, expressions, and upcoming anticipated and unanticipated trends in public art. Timelines tied to permanent and temporary public art should be omitted as having works tied to specific timelines can result in expensive maintenance and prevent necessary deaccessioning of deteriorated works.
4. **Create an internal working group for public art projects.** Internal working groups with representatives from across municipal departments proved to be most successful for the initiation of public art projects. Members of working groups become advocates for public art and help bring forward opportunities and ideas for public art in projects across the municipality. This is particularly important as most public art projects are located on municipal properties and public art is often tied to capital projects. Departments represented on the working group are generally culture, parks, planning, engineering, transportation, and facilities. Consideration should also be given to an advisory board or committee formed of external stakeholders to help oversee the public art portfolio and potential initiatives.
5. **Engage the public as early as possible in public art projects.** In best practice examples, the public are engaged at the onset of a project through workshops or outreach to help inform the public art creative process. When initial engagement is not possible, the public should be invited to provide feedback (likely through Connect Whitby) on the shortlist of submissions and concepts. Public voting on submissions is highly discouraged as works should be evaluated on artistic excellence and not be swayed by popularity.
6. **Capital funding for new projects is ideal and a maintenance reserve should be established.** Most public art programs have dedicated public art funding supported through the municipality's capital budget for new public art projects. In addition, a reserve for maintenance through the annual operating budget and/or a dedicated amount (typically 5-10%) of new projects should be set aside from maintenance of the public art collection. A section on developer fees or privately

funding public art projects should also be a funding consideration for the Town of Whitby's policy.

7. **Establish a new or exempted procurement or purchasing process for public art projects.** The existing procurement process has barriers that limit which artists can respond to a call such as a requirement to show proof of WSIB or the ability to prioritize local artists. As a result, the existing procurement process needs to be reviewed in relation to public art to determine and remove possible barriers that might limit which applicants can respond to public art calls.
8. **Create a competitive local artist market by offering education and training.** Local artists need tools and resources to successfully respond to calls and be competitive at a national and international level. Artist training can include how to use certain digital technologies, budgeting, and selection of appropriate materials based on outdoor environmental considerations and maintenance. When artists are given tools and resources, generally they are very successful at responding to public art calls and their projects have positive responses from community members. The Town of Whitby can also consider creative calls specifically for local artists to amplify local voices and perspectives.

### **Phase 3: Community Engagement (Q1-Q3 2023 – Upcoming)**

A variety of engagement tools will be used to gather community insights related to the Public Art Policy. Four main audiences will be engaged as part of this phase:

- Key stakeholders from Whitby's arts community
- Town Staff
- Mayor and Council
- Public

The first step in the phase is to establish a Steering Committee that will help inform and provide feedback throughout phases three and four of the Public Art Policy development process. The Steering Committee will be invited to three to four meetings, one of which will be the development of the SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) assessment and another to provide feedback on the draft public art policy.

Staff are recommending that the following stakeholders be included to participate as a Steering Committee member:

- Executive Director of Station Gallery
- Curator of Station Gallery
- Two to three local artists
- Local business owner that supports the arts in Whitby
- Representative from a local arts and culture organization
- Representative from the Town of Whitby's Planning and Development Department with prior public art experience in Whitby
- Representative from the Town of Whitby's Facilities Department

Public feedback will be gathered via a Connect Whitby survey to understand how community members define public art and what they would like to see in terms of

themes, locations, and mediums. Survey findings will help inform areas of improvement for Whitby's public art program and existing elements that should remain unchanged.

Last, interviews with the Mayor, Council, and Town staff from departments such as Community Services (Facilities and Parks Planning), Planning and Development, Financial Services, Legislative Services, Operations and Legal Services will take place to gather detailed knowledge of processes, protocols, and implementation of day-to-day policies, plans, and strategies related to public art. Interviews with external stakeholders such as Station Gallery, the Downtown Whitby BIA, and other key organizations (Durham Tourism etc.) will take place simultaneously. A Community Engagement and Stakeholder Findings Report will be prepared to summarize findings from feedback collected through Phase 3.

### **Phase 4: Development of Public Art Policy (Q3-Q4 2023 – Upcoming)**

The development of the Public Art Policy will take place in Q3-Q4 2023 taking into account findings and recommendations from all previously completed phases. The Creative Communities team will circulate a draft policy to the Steering Committee for feedback and make necessary revisions. Once revisions are completed, the final policy will be presented to Council in Q4 2023 for approval. Following the implementation of the Public Art Policy and initial projects, an evaluation from the Creative Communities team will take place in subsequent years to determine if a Public Art Masterplan for the Town of Whitby is recommended.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Next steps in the development of Whitby's Public Art Policy are outlined below:

- Q1-Q2 2023:
  - Invite proposed members to join Steering Committee and hold initial introductory meeting
  - Develop questions and content for Connect Whitby page and stakeholder interviews with guidance from Communications and Creative Services
- Q2-Q3 2023:
  - Meet with Steering Committee to complete SWOT assessment
  - Build out and launch Connect Whitby Page
  - Develop interview protocols and start internal and external stakeholder interviews
- Q3-Q4 2023
  - Prepare Stakeholder Engagement Summary Report including findings from interviews and public survey
  - Develop Draft Public Art Policy
  - Meet with Steering Committee to gather feedback on Draft Public Art Policy
  - Report to Council with Final Public Art Policy