

Town of Whitby

Staff Report

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Report Title: Creative Communities Update

Report to: Committee of the Whole

Date of meeting: December 2, 2024

Report Number: CAO 23-24

Department(s) Responsible:

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

Submitted by:

Sarah Klein, Deputy CAO & Director,
Strategic Initiatives

**Acknowledged by M. Gaskell,
Chief Administrative Officer**

For additional information, contact:

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Communities

Lara Toman, Manager, Events, Culture
and Tourism

1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 23-24, Creative Communities Update, be received for information.

2. Highlights:

- Report CAO 23-24 provides an overview of highlights, key actions and achievements of the Creative Communities Team from 2024. It further provides a snapshot of deliverables to be focused on in 2025.
- Creative Communities is responsible for the overall management and development of Whitby's cultural sector which acts as a driver for investment and economic growth and includes Events, Culture, Tourism, and Downtown Development.
- The team continues to deliver on actions from the Community Strategic Plan (CSP), the Downtown Whitby Action Plan, the Special Events Strategy, and the

Destination Whitby Tourism Strategy to advance the priorities of the Community and Council.

3. Background:

The Creative Communities division is part of Strategic Initiatives and was formed in 2020 to align several strategic priorities within the organization to optimize decision-making and support community building and economic development. Creative Communities is responsible for the overall management and development of Whitby's Events, Culture, Tourism, and Downtown Development portfolios.

A creative community is a place where creative people, experiences, places, businesses, and organizations are connected to foster new ideas and collaborate, transform, and implement those ideas and actions to build a healthy, vibrant, and dynamic community.

The Creative Communities team continues to build new partnerships with various stakeholders and foster strong relationships with cultural groups, organizations, tourism partners, downtown businesses, and internal departments to collaborate on new opportunities to showcase and strengthen Whitby's creative economy, making Whitby an exceptional place to live, work, and explore.

4. Discussion:

This section provides an overview of major accomplishments from the division in 2024, along with a snapshot of upcoming/new initiatives for 2025.

2024 Accomplishments

Events

- [Town Events](#) – the Town's annual events had over 50,000 people in attendance and included Family Day, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Canada Day, Music in the Park, Movies in the Park, Harvest Festival, Ghost Walks, Whitby Lights the Night, and Christmas in the Village, amongst others.
- Music in the Park – two more evenings of music were added to the summer calendar of events related to CSP Action Item 1.2.2. The annual Call for Performers saw a record high of 131 musicians and artists apply to be part of Whitby events.
- Town Supported and Third-Party Events - permitted 37 Town-Supported/Third-Party events such as Rotary Ribfest, Food Truck Frenzy, Remembrance Day Parades, BIA Christmas Market, Brooklin Tiki Festival and the new Durham Summer Fest. This is a 25% increase in approved permits from the previous year. Also worked with the Downtown Whitby BIA to permit new events this year including Movies in the Square, Summer Art Series and Comic Con.
- [Volunteer Training](#) – a new online Volunteer Training program was created and launched with over 50 volunteers trained in the last few months. The annual

Volunteer Appreciation Night was hosted in November at Landmark Theatres to thank volunteers for their significant contributions to the Town's events. This year, volunteers dedicated over 1,000 hours to supporting the Town's events.



Caption: Town of Whitby event volunteers

Culture

- Public Art Policy and Public Art Procedure - Council adopted the Public Art Policy in January (Report CAO 03-24). The purpose of the Public Art Policy is to outline the processes and responsibilities of the Town to support new art commissions, art donations and loaned art. Staff have completed the Public Art Procedure, a document that provides step-by-step guidance on implementing the Public Art Policy.
- Public Art Inventory – staff undertook an inventory of Whitby's public art, inclusive of artwork both inside municipal buildings and as part of the [Public Arts Trail](#). The new public art at the Whitby Sports Complex will be added to the Arts Trail once completed.
- New Public Art in Whitby – two new public art pieces have been created and installed this year including:
 - “The Hive” a tree carving by Ryan Locke using a century-old black walnut tree that was transformed into a honeycomb with bees, located across from the Centennial Building.



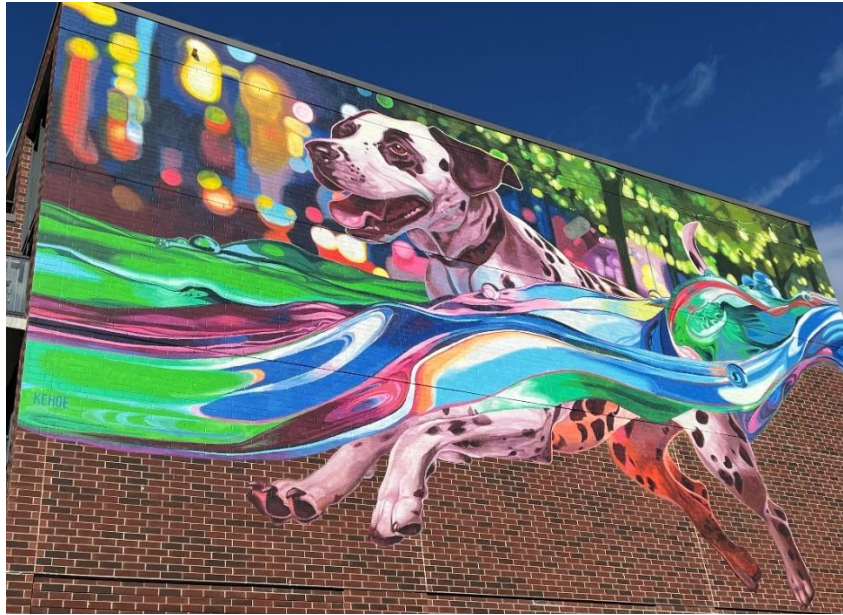
Caption: The Hive tree carving by Ryan Locke

- “Dancing in the Light” and “Welcome Home” digital print murals by Indigenous Artist Emily Kewageshig located at Rotary Park and sponsored by Elexicon Energy.



Caption: Digital print murals by Indigenous Artist Emily Kewageshig

- [Station No. 3 Mural](#) – staff worked collaboratively with Brookfield Residential to support the promotion of the story behind the new mural on the south side of Station No. 3 by local artist Meaghan Claire Kehoe. A [video](#) was created to highlight the artwork and honour and remember Molly the Fire Dog.



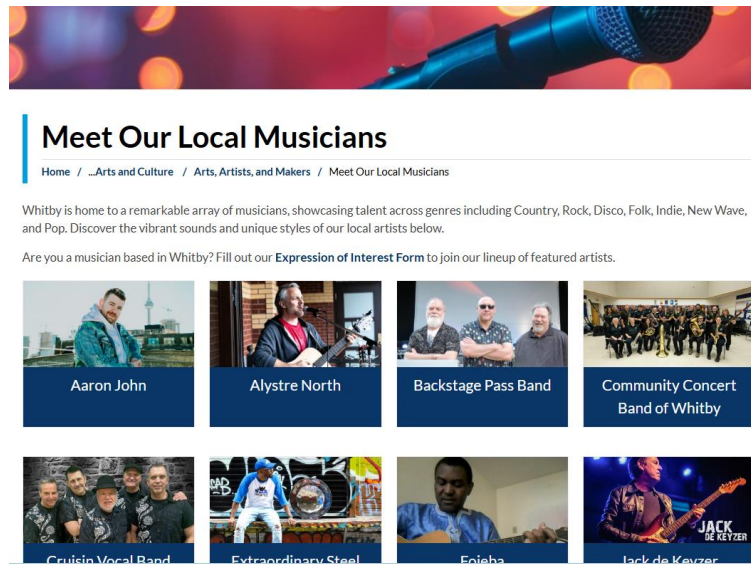
Caption: Station No. 3 mural by Meaghan Claire Kehoe

- [Culture Pop-Ups](#) – a series of five culture pop-ups were launched from June to October including Bollywood on the Pier, Greek Summer Night, Sunset Tango, En Plein Air Painting Event and Unravel for Change knitting event. Over 1,050 people attended these events throughout the summer. Culture Pop-Up content was some of the top-performing posts of the year, with over 11,140 views on Instagram and 369,000 impressions on Facebook and X.



Caption (Left to Right): Bollywood on the Pier, En Plein Air Painting Event, and Greek Summer Night Culture Pop-Up events.

- [Musician Database](#) – to support Whitby’s musical talent and an Action Item identified in the Community Strategic Plan, a new section on the Town’s [Arts and Culture website](#) was created to showcase the various featured musicians.



Caption: Page from the Town of Whitby's Arts and Culture website.

- Culture Roundtable – the second annual Culture Roundtable event was hosted in the Avalon Room at the Port Whitby Marina in March and brought together artists, makers, musicians, and cultural organizations to connect, network and learn from each other. Overall, the group enjoyed learning about Whitby's arts and culture workplan and how they could compliment or support ongoing and new initiatives.

Tourism

- [Food Tours](#) and the [Whitby Food Guide](#) – to support the award-winning Whitby Food Guide, a series of food tours were created. The Town hosted 19 Walking Food Tours in Downtown Whitby and Downtown Brooklin and three Trolley Food Tours with close to 500 people attending and supporting 42 businesses. Promotion of the tours on Facebook and X had 37,000 impressions and 7,290 video views. On Instagram, food tour videos received over 5,700 views. The third edition of the [Whitby Food Guide](#) was released in June with an additional 12 pages of content. To date there has been 2,859 views of the Food Guide.



Caption (Clockwise from top-left): Cover of Whitby Food Guide, Whitby Food Tours promotional image, participants on the Whitby Food Tour at Tuscan Wolf Pizzeria in Downtown Whitby, and Food Tours promotion in Grass Park, Brooklin.

- [Municipal Accommodation Tax \(MAT\)](#) – effective July 15, 2024, the Town approved a new 4% Municipal Accommodation Tax on all hotels and motels. These funds will support tourism with Whitby allocating 50% of the revenue to support tourism initiatives and help expand the community’s capacity for tourism offerings such as sports, art, music, heritage and cultural experiences. The Whitby Tourism Development Corporation will use the other half of the funds for tourism marketing and promotion of Whitby.
- Tourism Growth Program (FedDev Ontario) – the Town was successful in receiving \$200,000 to support the transformation and activation of waterfront lands in and around the James Rowe House / Shirley Scott Park to be actioned in 2025 with a new seasonal visitors’ centre, accessible dock for kayak/paddle boards, Muskoka chairs, picnic tables, public art, bike rack/repair stand, and year-round decorative lighting.

- Decorative and Seasonal Illuminations and Lights – the community will be lit up with over 100,000 lights at key locations including Whitby Civic Park, Downtown Whitby, Grass Park and Brooklin Community Centre. These illuminations help to support destination development and animate the Whitby community for residents and visitors.
- Destination Development Tourism Networking Event – over 100 tourism businesses, stakeholders and organizations joined staff on April 16 at DishPlay for “There’s S’more to Do in Whitby”, an evening designed to pursue partnerships and develop meaningful connections to collectively promote Whitby as a premier tourism destination.



Caption: Destination Development event welcome table and participants at Dish Play

- Tourism Marketing and @explorewhitby Instagram – the Discover Something New to Enjoy tourism brand continues to be used in market and there are 2,254 followers on @explorewhitby (as of November 7, 2024). This is a 215% increase since last year. Instagram allows for continued visual storytelling and support of our local tourism attractions and businesses and promotes all the great things to see, do and explore in Whitby.
- Tourism Articles, Influencers and Promotions – Whitby has been featured in many provincial and even international articles working with our tourism partners from Culinary Tourism Alliance, Destination Ontario, Central Counties Tourism, National Geographic and influencers/bloggers. A few are highlighted below:
 - [Wander Whitby on a 2-day Culinary Adventure](#) (Culinary Tourism Alliance)
 - [Flowing through Ontario’s Many Wonders of Water](#) (Nationalgeographic.com)
 - [3 Holiday Adventures in Ontario’s Downtowns](#) (Culinary Tourism Alliance)
 - The [tourism website](#) also features a Get Inspired page with numerous articles on Whitby.

Downtown Development

- My Main Street Community Activator Grant (FedDev Ontario) – the Town was successful in receiving \$91,000 to support further enhancements to the Roebuck Street placemaking project to include a new 'Field to Fork' mural, new bike racks, concrete foosball table, cornhole boards, seating, and lighting throughout Grass Park. Many of these new items will be installed on the street in 2025.



Caption: Image of placemaking project executed on Roebuck Street in Brooklin

- Community Improvement Plan (CIP) Funding – an additional \$2.5 million of additional funding was approved by Council to support high-density residential and mixed-use residential developments in Downtown Whitby through the Housing Accelerator Fund. The Town approved its first development application in November 2024 as part of this additional funding support.
- Hosted Downtown Meet and Greet Events – staff organized events in Downtown Whitby and Downtown Brooklin with business and property owners for an opportunity to network and learn about upcoming projects and events from the Town, Business Improvement Area and Whitby Chamber of Commerce.
- Façade Grant Recognition – Mayor and Council recognized several businesses and property owners in Downtown Whitby and Brooklin who have made various improvements to their buildings.



Caption: Downtown Whitby business, Whitby Audio | Video, a recipient of the Façade Grant program

New Initiatives for 2025

Many initiatives discussed above will continue to be undertaken throughout next year. New actions and projects for 2025 from the Creative Communities team include:

Events

- New Signature Event in Downtown Whitby – launching in July, a new Signature Event showcasing Whitby’s food, culture, art and music will take place in collaboration with many different community groups and include placemaking activations to support the downtown. Details on the Home Sweet Home Festival will be shared early in the new year, and the event is scheduled for July 25 & 26 in Downtown Whitby.
- Doors Open Whitby – this will once again be part of the annual events calendar. The event will highlight Whitby’s historical and cultural gems through an inside look at some of the community’s most interesting buildings and spaces.

Culture

- Street Piano at Waterfront – next summer as an initiative that was brought forward at the Culture Roundtable event, a street piano painted by a local youth/emerging artist will be installed at the Whitby waterfront, encouraging people to stop and play, creating opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with members of their community through music and art. Since 2008, over 2,000 street pianos have been installed in over 70 cities activating different environments and engaging the public through a shared love of music.
- New Public Art – a Call for Artists will be launched for the design and installation of a public artwork at a local neighbourhood park in Whitby. The goal of this project is to showcase public art within each of Whitby’s four municipal wards

over the next four years, creating opportunities for residents to enjoy and engage in public art projects throughout the entire community.

- Thickson Road Public Art – currently the Jury panel is finalizing the top three artists, and their concept designs will be out for public input in early 2025. The winning design will be selected by the end of March and installed next summer along Thickson Road between Dundas Street and Nichol Avenue.
- Public Art Plaques – to celebrate and promote public art along [Whitby's Arts Trail](#), new permanent plaques will be installed that contain the artist's name, the title of the artwork, and a QR code linking to the art trail map.

Tourism

- Municipal Services Corporation (MSC) – a new MSC to be called the Whitby Tourism Development Corporation is being created as the tourism entity responsible for the promotion of Whitby. This is required as part of the Municipal Accommodation Tax implementation.
- Tourism Growth Program – Official Ribbon Cutting of the waterfront parklands redevelopment project is anticipated for July.
- Tourism Maps – a tear-off tourism map highlighting Whitby's key destinations and tourism attractions and businesses will be available for visitors and residents visiting facilities and for use at sports tourism events. Large-size versions will be placed along Whitby's waterfront, Downtown Whitby and Downtown Brooklin. An online version and use of QR codes will compliment the printed version of the map.
- Self-Guided Brewery Tour – a self-guided brewery tour will be developed in consultation with local breweries to highlight and connect the craft beer scene in Whitby and encourage locals and tourists to visit these locations.
- Hop on Hop off Food and Lights Tours – a hop on hop off food/beer and lights tour will be launched in late 2025, featuring Whitby's six breweries with food pairing from local restaurants and showcasing seasonal and decorative lighting.
- Partnership with Zommer Media – Whitby tourism offerings will be strategically highlighted across Zommer Media platforms in 2025 including: a blogTO Dished Toronto Newsletter placement, blogTO Events Newsletter article placement, Curiosity Toronto article inclusion, and Curiosity Toronto Instagram contest.
- Walking Food Tours – the successful Walking Food Tours will be back during the summer season on a weekly basis with new locations and collaborations with local restaurants.

- Waterfront Placemaking Activations – new Muskoka chairs will be placed along the Whitby pier to provide additional seating options for residents and tourists along with new Edison lights to enhance the waterfront walkway next summer.

Downtown Development

- New Downtown Whitby Action Plan – staff will be engaging with the public, businesses and residents to develop a new multi-year action plan in 2025.
- Brock Street Redesign – a proposed concept design for Brock Street from Highway 401 to the CP Railway will be brought forward for Council's approval based on public feedback on what types of changes the community would like to see to create a more pedestrian-friendly street that is accessible for all ages, respects the cultural heritage in Downtown Whitby and creates opportunities for sustainable design.
- Downtown Whitby Light Topper – a new all-season light topper is being developed for Downtown Whitby to be installed along Brock and Dundas Streets, adding year-round animation and enhanced lighting to the streetscape.

5. Financial Considerations:

Financial resources to implement the Creative Communities work plan are included in the Town's annual approved budget. The projects outlined in the 2025 initiatives will be funded through a combination of tax-funded operating and capital budgets, grants (Tourism Growth Program), and funds collected through the Municipal Accommodation Tax. The Town also receives funding through the Whitby's Sponsorship program to support ongoing and/or new initiatives (i.e. Events, Culture Pop-Ups, public art).

6. Communication and Public Engagement:

Staff regularly collaborate with key partners and stakeholders within the municipality to support several of the action items in Creative Communities. Public input and engagement are essential components of the division, and staff continue to strengthen and build new relationships and partnerships through projects.

7. Input from Departments/Sources:

Delivery of the Creative Communities portfolio work plan relies heavily on the continued collaboration among municipal departments. Staff continually engage with teams from all areas in the organization to be successful at implementing the achieved outcomes.

8. Strategic Priorities:

Several actions from the Town's Community Strategic Plan align with the work plans for Creative Communities including:

- 1.2.1 Enhance Town-led and community-based events and festivals that celebrate diversity.

- 1.2.2 Enhance Whitby's culinary and live music sectors through collaborative partnerships.
- 1.2.3 Invest, promote and strengthen the local arts, culture, heritage and creative sector.
- 2.2.3 Invest in public art.
- 3.1.3 Implement actions to enhance Whitby's tourism sector, including a focus on the waterfront.
- 3.2.5 Implement initiatives that support our downtowns as thriving destinations.
- 4.1.2 Strengthen existing and build new partnerships.

The Creative Communities work plan continually strives to ensure accessibility and sustainable practices are implemented in the various actions. For example, when deciding on venues to support networking events such as the Destination Development or Downtown Meet and Greets, staff work with businesses that provide fully accessible spaces, so all members of the community can attend. The new public artwork "The Hive" was chosen to represent Whitby's commitment to sustainability by becoming a 'Bee City', a leader in pollinator conservation.

9. Attachments:

N/A