

# Town of Whitby

## Staff Report

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### Report Title: Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Whitby and the Canadian Musicians Co-operative 2026 to 2028

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**Report to:** Committee of the Whole

**Date of meeting:** April 13, 2026

**Report Number:** CAO 13-26

**Department(s) Responsible:**

Office of the Chief Administrative Officer

**Submitted by:**

Sarah Klein, Deputy CAO

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

**For additional information, contact:**

Sophia Sousa, Culture & Tourism  
Coordinator

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#### 1. Recommendation:

1. That Report CAO 13-26 be received for information;
2. That the Town enter into a three-year Memorandum of Understanding with the Ontario Musicians Co-operative Inc. (operating as the Canadian Musicians Co-operative) effective May 1, 2026 to December 31, 2028;
3. That the CAO and Commissioner Financial Services/Treasurer be authorized to execute the Memorandum of Understanding, and be delegated the authority to make amendments thereto subject to such amendments being mutually agreed upon by the Canadian Musicians Co-operative and the Town; and,
4. That Council provide an exemption to the Public Nuisance By-law 6714-13 for the duration of the Memorandum of Understanding with respect to the ability of Canadian Musicians Co-operative Performers to be able to receive a voluntary gratuity as part of the program.

## 2. Highlights:

- The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the 2023 to 2025 seasons of the Community Performance Program with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative and to recommend entering into a new three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from 2026 to 2028 to support local youth and young adults that are emerging musicians in the community through this program.
- Canadian Musicians Co-operative is a not-for-profit arts service organization dedicated to assisting emerging independent artists between 15 to 30 years of age to build sustainable careers intersecting the music industry in the 21st Century.
- Town staff have been collaborating with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative since 2021 to create meaningful opportunities for young musicians and cultural opportunities in the Whitby community.
- Town staff request Council consider an exemption from the Public Nuisance By-law No. 6714-13 to permit voluntary gratuities during a performance by Canadian Musicians Co-operative, as part of the program.

## 3. Background:

In March 2021, Council adopted Whitby's first-ever Culture Plan to support a collaborative, inclusive, and creative process to develop Whitby's cultural sector. This 10-year plan includes five strategic Directions, 20 Goals, and 75 Actions for the provision of arts and culture programs, services, and facilities in the municipality. The Plan looks at building capacity in the culture sector and acting as an economic driver to retain and attract talent and grow capital investment. A key direction from the Culture Plan (Direction 1, Goal 4, Action E) is to "Integrate live music programming within venues, facilities, and capital projects in support of a growing music scene." The Community Performance Program further develops this initiative and the creative economy in Whitby.

Since 2021, the Town has been collaborating with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative, a not-for-profit arts service organization dedicated to assisting new, emerging, and independent youth and young adult artists to build sustainable careers intersecting the music industry in the 21st Century.

Canadian Musicians Co-operative is a volunteer-led and accessible organization, funded in part by grants, sponsorships, and membership fees. They originally started in Simcoe County and, in 2021, expanded their organization to Durham Region, with Whitby being their first key partner.

The Canadian Musicians Co-operative program not only supports the creation of local music and performances but also provides behind-the-scenes training for artists, such as communication and networking skills, building artists' websites and skills using social media, business planning, bookkeeping and taxes,

technical skills such as cables, mixing a live performance, coaching, and health and safety. Canadian Musicians Co-operative develops the full music ecosystem so musicians can build a variety of skills to be deployed in a professional capacity.

In 2021, Council approved a pilot program and entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative through Report CAO 27-21, granting an exemption to the Public Nuisance By-law #6714-13 for performers participating in the Community Performance Program. With 16 artists and 30 performances logged between the 2021 and 2022 seasons, the pilot was considered a success, therefore, in 2023, Council approved a subsequent three-year MOU through Report CAO 04-23, which continued the same by-law exemption.

#### **4. Discussion:**

##### **2023 to 2025 Seasons Recap**

The Town has worked with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative since 2021 to provide musicians an outdoor venue for performances at three dedicated zones within the municipality. The zones included:

- Downtown Whitby (Celebration Square, Rotary Park, Dundas/Byron Parkette)
- Downtown Brooklin (Grass Park, Brooklin Community Centre and Library)
- Port Whitby (Whitby Pier, Heydenshore Park)

In 2023, the Town entered into a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which outlined the roles and responsibilities of both parties.

The MOU defined a performer as an individual or group who is a member of the Canadian Musicians Co-operative and provides entertainment in the public realm for a voluntary gratuity from audience members. The performer's entertainment could include playing an instrument, singing or other forms of creative musical performance, as agreed to by the Town of Whitby.

Each season provided performers with set days/times in the week for scheduled performances, including Wednesdays, Thursdays, Friday evenings, Saturday and Sunday afternoons/evenings, with the program running from May 1 to Thanksgiving Monday.

From 2023 to 2025, 23 artists participated, with over 185 different performances logged (average of about 60 performances per season). Artist feedback on the program highlighted meaningful community impact and professional artist development. Performers consistently noted positive, welcoming interactions with audiences, including families and youth and increased public engagement year over year. Emphasis was also placed on the program's value in artist skill development such as timely technology set-up and improvement of stage presence through practice in public environments. Overall, artists felt that participating in the program was beneficial to advancing their careers in the music industry.

As described by program participant and saxophone artist Austin Bassarath, “I often played at Heydenshore Park and Whitby Pier, and the people in both areas were nothing but warm and kind-hearted to me. It happened to be one resident’s birthday, and he said it made his day when I played some of his requests. A lot of people also seemed very intrigued as some of them told me that it was the first time they’ve seen a live solo saxophone set before, and I’m glad I was able to give them that experience.”

Although staff had identified different possible locations for the musicians to perform, it was clear that the waterfront still remains the favourite location as it was a prime spot attracting many visitors/audiences.

On June 5, 2025, The Town collaborated with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative and Durham Region on the Beyond the Music: Business Skills and Branding Event at the Centennial Building in Downtown Whitby. Participants enjoyed networking and refreshments followed by several 90-minute workshops (running concurrently) focused on music business management and marketing. The Town provided opening remarks and in-kind support for the event space while Invest Durham and the Canadian Musicians Co-operative coordinated the workshops, networking, and refreshments. The event was an important initiative to connect and build on the collective talent and creativity in the music industry within the Town and Region.

### **Entering Into a New Three-Year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**

With the general success of the program in the first five seasons, staff are recommending that the Town enter into a new three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative (see Attachment #1). Staff are also recommending that any future amendments to the MOU that are mutually agreed upon by both the Town and the Canadian Musicians Co-operative be delegated to the CAO and Commissioner Financial Services/Treasurer to execute.

The Town and Canadian Musicians Co-operative met and discussed opportunities to further enhance the program by helping promote the auditions for the program through the Town’s social media channels, sending information to the Town’s Youth Groups, collaborating on Canada Day and future Beyond the Music Events with Durham Region, and connecting the Canadian Musician’s Co-operative with local community groups like the Whitby Farmers’ Market.

Staff will revisit the MOU annually to ensure the program is successful and in line with the goals of the Culture Plan.

### **2026 to 2028 Seasons**

This season would operate similar to the past three years with musicians able to play in one of three dedicated zones including Downtown Whitby, Downtown Brooklin, and the Waterfront. The Whitby Visitor’s Centre would be added as a new waterfront location for the duration of the MOU. The following days/times are offered:

- a) Wednesdays 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm;
- b) Thursdays 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm;
- c) Fridays 12:00 pm to 8:00 pm;
- d) Saturdays 12:00 pm to 8:00 pm; and,
- e) Sundays 12:00 pm to 6:00 pm

The Canadian Musicians Co-operative would manage the performers and program logistics while the Town provides the space and supports the program through promotion.

**5. Financial Considerations:**

The Town will provide in-kind support in the form of room rentals at Town of Whitby facilities (e.g. for program auditions or workshops).

**6. Communication and Public Engagement:**

The Town will continue to support the Community Performance Program through social media posts, on the Arts and Culture microsite, and in the Town's calendar of events.

**7. Input from Departments/Sources:**

Staff in Strategic Initiatives have consulted with Community Services and Whitby Public Library staff regarding the use of the designated zones for performances. Staff have also consulted with Legal Services regarding the Memorandum of Understanding and By-law Services to address any concerns related to enforcement during the weekend, should those services be required. Staff have also consulted with Risk Management regarding insurance requirements and the Communications and Creative Services team regarding promoting the program on the Town's channels.

**8. Strategic Priorities:**

This initiative addresses the Town's Community Strategic Plan (Action 1.1.2) to "enhance Whitby's culinary and live music sectors through collaborative partnerships". This partnership between the Town and the Canadian Musicians Co-operative directly advances this action by offering live music programming in local public spaces.

The partnership with the Canadian Musicians Co-operative to create a Community Performance Program ensures accessibility is factored into both the location of public spaces (accessible locations and paths of travel being maintained). Sustainable business practices such as promoting the program through social media channels and reusing signage where available are being administered.

**9. Attachments:**

Attachment 1 – Memorandum of Understanding between the Town of Whitby and the Canadian Musicians Co-operative 2026-2028.