

Arts Survey will help drive future cultural programming in Aurora, Town Square

A new survey being conducted by the Aurora Cultural Centre will help drive future programming for portions of Aurora Town Square and the community as a whole.

Open now through to the end of the first week in June, the anonymous survey will help the Centre gauge the kinds of programming cultural consumers want to see down the road, and in what form given the shift to hybrid programs at the height of the global pandemic.

‘Each year we do a customer satisfaction survey to keep a beat on what we’re doing [but] we also recognize that this is really the time [for a survey] as we head back to Aurora Town Square in the coming months,’ says Jane Taylor of the Aurora Cultural Centre. ‘It’s the perfect time to really poll the community after we have been out and about in the community for the last three years to get a deeper understanding of how we can best serve the arts community here in Aurora and beyond by doing a deeper dive into more pointed questions around the arts.’

‘We call it the Aurora Arts Survey, but interestingly people don’t have to live in Aurora to complete it’ in fact, it is really helpful for us because anecdotally we welcome people outside Aurora, around York Region and beyond. We see this in our performing arts in particular, but if we have a gallery show that is of interest or an artist, people will travel for the arts.’

The survey, she adds, will also help the Centre as they begin work over the next few months developing their new strategic plan.

Some of the questions in the survey will ask what programs people have enjoyed, how they have enjoyed them (in person, virtual, etc.), and, if the respondent is outside Aurora, how frequently they come into Town and why – such as for work or school.

‘This is important data to know,’ says Taylor. ‘Has there been a true culture shift into virtual programming that now becomes part of an ongoing conversation with the wider community? There is feedback there. We have questions like whether you agree or disagree with statements like, ‘I would like more arts and culture,’ and this really gives people a chance for a broader response on how they feel about the situation for the arts in Aurora right now and what it could be going into the future as well.’

‘The survey is perfectly timed [for the completion of Aurora Town Square]. With our partners at the Town of Aurora and other partners who will be working within Aurora Town Square, these are discussions that have been going on since 2018 and 2019 in terms of how this space will be used and activated in so many ways; there is a really terrific conversation and some planning that has gone into the past to get to this point, but here’s an opportunity. If there’s a particular arts direction the community is really interested in, that is helpful for all of us partners to know.’

Taylor says ‘culture is all around us’ and the Aurora Cultural Centre team serves everybody. As such, ‘community understanding of culture is so vital.’

‘We’re not a top-down organization and that is sort of the beauty of what we do. We really like to position ourselves as understanding what our grassroots needs are. So many of us actually live in this community and work in the arts in this community [and] we’re so passionate about what we do. If you scratch below the surface, everybody, and it doesn’t matter who you talk to, has a personal understanding of what culture is and it is our hope that this survey will be able to tease that out so that people really understand this isn’t just a tick of a box they’re making, this is vital data that will guide our future direction and it will be rooted in our growing and diversifying community, and that is of real interest to us.’

The Aurora Arts Survey can be accessed at auroraculturalcentre.ca/artssurvey23 and, as noted above, it will be open until June 11.

From there, the data will be collected, interpreted, and presented to the Centre’s Board of Directors this summer to help direct their Strategic Plan. The report itself will be released to the public later this year, Taylor notes.

'It is important that people know this is an anonymous survey because we want an honest opinion,' she says. 'It is a digital, anonymous survey, so really feel free to let us know all your wishes and desires, as it were, when it comes to the arts because they will all be taken into account. We also have an opportunity at the end of our survey to do a call to action. Because it's anonymous, we ask if you want to have a bit more involvement [in this area] you can certainly email us and just follow up to say, 'I'm interested in a deeper conversation,' in which case we're helping to put together some focus groups with some pointed questions' so we can take a bit of a deeper conversation [to look at] themes that have emerged.'

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter