

Council set to approve Public Art Strategy for Aurora

Aurora Council has tentatively approved a new Public Art Strategy that will shape the municipality's approach to public art over the next four years.

Developed by the Town's Cultural Services Division and endorsed by Councillors at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, the strategy lays out a vision for inclusive, diverse, and site-specific public art, while outlining funding mechanisms and administrative processes.

The strategy identifies key priorities for public art, including equitable distribution across the community, transparent processes, and a commitment to showcasing artistic creativity and accessibility.

It gives a broad definition of what 'Public Art' is and provides criteria for how the artists taking part in Public Art projects will be chosen.

For example, the strategy dictates that all Public Art must be created by professional artists (with preference given to those with knowledge of Aurora's communities and histories), align with the Town's artistic values, be informed by community feedback, and be contextually relevant to the sites in which it's placed. Public spaces identified for future art installations include parks, underpasses, intersections, streetscapes, and civic facilities.

The report also outlines the various sources through which these Public Art projects will be funded—namely, Municipal Funding drawn from Aurora's Public Art Reserve, Developer Investments, and Not-for-Profit Collaborations.

Councillors praised the report for its intentions and thoroughness, with Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland stating, 'I know this is something that we've been working on for quite a few years now, so I was quite impressed with it.'

She raised some concerns about the Plan's reliance on public engagement to decide on Public Art projects, as the strategy presented to Council dictates that the public will be able to participate in choosing which annual Public Art project the Cultural Services department pitches to Council.

She stated that she might prefer to rely on the opinions of professional artists for these very subjective choices, highlighting that there are other ways to get Aurorans involved in Public Art, such as through workshops and Engage Aurora.

Cultural Services Manager Phil Rose responded, noting the importance of public involvement to this strategy.

'I would say that public engagement is the cornerstone of the Public Art Plan and we are going to make sure that we consult with the public throughout the entire project pipeline as we call it when we develop all public art projects,' he said.

Councillor Gilliland requested that staff give a high-level overview of the strategy and its related policies at a future Council meeting, to share the key points of the plan with the public in a more digestible way. Mr. Rose agreed and promised to have one prepared once the policy portion of the strategy was ready to be presented.

Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo also stated his strong support for the plan, while highlighting a major source of funding for the Public Art Reserve Fund—a by-law that states that 1% of the budget for any capital project must be allocated to the Public Art Reserve.

'I was on Council in 2010, I was part of the Official Plan Review, and I was one of the proponents for this 1%, so I'm happy to see we're doing it, I'm happy to see the fund is getting bigger, and I'm looking forward to seeing us spend that money on public art, and enhancing our community.'

Finally, Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese inquired about how the budget for these Public Art projects would be approved. Rose explained that, as is the practice in any municipality, these projects would be treated as regular capital projects.

?[Town Cultural Services] will bring forward our Public Art Plan that will recommend the amount of money we'd like to spend on public art and the types of projects we'd like to work on [for that year].?

Rose added that the first major project is already on the horizon.

?For the first official Public Art Project?we're proposing to develop in 2026 with a budget of \$100,000 that will be coming through the budget consultation process in the short term.?

By Selena Loureiro