

## Cultural Centre faces ?losing momentum? without Budget increase

Going forward without a boost in municipal support could see the Aurora Cultural Centre ?lose momentum? in the face of significant growth.

That was the message delivered to Council by Suzanne Haines, Executive Director of the Aurora Cultural Centre, this month as local lawmakers began Budget deliberations.

The Cultural Centre sought a \$11,200 increase to their municipal funding in 2026, a figure that was previously budgeted as part of the Town's Multi-Year Budget process. Inflationary boosts, however, were not part of the equation after Mayor Tom Mrakas presented a 2026 Municipal Budget with a proposed 2.2 per cent tax increase rather than the previously anticipated 2.9 per cent.

?Demand from our community for our programs continues to grow,? Haines told Council. ?Program statistics are expected to exceed previous years when recorded to year end.?

The Cultural Centre, she said, has been able to leverage the support they receive from the Town to generate revenue from elsewhere, but she added the last year has proved difficult.

?We had a difficult year-end in 2024 with a second significant year of operational deficit based on external factors and timing challenges,? she said. ?The Board manages the fiscal plans closely and required a revised Budget Plan in early 2025 given these realities, including a focused effort on a five-year Working Capital Deficit Reduction Plan.

?Town Staff were made aware of the issues caused by our deficits and worked with us throughout the year to improve collaboration and operational efficiencies, including outcomes that helped us maintain a positive cash flow. This is clearly our financial responsibility to respond to, and we've not asked for additional funding for the issue. The plan is strong and managed by the Board and staff to ensure we resolve these challenges. An excess of revenue over expenses must be budgeted to support sustainability for the organization as we continue to deliver programs to the community.?

Haines said the Centre is aware of the ?financial pressures that have been part of the budget conversation? but said their \$11,200 ask is ?critical to the organization's capacity to meet the community interests.?

?We provide a place of well-being for the community, a place to be innovative and creative, a place of dialogue, a proven outlet for social inclusion and diverse voices, a place of belonging, civic pride, and connection to each other,? she said. ?We are at the end of a four-year planning cycle where we worked with the Town to open the incredible Aurora Town Square, a place widely registered as unique in York Region and Ontario, especially the way we work together to capitalize on the skill sets of the partners to the benefit of the community. Halting momentum now for a full year will halt our ability to continue building for the community, including our plans that stimulate a creative, inclusive, and socially responsive community, helps to build a reputation for Aurora as a whole and the Cultural Centre, and leverages new revenue sources.?

A 2023 economic report, she added, ?documented \$16.3 million of economic impact leveraged from their \$1.5 million budget in the previous year ? we know that every dollar invested matters and every program we offer has significant economic impact on Aurora businesses and the community.?

When it came turn for Council to ask questions, Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo, who has served on the Aurora Cultural Centre's Board, agreed that the challenges faced by the Centre when they had to move out of the Church Street School for the duration of Aurora Town Square construction, raised much uncertainty.

But it was a journey of excitement, too, Haines added: ?While we're experiencing a working capital deficit right now, it's made of the excitement and the planning for all the programs that we wanted to bring to the Centre and the partnerships that we were

building and building and building. So that investment, while challenging now, is worth it, and we're going to work to eliminate that.?

Ward 1 Councillor Ron Weese said he was ?proud? of what the Aurora Cultural Centre brings to the local community and said the model they've developed ?is working.?

?I have just seen your organization go from all this adversity and the resilience your organization went through in order to keep afloat was amazing.? said Ward 2 Councillor Rachel Gilliland. ?We asked a lot of the Aurora Cultural Centre for the patience you went through ? not only the Town Square project, but through COVID and tightening your straps in the Budgeting.?

Mayor Mrakas, in his comments, said the municipal investment of \$600,000 will continue and the Town ?continues to invest in our community partners? to make sure they ?continue to thrive within the community.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter