



C: Cultural Services Assessment

The following assessment examines the current level of cultural activity in the Town of Milton as part of the Community Services Master Plan Update. Cultural participation, arts and cultural municipal support and delivery and key issues were evaluated through stakeholder interviews, community input, a cultural forum and the consultant’s experience in municipal cultural planning.

Appendix Contents	Page
Cultural Planning.....	2
Trends in Municipal Arts and Culture	4
State of Culture in Milton	5
Coordination in the Arts and Cultural Sector.....	7
Communicating Arts & Cultural Opportunities.....	10

Cultural Planning

Culture in the Community

Culture is recognized as one of the four main pillars of community sustainability and is as essential and distinctive as economic prosperity, social equity and environmental health. In the seminal report produced by the Government of Canada – *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places* – culture is the ‘glue’ that binds together the other three pillars, providing the sense of shared identity and purpose needed to tackle challenges together. Culture helps build social capital and contributes to a vital and vibrant community.

As evidenced in other cities and towns in Ontario, Canada and around the world, culture contributes to a prosperous future for a community. Culture contributes to innovation and entrepreneurship, helping to attract investment and a creative workforce. It builds an attractive and welcoming environment and improves community image and safety. Culture adds to the quality of life of its residents and fosters a healthy and active sense of placemaking.

Culture in a community provides a sense of self and purpose. Culture is more than performing arts centres, art galleries or heritage trails. Culture is the shared experiences of a community that builds a collective sense of identity; and the inclusion of people from many different experiences and backgrounds, voices and stories that reflect all of the community. Self-expression, inclusion and creativity are the lifeblood of a municipality.

Cultural Planning

In 2006, a federal advisory committee on the future of cities and communities, known as the Harcourt Commission, pointed to the recognition of culture as a key component of community sustainability. Since that time municipalities across Ontario, and Canada for that matter, have strategically approached the way they plan for culture. Over the last five years, there has been a significant shift in vision and understanding of culture. Municipalities started to think about and plan for the integration of cultural and heritage resources across all areas of municipal planning including economic development and downtown and neighbourhood renewal, land use planning, social services and liveability, new business development and population retention strategies.

The prevailing trend has been for municipalities to take a broader, more holistic approach to cultural planning. Cultural planning builds a shared vision and vocabulary related to culture involving the integration of arts, culture and heritage resources across all facets of planning and decision making. Recognizing the importance of cultural planning, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport (then the Ministry of Tourism and Culture) launched the Creative Communities Prosperity Fund (CCPF) in 2009 which supported municipalities and Aboriginal communities to undertake planning and provide opportunities for municipal cultural planning processes. Since this time, dozens of municipalities across Ontario have taken advantage of this fund to launch and undertake a process of cultural planning.

The essence of cultural planning is the recognition that culture is “place-based” – the belief that cultural resources of a community, its constituents and its assets make a town or city unique. Cultural planning involves and engages a wide and diverse mix of constituents from creators to participants. It connects people, groups, institutions and organizations from within the municipal administrations and across the community in order to make them part of the planning and decision making processes.

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Cultural plans have become the essential planning tool for municipalities because it integrates and embeds culture in the municipal plans and policies across departments ultimately empowering the arts and cultural sectors. Culture is not considered the afterthought or the “nice thing to have” but rather a key economic driver contributing to quality of place and community sustainability.

The outcomes of cultural plans do not necessarily result in recommendations to increase funding to the arts and cultural communities. Cultural plans outline a set of priorities and implementable initiatives that may or may not include additional funding. Cultural plans endeavour to:

- Build capacity for arts organizations, individuals and institution enabling them to become more self sufficient and self sustaining.
- Foster greater participation in arts and community events and cultural experiences. This is achieved in a number and very specific ways to individual communities. Some examples have been supporting local festivals either through direct funding, incentives or in-kind provisions. Establishing arts and cultural programs in outlying communities and neighbourhoods is another important initiative.
- Coordinate communication and information sharing that reaches all residents of the community.
- Establish arm’s length arts organizations to advocate, coordinate, manage and facilitate arts, heritage and cultural programming.
- Recognize and embrace cultural diversity in a community including youth and the elder citizens. This has often been achieved through communication, municipal marketing materials and the development of grass roots initiatives.
- Support and celebrate cultural and heritage assets including museums, places of interest (historical sites, heritage trails, cenotaphs), community and arts centres, and public libraries.
- Encourage volunteerism and officially recognize the work of volunteers.
- Develop municipal and regional cross-departmental working groups to address efficient cultural service delivery, communication and community development.
- Leverage community leaders, businesses and other assets to encourage and support cultural initiatives and capacity building.

Cultural Mapping is a time consuming yet worthy endeavour. It is a systematic approach of defining and identifying cultural services, organizations and assets as well as creative workers and organizations and GIS mapping these coordinates throughout the town. This information is essential for urban planning and policy development. Arts Milton has attempted to create a database of cultural and creative workers in the community, however, a more rigorous and comprehensive approach requires funding and resources.

Action Plans

- C1. Evaluate the most effective and beneficial approach to identify, record and classify the cultural resources (cultural mapping) in order to gain greater knowledge of Milton’s cultural community and its assets, in order to foster participation and improve cultural delivery.

Trends in Municipal Arts and Culture

Departmental Roles in Delivering Cultural Services

In Ontario municipalities, particularly cities and towns the size of Milton, arts and cultural services are typically planned, facilitated, promoted and delivered through departments with shared services such as recreation and tourism. Economic Development and Tourism, Community Services, Recreation and Community Services, Tourism, Recreation and Culture are examples of municipal departments that are responsible for culture for the community. Most departments designate a person(s) who is responsible for cultural affairs, some form cultural divisions within the department, and almost all municipal councils appoint advisory committees comprised of community members to provide vision and direction to staff and council on arts and culture matters.

Over the last five to ten years, municipalities have taken more active roles in the way arts and culture is managed, procured and delivered. Municipalities directly fund arts and cultural programs, services and events such as festivals, public art and other arts programs. Funds are distributed through grants, cultural investment programs, arts councils and other arm's length organizations to arts groups, institutions and individuals. Many municipalities directly deliver arts and culture through the ownership and management of cultural facilities including performing arts centres, museums and other cultural centres. Municipalities indirectly support the delivery of arts and culture through marketing and communication initiatives (e.g. municipal website, social media, and tourism brochures). Larger cities are often able to leverage funding through tax incentives such as the Heritage Tax Relief for property owners, the provision of reduced or below market rent of municipally-owned facilities and planning regulations such as Section 37 Agreements (a provision under the *Ontario Planning Act* that is administered by the municipalities).

Cultural Facilities and Programs

While many municipalities in Ontario have embraced cultural planning, others still continue to plan, invest and support specific cultural initiatives, programs and facilities. These "one-off" or annual investments are still important and integral to a community's cultural infrastructure. Often the development of cultural plans will coincide with the planning of specific cultural initiatives. Within the last five years, the City of Burlington and the Town of Milton opened performing arts centres – the Burlington Performing Arts Centre and Milton Centre for the Arts in 2011 and in St. Catharines, the new performing arts centre is under construction and slated for a 2015 opening. The Town of Oakville is currently planning for a new performing arts centre.

For smaller communities, performing arts centres or multi-purpose arts centres tend to be the one cultural asset that seems to be the most justifiable in terms of public expense and investment. They serve a wide and diverse range of people with a mix of professional and community performances. They serve as showpieces for a community – a symbol of cultural maturity and independence. Arts centres like the Milton Centre for the Arts offers art classes for families, children and youth and older residents as well showcases visual art in public galleries. In one facility, much of a community's arts and cultural needs can be fulfilled and encourages greater participation amongst its residents.

These facilities are typically funded by the province, the Federal Government and the municipality with corporate and private donations. Investment in performing arts centres also tends to be more attractive to local governments because of the higher potential for earned revenue on the operational side compared to a museum, for example. The Milton Centre for the Arts was funded in equal measures between the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario and Town of Milton. All private donations are currently used for operations.

Many communities across Ontario support local programmatic activities that build civic pride and engage residents. Festivals are probably best examples of these types of programs. Festivals and events are cultural outputs that reflect a community's diversity, interests and identity. They are



often connected to the unique history and traditions of a community and foster awareness and appreciation for local culture and heritage. They contribute to a strong sense of community building, place-making, quality of life, economic development and to attracting and retaining a creative workforce – all of the same values culture brings to a community. In addition to serving the needs of its local residents, cultural festivals and events are also important elements of broader tourism strategies and municipalities see direct results through its investment.

State of Culture in Milton

Milton's Cultural Investment

The primary vehicle for arts and culture delivery by the Town of Milton is the Milton Centre for the Arts (M.C.A.), a \$45 million complex that opened in 2011 with capital funding provided by the Town of Milton, the Province of Ontario and the Federal government. Owned and operated by the Town of Milton, the M.C.A. is part cultural community centre, part art gallery and part performing arts centre. The M.C.A. presents a wide range of professional performances, art exhibitions and provides space for local community groups and organizations to use and present. Some of these groups include the Milton Players, Arts Milton, Milton Concert Band and the Milton Chinese Association in addition to a host of dance studios, film clubs and local and regional high schools, colleges and universities. In addition, the Milton Public Library is a multi-faceted cultural and community asset that has been an integral part of the Milton community since 1855 and its main branch is housed within the M.C.A. As a community hub for social interaction, cultural activity, information and education, the Milton Public Library fulfills a much greater role “beyond books” through the provision of a multitude of programs, events and services.

Discussions with the Town’s Cultural Services Staff suggest that programming for the M.C.A. is challenging. Its mandate is to appeal to a broad range of constituents while the facility must be accessible in terms of content and price as it must be inclusive. The challenge is the balance between commercial fare that appeals to the greater public and productions that have limited appeal but high artistic value to “broaden the cultural horizons” of the community. While commercial productions attract a large resident audience, it is unlikely visitors from outside Milton would attend (as they could find this in other local communities). More unique programming could boost cultural tourism.

The M.C.A. advertises its annual programming through its seasonal brochure, website, Town of Milton event calendar, local media, and social media. The M.C.A. and the Town of Milton do not promote or advertise non-Town or non-Centre events. In addition to its investment in the M.C.A., the Town of Milton (through Culture Services) contributes annual grants to Arts Milton (\$20,000 per annum) to manage Culture Days and to present four small outdoor concerts per year, as well as to serve as a cultural advisory body. Through grants to Arts Milton, Culture Days enjoyed tremendous success in its inaugural year and in the years since. Culture Days is a community-wide three day cultural event which celebrates creativity. Free to the public, Culture Days engages a wide array of artists, musicians, dancers, poets and magicians in demonstrations, performances and classes.

The Milton Community Fund Grant Program supports not-for-profit organizations and individuals whose initiatives “add to the quality of life within the community or enhance the image of the Town.” In 2014, \$334,000 of funding went to various recreational, artistic and cultural programs as well as capital improvement projects and to individuals. Of the total amount of grants provided in 2014, \$66,600 was allocated to arts and cultural activities.

The total annual Town of Milton investment in arts and culture is \$624,537, equating to about \$6.00 per capita (based on year 2014 figures). This includes \$604,537 of net operating expense for the Milton Centre for the Arts and the \$20,000 grant to Arts Milton. The \$38,600 for cultural

programming from the Community Fund is not reflected in this total. Generally speaking, Milton's per capita arts and culture spending is on the lower end of the spectrum among municipalities making a conscious effort to invest in their arts and cultural systems.

Furthermore, the Town of Milton's per capita cultural investment is primarily concentrated in one venue. Although the M.C.A. programs a broad mix of both professional and community events, residents might be better served with a more diversified funding stream to reach those constituents who do not participate in the activities at the M.C.A. Funding could be distributed to organizations, community groups and individuals who in turn could deliver programs and services in community centres, seniors residences, churches and mosques, and schools throughout Milton. The same way that programs such as youth drama programs, sculpture or other creative arts are offered at the M.C.A., other similar programs could take place in other community centres (e.g. the Milton Senior's Activity Centre, proposed Sherwood Community Centre, etc.) or parks, for example. Other Town- owned assets such as heritage buildings could be made available to arts and cultural groups for programming.

The message is that not all residents in Milton are inclined to use one facility to fulfill all their arts and cultural needs. Regardless of the quality of programming, many residents may feel intimidated using the M.C.A. for art classes and would feel more comfortable and more apt to partake in cultural activities in their own neighbourhoods. As well programs could be more customized to meet the specific needs of a community (e.g. video game design or digital media design for teenagers). In some cases, programs could be duplicated from those offered at M.C.A. and some could be specifically created for the other communities. There is also a potential for economies of scale if a single program is developed but can be delivered in multiple locations.

The M.C.A. does a good job of providing a broad mix of programming that appeal to a wide audience. Most popular programming is live music and the most successful in terms of ticket sales featured well-known headliners such as Jesse Cook and Roch Voisine. Theatre and dance tend to be the two art forms that have the least appeal to the general market. Community and theatre groups such as the Milton Chinese Association and Milton Players, who rent space from the M.C.A., draw strong crowds for their performances but for their already committed audiences. Milton Players has historically drawn well and continues to do so, indicating that they have experienced increased ticket sales since their move to the M.C.A. The Milton Chinese Association's annual Chinese New Year's gala features traditional Chinese performance arts including folk, dance, martial arts, and singing that draws primarily the Chinese community.

Based upon experiences elsewhere, the M.C.A. may explore the following strategies (at a minimum) to boost overall appeal:

- Booking programs that appeal to a diverse audience and/or explore programs that deal with diversity to encourage a melding of audiences. When the M.C.A. rents spaces to an organization, it has no control over who is attending.
- Present children and youth-oriented theatre to attract more families and younger audiences. It is important, particularly in a new theatre market such as Milton, to build audiences; the best place to start is with children. A good example of this is Linamar at the River Run Centre in Guelph. It is dedicated to building "wisdom and understanding of life's broadness and diversity through exposure to performing arts". The program is aimed at audiences for grades 1 through 8.
- Incentifying youth audiences through discounted events again to build audiences into adulthood. The EyeGo program at the MCA, as well as other venues across the country, offers low cost shows to high school students inviting them to make their "own choices and experiment by taking in performances that capture their imaginations."

Action Plans

- C2. Investigate ways to support arts and culture programs in community centres in outlying neighbourhoods— beyond the library and Arts Centre. Many of the programs developed for the Milton Centre for the Arts could also be offered at other municipal facilities (e.g. the Milton Senior’s Activity Centre, the proposed Sherwood Community Centre, and heritage buildings) or at local high schools and places of religious assembly.
- C3. Promote cultural hubs within the Town to create greater opportunities for arts and cultural groups to interact and for residents to engage with arts and culture providers. Cultural hubs do not have to be anything more than centralizing around existing assets such as community centres or Library branches, for example. The concept is decentralization – moving away from aggregating all cultural activities in one facility and one location.
- C4. Explore opportunities to augment the number of universal arts programs, particularly for the children’s market.
- C5. Explore an enhanced and/or more equitable allocation of funding specific to the municipal arts and cultural portfolio in a manner that allows the delivery of arts and cultural services to reach a greater number of residents (i.e. the Milton Centre for the Arts presently receives over 95% of all arts and cultural expenditures, a portion that may be adjusted to achieve greater balance with other arts and culture priorities).

Coordination in the Arts and Cultural Sector

Community Cultural Providers

The Town of Milton is fortunate to have a committed group of community arts and cultural providers. In addition to these mostly volunteer organizations, many artists and musicians reside in Milton who do not necessarily make their living as cultural professionals. As well there are a number of professional artists and creative workers including designers, architects and photographers who live and work in Milton.

Among the most recognized arts organization in Milton is the Milton Players Theatre Group. This community theatre company has been a Milton cultural staple for thirty-five years performing in churches, community centres and schools. Milton Players now presents three productions each year at the Milton Centre for the Arts. A Cappella Showcase is an International Championship women's chorus group that teaches and trains women of all ages to sing and perform in a cappella harmony. Winner of numerous awards, A Cappella Showcase participates in a number of international competitions and performs locally.

In addition to these well known theatrical and musical groups, there are several other smaller choirs, artist guilds and visual arts collectives that all contribute to the arts and culture landscape in Milton. These organizations operate as not-for-profits who derive funding through provincial and federal grants, private donations and small amounts of earned income. Culturally specific community groups such as the Milton Chinese Association and the Italian Canadian Club of Milton all play a part in the Milton cultural scene presenting a variety of cultural offerings primarily for their individual communities.

Museums and historic sites in the Town are operated and managed by the Region of Halton. The Halton Region Museum, the largest of these institutions, is dedicated to collecting and conserving artifacts significant to Halton’s history and heritage. The Halton County Radial Railway, Waldie



Blacksmith Shop and the Milton Historical Society (located in the Blacksmith Shop), and the Country Heritage Park are the other museums and organizations that preserve, record and interpret Milton's historical and cultural heritage.

Arts Milton is the de facto arts umbrella organization in Milton, developed in the early 1990's to coordinate and assist with arts and cultural endeavours in the Town. Along with the Fine Arts Society of Milton (FASM), Arts Milton played a strong role in assisting the Town with the development of the Milton Centre for the Arts and while it is not a Council approved Committee, Arts Milton is the organization that the Community Services Department looks to for advice about arts matters and have appointed a staff liaison to the group. Over the years, Arts Milton has evolved into a member-based arts organization that promotes visual, literary and performance artists, as well as supporting heritage groups in Milton and the surrounding area. Its mission is to stimulate the enjoyment and understanding of the arts, enrich the cultural atmosphere in the Milton area and enhance awareness of local arts events. In addition to its role as arts promoter, advocate and supporter, Arts Milton presents two major events in the town consisting of Culture Days at the M.C.A. and Summer Days. During Culture Days, professionals, amateurs, community groups and organizations showcase and demonstrate everything from photography to performance art, culinary arts to creative writing, new media and interpretive dance to improv. Summer Days, the other event Arts Milton presents is a free series of entertainment showcasing the best of Milton talent including music, dance and theatre. Performances take place every Wednesday in July in front of Milton Town Hall.

Other town cultural events, organized by local volunteer groups, are the Milton Film Forum and the Downtown Milton Street Festival. Milton Film Forum is coordinated through the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and presents the latest independent, international and Canadian films. The Downtown Milton Street Festival, organized by the Town and downtown BIA, features over forty performing artists showcasing a broad range of music from folk, jazz, rock, blues, celtic and country. This popular summer event is ranked among the top 100 festivals in Ontario and the Town can continue to lend its expertise to build upon the successes of these events to further grow their internal sustainability while increasing cultural capacity for Milton as a whole. For example, it makes more sense to grow an existing and successful festival rather than starting one anew in order to achieve greater reach and diversity. More performances from other cultures (that represent the various communities in Milton) could be added to the Downtown Street Festival roster. As well, children's music programs could also be supplemented to the festival's roster to encourage families and acts aimed at teenagers.

Coordination and Collaboration

There is limited coordination, communication and collaboration amongst the various arts groups and organizations, individual artists and the Town of Milton. Although Arts Milton tries its best to engage and coordinate various community events, they are a small volunteer organization with a modest budget. The Town provides Arts Milton with financial support to operate, and also supports them to grow their programs and services and in their pursuit of additional funding from appropriate sources (e.g. grants, sponsors, Trillium Foundation). Also there appears to be a lack of coordination and communication between the Town of Milton and Halton Region with respect to cultural facilities and programs. A good example is cNiagara (www.cniagara.ca), which is an online resource for all cultural and community events developed by the Region Niagara with the collaboration, cooperation and input from its lower-tier municipalities.

Additionally, the Town does not have a mechanism to coordinate local arts and cultural programs and activities as there is presently no Town advisory committee or organization that can coordinate activities around Milton, or facilitate groups and organizations to work together. It is suggested that the Town work more closely with Arts Milton, Milton Public Library, FASM and the Region of Halton to undertake some of the initiatives identified in

this section. Of note, many municipalities form advisory committee for arts and culture. These committees advise council on all cultural matters and are the eyes and ears of the cultural community.

The overall intent of strengthened coordination and collaboration is to build the organizational capacity of the arts and cultural sector through community development. As alluded to in previous paragraphs regarding the Downtown Street Festival, building upon existing expertise and social capital is usually more effective than trying to start over again. As an example, the City of Brantford’s Economic Development & Tourism Department and the Business Resource Centre offer a range of capacity building workshops which include training opportunities for the cultural and not-for-profit sectors. In providing organizations with the tools to succeed, the Town fulfils a key goal of indirectly facilitating services through enabling and empowering its community to provide meaningful facilities and services to residents.

Improving coordination, collaboration and the delivery of municipal/community-based programs can also be achieved through policy development. Policies, however, are only as good as the people that enforce them. For example, the Public Art Policy within the Milton Official Plan (Section 2.8.2.45) is simply a strategic guideline as there is no mandated 1% of construction for public art policy in the Town. It is a worthwhile policy to have as it least provides public cultural amenities for the Town and paid for by the private sector.

Action Plans

- C6. Determine how the arts, cultural and heritage assets, programs and services within municipal departments as well as Halton Region could collaborate more closely to provide optimal cultural delivery to the residents of Milton.
- C7. Strengthen support provided to Arts Milton to enable this organization to operate as the official arms-length or independent arts umbrella for the Town of Milton, in order to support and advocate for arts and culture in the community to more efficiently deliver cultural services to the Town.
- C8. Investigate ways in which the organizational capacity of arts and cultural groups and institutions could be strengthened. Professional development workshops and seminars in partnership with local businesses, Halton Region or other community stakeholders could be developed and offered to arts organizations and individual artists and cultural workers.
- C9. Determine ways in which the Town could strengthen the support and expand the Downtown Milton Street Festival to be more multi-disciplinary and more multi-cultural to reflect the diversity of the community.
- C10. Engage the private sector, including local businesses, as supporters, potential funders and capacity builders of Milton’s arts and cultural sector. The corporate sector should be engaged in arts and culture beyond donations and corporate gift-giving. Lawyers, accountants and other business leaders should be approached to impart their experience and knowledge in helping not-for-profit entities run their organizations more efficiently and business-like.

Communicating Arts & Cultural Opportunities

Key Issues

There is limited means to communicate all of the cultural programs, events and services in Milton, particularly in the absence of a local radio station or daily newspaper, and thus many residents are unaware of the cultural activities in Milton. The Town's current practice for communicating arts and cultural programming is through Leisure Guide and the M.C.A. brochure. The Leisure Guide lists primarily recreational activities across the town and arts and cultural programs offered at the M.C.A. only. The M.C.A. produces a seasonal brochure for programs and events at the M.C.A. The Town does not facilitate, promote or communicate any other arts and cultural programs, services and events. The City of St. Catharines, for example has developed an online quarterly guide that lists all arts and cultural events, coordinating all arts, cultural and heritage activities and events in one resource.

Milton is home to a growing population base of new immigrants from many different cultures and backgrounds. However, many of these groups do not participate widely in cultural programs at the M.C.A. or in other "mainstream" cultural events in and around the town. Culturally specific groups such as the Milton Chinese Association, the Italian Canadian Club of Milton or the Milton Muslim Association tend to program activities within their own communities with limited integration and interaction with the rest of the community. As well, many of Milton's new residents were born and raised in nearby communities and often participate more in cultural activities in the places from which they came rather than in Milton.



Action Plans

- C11. Work with the various arts organizations, volunteer groups and festival organizers and the library to collectively build audiences for arts and cultural services.
- C12. The Town should consider a community services marketing piece oriented to the Milton Centre for the Arts and/or the broader arts and cultural community, largely leveraging cost-effective platforms such as digital and online media. As part of this strategy, the Town could also develop a micro-site to www.milton.ca that posts cultural events and programs with links to individual organizations in order for residents to stay current with the cultural activity in Milton.
- C13. Consideration should be given to how programs and events are communicated. Marketing should be tailored to specific communities (i.e. language, messaging, more inviting and inclusive events), to youth, teenagers, families and older citizens.