

Corporate Report

REPORT NUMBER 095-2025-Community Services-Recreation & Culture

DATE

PREPARED

March 3, 2025

FILE

MEETING DATE April 28, 2025

SUBJECT Culture Plan

RECOMMENDATION

WITH RESPECT to Report 095-2025-Community Services-Recreation & Culture, we recommend that the pillars and objectives of the *Create. Connect. Grow.* Culture Plan be approved;

AND THAT administration provide an annual update to Council on the Plan's implementation beginning in 2026;

AND THAT any necessary by-laws be presented to City Council for ratification.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN

The *Create. Connect. Grow.* (Zhitoon. Anakoobideh. Maachiigiih.) Culture Plan addresses several goals and objectives within the Maamawe, Growing Together Strategic Plan's pillars:

1. Maamawe – All together: Goals 1.1 and 1.2

- Pillar 4 of the Culture Plan aims to strengthen the City's relationships with Indigenous communities, leaders and organizations and enhance the integration of Indigenous perspectives in City services, programs, and places. It also acknowledges expressed needs for purpose-built space for the Indigenous Community and sector access to space and opportunities while addressing barriers to access.

2. Safety & Well-Being: Goals 2.1, 2.2, 2.3

- Pillar 2 and 4 aim to enhance public art and creative placemaking within the city, create strong neighbourhoods for connection, and facilitate accessible programming for lively community spaces.

- Pillar 3 recommends diverse opportunities for people to get involved and more integrated in the community, and to leverage arts, heritage and culture to foster increased sense of civic pride, cohesion and well-being.
- Pillar 5 builds capacity to support the arts, heritage and culture sector, enhancing awareness of City supports.

3. Growth: Goal 3.1

- Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 support the goal of celebrating and increasing awareness of cultural activities in Thunder Bay and creating attractive, dynamic environments that advance community economic development. The Culture Plan recommends the City reactivates the Baggage Building Arts Centre as a centralized hub and draw for visitors, and enhances public art and place-making to improve the community's attractiveness.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the pillars and objectives of *Create. Connect. Grow.* A Culture Plan for Thunder Bay. This plan was developed to guide future cultural development in the city. It replaces the *Inspire Thunder Bay Culture Plan*, which was adopted in 2011 and has reached the end of its lifespan. *Create. Connect. Grow.* reflects changes and anticipated trends in demographics of our community, the needs of the community and culture sector, and City priorities.

The Plan was developed with consulting agency Nordicity Group Ltd. and governed by a Steering Committee comprised of Administration from various departments, CEDC (Tourism), Indigenous Performing Arts Alliance, representatives of the Public Art Committee, Clean, Green & Beautiful Committee and Heritage Advisory Committee, and the Arts & Heritage Alliance which represents a wide range of cultural organizations and institutions.

The Plan has five strategic pillars:

1. Celebration & Promotion / Mamakadendan Dagoo Waabidehyawmin
2. Spaces & Places / Daawamagad Dagoo Achigmigad
3. Community Connection / Anakay Dinakii
4. Honouring & Supporting Indigenous Arts, Culture & Heritage / Manadendan Dagoo Wiidokadan Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin
5. Leadership & Support / Ogemahwin Dagoo Wiidookagehwin

The goals and objectives of the Culture Plan provide strategic direction for the City and community partners as we work towards achieving the many benefits of arts, heritage, and culture related to community and individual health and well-being, growth and economic development, place-making, beautification, community connection and capacity building.

Upon approval of the plan, annual workplans of actions to achieve the plan's objectives will be developed by Administration. Any related items that require Council approval will be brought forward for Council's consideration through reports and the annual budget processes. Administration will also provide annual reports on implementation of the plan beginning in 2026.

DISCUSSION

Investing in arts, culture, and heritage is in the best interest of municipalities as it brings wide-reaching benefits, including improved quality of life and social well-being, economic growth and resilience, tourism, and creative place-making. Municipal cultural planning is a strategic approach to integrating arts, culture and heritage into broader community development.

The *Create. Connect. Grow.* Culture Plan has been developed to replace the *Inspire Thunder Bay Culture Plan* that was adopted in 2011 and is now at the end of its lifespan. The community has seen significant changes in recent years, both locally and on a global scale, and a new plan was necessary to reflect the current and future needs of the community and arts, heritage and cultural sector.

The Recreation & Culture Division engaged Nordicity Group through an RFP process to conduct background research analysis, community and stakeholder engagement, and develop the draft Plan. Nordicity is an international consulting firm engaged by many Canadian municipalities and provides solutions for economic analysis, policy, strategy and business in the arts, heritage and culture sector. Nordicity partnered with Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux to guide the Plan's consultations with Indigenous communities, organizations and representatives. Their work was designed to help form the foundation for policy and program decisions, resource forecasting, and strategic investments in cultural development. Engagement included community pop-ups at local cultural spaces and events, interviews with cultural organizations and individual artists, stakeholder roundtables, and public and sector-targeted surveys.

The Plan was designed to be a living document with a primary focus of 5 years that can be updated over a 10-year span. The Plan also includes a focused review of the Baggage Building Arts Centre's operations and governance for a renewed vision aimed at reactivating the space to meet resident and visitor needs.

The Plan's vision and five key pillars (broad strategic goals) are summarized below. See Attachment A for the draft Plan. Recommended individual actions to achieve the Plan's goals and objectives have been provided to Administration as an internal document and will be considered in the development of annual workplans to achieve the Plan's objectives.

Vision

In Thunder Bay, we envision culture at the core of everyday life. Our city is recognized and celebrated as an Indigenous gathering place, and a place where diverse traditions and heritage converge to bring us all together (Maamawe). With a thriving cultural landscape that proudly celebrates its exceptional talent, heritage, and programming, Thunder Bay is a dynamic, year-round destination for both residents and visitors.

Pillar 1: Celebration & Promotion / Mamakadendan Dagoo Waabidehyawmin

This pillar aims to increase awareness of the wide-ranging cultural activities in Thunder Bay for residents and visitors. Objectives work to better integrate arts, culture and heritage into the narrative of Thunder Bay, increase knowledge and access to information, promote Thunder Bay as an arts and culture destination, and showcase and celebrate the diverse cultures in Thunder Bay.

Pillar 2: Spaces & Places / Daawamagad Dagoo Achigmigad

Public and sector engagement pointed to a need for year-round spaces that encourage and support cultural activity. This pillar aims to increase access to space, enhance public art and creative placemaking, honour and recognize Indigenous presence, history and culture, and intentionally integrate arts, culture and heritage in urban design.

Baggage Building Arts Centre Review

A key focus of Pillar 2 included a review of the Baggage Building Arts Centre, with the recommendation that it continue to be a centralized hub for arts, culture, and heritage. As part of workplans, Administration will need to do further business plan development to explore the recommendations provided through the review prior to bringing forth any recommendations to Council.

Pillar 3: Community Connection / Anakay Dinakii

The purpose of this pillar is to ensure diverse opportunities for people to get involved, interact, and feel a sense of belonging. With changing demographics and newcomer populations seeking community, this pillar aims to strengthen neighbourhoods, events, and other cultural activities to help strengthen community connection and combat social isolation.

Pillar 4: Honouring & Supporting Indigenous Art, Culture & Heritage / Manadendan Dagoo Wiidokadan Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin

Objectives of this pillar aim to follow the lead of the Indigenous community in ensuring there are dedicated spaces and opportunities to gather, practice, share, and honour culture within the city. Indigenous leaders and community members have expressed a need for supporting purpose-built space and increasing economic opportunities for Indigenous artists and organizations, while cultivating Thunder Bay into a centre for

Indigenous gathering and knowledge. The Plan recommends honouring and celebrating Indigenous culture, and enhancing public understanding of Indigenous place names, culture and traditions. The Plan includes Anishinaabemowin translations and syllabics of the title and pillars as an example of one way that the City can honour Indigenous culture through language in strategic planning efforts.

Pillar 5: Leadership & Support / Ogemahwin Dagoo Wiidookagehwin

Stakeholder consultations identified a need for capacity building, both within the sector and City. Objectives of this pillar include facilitating shared services and knowledge sharing, galvanizing financial support for the sector, enhancing awareness and transparency around City support, and fostering growth of artistic talent and creative economy. Arts, culture, and heritage can be prioritized through cross-departmental collaboration in municipal planning.

CONSULTATION

Community and stakeholder engagement included five community pop-ups at high traffic events, the Kinsmen Youth Centre and Goods & Co. Market, 44 interviews, 6 focus group roundtables, one public and one sector-targeted survey, and one open house. Consultations with the Indigenous community were guided by Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, the first Indigenous Chair for Truth and Reconciliation in Canada for Lakehead University. The City's Indigenous Relations Office and Indigenous Action Council provided valuable input regarding Indigenous cultural development and the importance of including Anishinaabemowin translations of the title and key pillars.

Several City Departments were engaged through Steering Committee involvement and/or stakeholder roundtables and interviews. These include:

- Recreation & Culture
- Parks & Open Spaces
- Indigenous Relations Office
- Development Services
- City Manager's Office (Archives)
- Community Safety & Well-Being
- Corporate Communications & Community Engagement
- Committees & Boards: Community Economic Development Commission, Tourism Thunder Bay, Public Art Committee, Heritage Advisory Committee, Clean, Green & Beautiful Committee, Anti-Racism & Equity Advisory Committee

Numerous community and cultural organizations were engaged for input, providing valuable feedback that shaped the Plan's pillars and objectives. See Attachment B for a

list of Steering Committee members and community organizations that provided input during stakeholder consultations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION

There are no immediate financial implications associated with the *Create. Connect. Grow.* Culture Plan.

Future financial implications will be forecasted through administrative review processes and brought forward to Council for consideration as required through the annual budget process and reports.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that the *Create. Connect. Grow.* Culture Plan's pillars and objectives reflect the needs of the community and provide strategic direction for the City over the next 5-10 years and should therefore be approved.

BACKGROUND

The Culture Plan Framework was presented to Council on March 4, 2024 (Memo: Presentation Request – Culture Plan Framework), including an overview of the draft vision, guiding principles and emerging core pillars based on early research analysis and community/stakeholder input.

The *Inspire Thunder Bay Culture Plan* was approved in 2011 (Report No. 2011-049 Recreation & Culture) and has guided cultural development for the City and its partners since then. As the plan is now at the end of its lifespan, a new plan is needed to reflect changing demographics, trends, and needs in the community.

REFERENCE MATERIAL ATTACHED

Attachment A – *Create. Connect. Grow.* (Draft Culture Plan)
Attachment B – Engagement List

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REPORT SIGNED AND VERIFIED BY

Leah Prentice, Acting Commissioner - Community Services

04/17/2025 (MM/DD/YEAR)