

CULTURE
CONNECTS US

**Strategic
Cultural Plan
Summary**



City of
Courtenay

Vision

Courtenay is a thriving cultural hub of creative opportunities, dedicated to cultivating vibrant and inclusive arts and culture for residents and visitors alike. Culture and history of Indigenous peoples are interwoven into a diverse community where connection and resiliency are celebrated through artistic expression and cultural exchange.



Land Acknowledgment

The City of Courtenay respectfully acknowledges that the lands to which this Strategic Cultural Plan applies are on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, the traditional keepers of this land.

The City is committed to a long-term collaboration with the K'ómoks First Nation to ensure the Strategic Cultural Plan supports Truth and Reconciliation and reflects K'ómoks First Nation values, objectives, and priorities. The City acknowledges that the Strategic Cultural Plan will need to be a living document to allow time for relationship building and meaningful engagement with K'ómoks First Nation that considers Indigenous values, practices, and priorities.

Summary

Located in the Comox Valley and on the Unceded territory of the K'ómoks First Nation, Courtenay offers a vibrant arts and culture scene with a variety of offerings to residents and visitors. **The city is the heart of arts and culture in the Comox Valley, connecting residents and communities through diverse arts and cultural experiences.** There is also significant community and City support for the cultural sector, with numerous local arts and cultural organizations, and cultural facilities that serve residents of the city, and region, as well as visitors.



The Strategic Cultural Plan creates a **framework and roadmap** to continue supporting arts and culture in Courtenay over the next 10 years. The Plan includes specific objectives and actions, informed by **extensive research and consultations**, including with diverse community members, arts and culture patrons, and local arts and culture organizations. The Plan was developed using a **5-phase approach**, involving desk research, community engagement, analysis, followed by the development of a draft strategy and recommendations for community feedback and review, and lastly, the creation of the final Strategic Cultural Plan.

Community engagement for the Strategic Cultural Plan included: an online survey which received approximately 700 responses overall, feedback from 120 community members via qualitative engagements, an arts and culture sector focus group attended by 38 participants from local arts and culture organizations, and a public drop-in engagement event in July 2023.



The team also held 24 interviews, which engaged 54 participants in total. These interviews included consultations with four core cultural services providers i.e., the Sid Williams Theatre Society, the Comox Valley Arts Gallery Society, the Comox Valley Community Arts Council, and the Courtenay and District Historical Society). In addition, 28 participants were engaged as part of four group conversations with equity priority communities (i.e., representatives of/persons with lived experience of disabilities, being unhoused, being a newcomer, and being part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community).

Before the document was finalized, feedback from an online survey which received 149 responses, four Indigenous serving community organizations, and feedback from an additional session with the core cultural service providers were incorporated.

Community engagement identified priority needs based on collective findings from engagement activities and across all individual and community group consultations for the Strategic Cultural Plan.

Findings indicate there is a need for:

- Engaging K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous peoples with cultural humility and cultural safety
- More cultural spaces, and better availability and affordability
- Developing more diverse and affordable cultural programming
- Further promotion of community partnerships and collaboration
- Increased support – financial and non-financial, local, and regional
- Further development of cultural tourism
- Attraction and training of technical cultural workers
- Development of a Public Art Policy
- Building relationships with community members including Elders

Foundational Elements

The strategic vision for Courtenay’s cultural landscape sets the stage for a dynamic and inclusive future where arts and culture play a pivotal role in community identity and resilience. To translate this vision into actionable goals, it is essential to establish the foundational elements that will guide our efforts in responding to the strategic plan’s goals, objectives, and actions. These elements represent the core priorities that must be integrated across all cultural initiatives, ensuring that our strategy is both comprehensive and sustainable.



Advance Reconciliation Across All Initiatives

A key action for Courtenay is to weave the principles of truth and reconciliation into the fabric of every cultural effort. This means ensuring that the history, culture, and contributions of the K’ómoks First Nation, MIKI’SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples are not only acknowledged but celebrated throughout the city. This commitment to reconciliation must guide the City’s actions, policies, and the way we engage with the community, making it a cornerstone of Courtenay’s cultural identity.



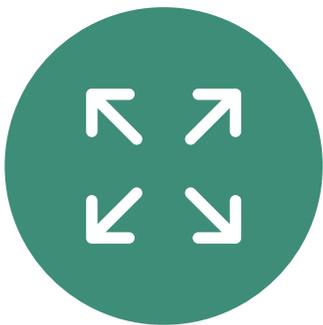
Build the Team to Drive Cultural Change

To lead Courtenay’s cultural transformation, the City must invest in building a strong, dedicated team. This involves reflecting on the findings of the benchmarking analysis and determining Courtenay’s approach to resource creation that is required to drive this ambitious cultural agenda. New cultural resources will be required either internally, externally, or a blend of both and with the right people in place, Courtenay can effectively deliver on its cultural promises, ensuring that arts and culture are accessible and thriving for all.



Elevate Investment in Arts and Culture

One of the most impactful actions the City can take is to increase its financial commitment to arts and culture. By prioritizing funding and investment, Courtenay will enable its cultural sector to grow and innovate and continue to deliver on the exceptional social, economic, and tourism impacts of the sector. This move is about more than just funding projects—it's about creating a sustainable environment where funding can be leveraged to so that arts and culture can reach its full potential.



Transform and Expand Cultural Spaces

Courtenay's cultural spaces located in the downtown are at the heart of community life, and enhancing these facilities is a critical move to achieving the vision of a cultural district.. Whether it's upgrading existing venues, creating new multi-purpose spaces, or improving accessibility, these investments will ensure that the City's cultural infrastructure meets the needs of a growing and diverse population. This move is essential for fostering a sense of place and ensuring that all residents and visitors can participate in the City's cultural life.



Lead Regional Cultural Advocacy

Courtenay must take a leadership role in advocating for arts and culture not just within its own boundaries, but across the Comox Valley. By championing regional collaboration and investment, and positioning Courtenay as a cultural leader, the City can attract new opportunities, enhance tourism, and strengthen its cultural sector. This move will require building strong partnerships and advocating for policies and investments that benefit the entire region and reflect the regional impact of Courtenay's arts and culture assets.

Courtenay Strategic Cultural Plan Goals, Objectives, and Actions

GOAL 1 Advance truth and reconciliation through arts and culture



OBJECTIVE 1.1

Recognize the role and rights of K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples as it relates to arts and culture

- ▶ **Action 1.1.1:** Commit to **ongoing relationship building** with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples to allow for the **continuous shaping of the Strategic Cultural Plan** as a living document reflective of the Indigenous history of Courtenay and the region.
- ▶ **Action 1.1.2:** Engage with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous peoples to **seek input, guidance, and consent** in cultural planning processes and co-designing protocols through **decolonized practices**.
- ▶ **Action 1.1.3:** Include Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community leaders in **cultural planning processes** to ensure the incorporation of traditional wisdom.



OBJECTIVE 1.2

Respectfully acknowledge K'ómoks territory through arts and culture

- ▶ **Action 1.2.1:** Continue to **respectfully acknowledge the land**, recognizing the Unceded traditional territories of the K'ómoks First Nation, in all City-led engagement and activities. Further this through the development of the City's Reconciliation Framework, and include corporate policy to ensure K'ómoks First Nation land acknowledgment is carried out consistently across City operations.
- ▶ **Action 1.2.2:** Support the creation of **public art installations that celebrate K'ómoks First Nation and Indigenous cultures** and reinforce the City's commitment through development of a **Public Art Policy**. These installations can serve as a visible and lasting representation of the respect and acknowledgment of the territory and should be commissioned from Indigenous artists.
- ▶ **Action 1.2.3:** Consider **renaming the Native Sons Hall** following an appropriate process that acknowledges the harms caused by the Native Sons of Canada to a number of equity deserving groups. The process should be conducted with consent from K'ómoks First Nation as part of acknowledging the Indigenous history of Courtenay.

OBJECTIVE 1.3

Increase support and investment in Indigenous arts and culture

- ▶ **Action 1.3.1:** Consider establishing dedicated **funding and grants for Indigenous artists, cultural projects, and public art** through a City-funded Arts and Culture Grant Program.
- ▶ **Action 1.3.2:** Investigate **financial investment** opportunities to support K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous organizations to **bolster their capacity for meaningful engagement** in City arts and culture initiatives such as the Strategic Cultural Plan. Further this through the development of the City's Reconciliation Framework and potential Arts and Culture Grant Program.
- ▶ **Action 1.3.3:** Support and encourage participation in **Indigenous-led cultural events and ceremonies** and explore ways to decolonize existing arts and cultural activities by integrating Indigenous arts and culture into events like Canada Day.
- ▶ **Action 1.3.4:** Foster **collaboration with Indigenous artists and creators** by commissioning or showcasing their work and exploring facilitation of networking opportunities to connect with peers, collaborators, mentors, and buyers.
- ▶ **Action 1.3.5:** Advocate for **sustainable tourism initiatives and tourism investments** that respectfully highlight and celebrate Indigenous arts and culture in collaboration with K'ómoks First Nation, MIKI'SIW Métis Association, Inuit and Urban Indigenous cultures.
- ▶ **Action 1.3.6:** Explore partnerships with Indigenous communities to co-develop arts and culture-related **policies, learning opportunities, programs, events, and workshops** that foster understanding of Indigenous histories, traditions, and values.

GOAL 2

Build community resilience through arts and culture

OBJECTIVE 2.1

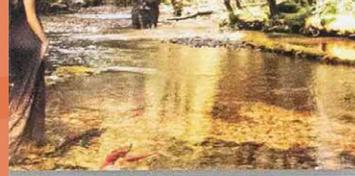
Use arts and culture to support community belonging and inclusion, where differences and similarities are celebrated

- ▶ **Action 2.1.1:** Explore establishing a **Cultural Coordinator position** at the City as a resource for arts and culture. This role will be responsible for connecting with communities, building relationships, and ensuring that arts and culture initiatives are effectively integrated and supported throughout the City.
- ▶ **Action 2.1.2:** Review the **City's current event and festival support**, as well as community activities, with a lens to enhance diverse cultural representation and celebrations (i.e. Complete a Special Events and Hosting Policy for the City of Courtenay).
- ▶ **Action 2.1.3:** Explore ways to make arts and cultural events, as well as heritage offerings more **inclusive, accessible, and representative** in collaboration with community arts groups.
- ▶ **Action 2.1.4:** Explore **collaborations with community arts groups** that serve distinct community members in creating cultural spaces and developing activities that are accessible and welcoming to everyone.

OBJECTIVE 2.2

Leverage arts and culture as a medium to engage community on complex social challenges and to support healing

- ▶ **Action 2.2.1:** Support ongoing **collaborative arts and culture projects** with local organizations that encourage dialogue, collective problem-solving, and storytelling through diverse media to address social challenges like isolation, while promoting relevant grant funding streams to support this work.



- ▶ **Action 2.2.2:** Develop **partnerships with organizations that provide arts and culture-based wellness activities to support healing and well-being**, especially for community members affected by trauma or social disparities.

OBJECTIVE 2.3

Develop cultural programming that appeals to a more diverse community

- ▶ **Action 2.3.1:** **Strengthen partnerships with equity priority groups** (Indigenous, Black and people of colour, immigrants, 2SLGBTQIA+, persons with disabilities, and unhoused community members) to support or co-create inclusive programs and events, provide space for feedback on cultural sensitivity, and identify diverse programming opportunities that reflect the needs and interests of all community members.
- ▶ **Action 2.3.2:** **Showcase the contributions of diverse individuals and local organizations** in the cultural sector through an awards program or by integrating recognition into existing community events.
- ▶ **Action 2.3.3:** Explore **partnerships with local groups and institutions**, such as North Island College and School District 71, to develop **youth arts and culture** programming both in schools and community, focusing on reducing barriers to participation.

GOAL 3

Develop more accessible and affordable cultural spaces



OBJECTIVE 3.1

Increase the availability of accessible and affordable spaces for arts and culture

- ▶ **Action 3.1.1: Conduct a facility needs assessment and accessibility audit** of City-owned arts and culture spaces as the first step in developing a Cultural Facilities Plan. This assessment will consider factors like location, transportation, and potential upgrades, with the findings directly informing the plan to guide future development of cultural spaces.
- ▶ **Action 3.1.2: Encourage other arts and cultural spaces (non City-owned) to conduct accessibility audits of their spaces.** The City can support this by communicating and promoting external grant opportunities that support facility retrofits.
- ▶ **Action 3.1.3: Advocate to the region for transit providers** to include consideration for events and programming relating to arts and culture (i.e., car and bike usage, shuttle usage, walking and parking) in service planning.
- ▶ **Action 3.1.4:** Consider exploring **digital platforms to host a Cultural Asset and Resource map** that communicates the inventory, availability, and pricing of cultural facilities, in partnership with a community lead agency.

OBJECTIVE 3.2

Prioritize initiatives and upgrades that provide enhanced and additional space for arts and culture

- ▶ **Action 3.2.1:** Complete Facility Feasibility / Needs Assessments to **look at how existing City-owned arts and culture facilities can be modified to meet**

emerging community needs and support the **cultural district in the downtown area** where existing cultural assets are located (including spaces for live performance, multi-disciplinary, rehearsal, and creation spaces). These efforts should be integrated into a Cultural Facilities Plan to align with the City's long-term cultural infrastructure strategy.

- ▶ **Action 3.2.2:** Develop a **Cultural Facilities Plan** with short, medium and long term priorities, leveraging relevant feedback collected and analysis undertaken in the Strategic Cultural Plan project including the Cultural Facilities Options Analysis.
- ▶ **Action 3.2.3:** Work with partners to **promote grant opportunities**, such as the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund, for both City and non-City-owned cultural organizations to fund renovations, specialized equipment, and feasibility studies.
- ▶ **Action 3.2.4: Advocate to the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD)** regarding regional funding to support future capital arts and culture projects that demonstrate regional impact.
- ▶ **Action 3.2.5: Develop policy to include arts and cultural facilities and amenities as eligible to receive development related funding** including, but not limited to, Amenity Cost Charges. These funds could be directed toward projects identified in the Cultural Facilities Plan. These tools provide a funding mechanism to ensure that the increased demand on community amenities such as arts and cultural services is accommodated as the community grows, as well as provides for street improvement amenity features that can assist in the unique feeling and community practice of place-making at the neighbourhood scale.

GOAL 4 Bolster community arts



OBJECTIVE 4.1

Support the capacity building of community-led arts and culture organizations

- ▶ **Action 4.1.1: Continue supporting core cultural service providers** (i.e., Comox Valley Art Gallery, the Courtenay and District Museum, the Sid Williams Civic Theatre, and the Comox Valley Community Arts Council) to ensure continuity and ability to meet their full potential as cultural anchors in the community.
- ▶ **Action 4.1.2:** Leverage the City's relationship with Comox Valley Community Arts Council to support organizational capacity building in the sector through its **training and professional development initiatives**.
- ▶ **Action 4.1.3:** Consider establishing a **City-funded Arts and Culture Grant Program** to support community-led events, initiatives, and organizational capacity building. This grant program would be the primary mechanism for providing financial resources to local arts organizations, community groups, and Indigenous artists.
- ▶ **Action 4.1.4:** Explore establishing a **dedicated Cultural Coordinator role in the City** to act as a liaison for the cultural community, support capacity building, identify and act on arts and culture opportunities, lead coordination activities, and implement the Cultural Strategic Plan.

OBJECTIVE 4.2

Break down silos and increase collaboration across the cultural sector

- ▶ **Action 4.2.1:** Work with one of the core cultural service providers to organize **regular networking events, conferences, and forums that connect organizations**, facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration, and exchange resources to strengthen community capacity throughout the region.

- ▶ **Action 4.2.2:** Consider **fostering a relationship between the cultural sector and other local institutions** – e.g. North Island College and SD71. Such a relationship can support youth engagement in arts and culture as well as access to the use of school spaces.
- ▶ **Action 4.2.3:** Investigate opportunities to **develop policies or incentives to encourage partnerships between local businesses** (i.e. Downtown Courtenay BIA), and local artists, groups, and organizations.

OBJECTIVE 4.3

Increase the awareness of community-led arts and culture events

- ▶ **Action 4.3.1:** Introduce an **annual Arts and Culture report to Council from core cultural service providers** that includes insights from community on their programs and services, as well as performance metrics, and reports on implementation of Strategic Cultural Plan.
- ▶ **Action 4.3.2:** Consider **partnering with existing non-profit organizations who are curating event calendars** locally and on Vancouver Island to support promotion and increased awareness of local events.
- ▶ **Action 4.3.3:** Consider **support for development of an awareness and marketing strategy to promote arts and culture events and offerings**, with a focus on reaching diverse groups. This strategy will also consider event promotion and collaboration with partners like the Comox Valley Community Arts Council.
- ▶ **Action 4.3.4:** Promote and raise awareness of arts and culture by **supporting community-based arts projects supported by public art policy**.
- ▶ **Action 4.3.5:** Consider creating an **annual or bi-annual process of updating Courtenay's Cultural Asset Map** in collaboration with Creative Coast to highlight Courtenay's cultural offerings and encourage regional collaboration.

GOAL 5

Support the strategic development of the cultural sector

OBJECTIVE 5.1

Build and sustain existing social and economic impact by strengthening Courtenay's professional arts and culture sector

- ▶ **Action 5.1.1: Integrate arts and culture into City's Community Economic Development Analysis and economic strategies**, including fostering closer alignment with local, regional, and national economic development initiatives by collaborating with entities like the Canada Council for the Arts (CCA) and Canadian Heritage.
- ▶ **Action 5.1.2: Review and enhance existing funding structures to support core cultural service providers** (Comox Valley Community Arts Council (CVAC), Comox Valley Art Gallery (CVAG), Sid William Theatre, and Courtenay and District Museum) by considering integrating existing funding into a dedicated stream within a City-Funded Arts and Culture Grant Program. This will ensure that these providers continue to meet the evolving needs of the community.
- ▶ **Action 5.1.3: Cultivate diverse collaborations with interest groups**, including educational systems (e.g., North Island College, School District 71), private studios, individual arts educators, and music organizations, to build a robust network that amplifies the sector's influence and supports arts education and Indigenous collaborations.
- ▶ **Action 5.1.4: Explore a regional funding and coordination approach with Comox Valley local governments and the Comox Valley Regional District** to support arts and culture. This includes establishing regional funding for core cultural partners who provide regional services, as well as community grants and capital funds for arts and culture.



OBJECTIVE 5.2

Embed arts and culture more firmly in tourism initiatives in Courtenay and the Comox Valley

- ▶ **Action 5.2.1: Collaborate with the Comox Valley Regional District and Experience Comox Valley** to highlight cultural tourism opportunities in Courtenay, aligning with their Tourism Strategy Plan.
- ▶ **Action 5.2.2: Work with local organizations** (e.g., Comox Valley Community Arts Council, Experience Comox Valley) to develop a **marketing and outreach strategy** for events and programs and to promote the City and Comox Valley as a cultural tourism destination. Leverage Experience Comox Valley's annual Destination Plan.
- ▶ **Action 5.2.3: Create a Working Group to develop a sustainable vision and action plan for nightlife** in Courtenay and advocate for the nighttime economy, potentially leveraging the existing Comox Valley Tourism Advisory Committee or Economic Development Strategy.
- ▶ **Action 5.2.4: Work with Experience Comox Valley to establish signature tourism events** during the shoulder months (outside of summer) to draw year-round visitors to Courtenay and the Comox Valley.

OBJECTIVE 5.3

Create new and/or updated policies to support the cultural sector

- ▶ **Action 5.3.1:** Develop a **Special Events and Hosting Policy or Guidelines** that support arts and cultural events including those that serve as a tourism draw for Courtenay. The policy could also outline how to create accessible materials for hosting events that would be useful to community-led and grassroots event organizers. The policy should further clarify guidelines for when the City is being a host, a facilitator a location for special events. Note, this policy should align with cultural tourism and economic development plans.
- ▶ **Action 5.3.2:** Develop a **Public Art Policy** that supports public art and mural projects in the community. The policy would outline how to prioritize commissions for local artists, as well as support the representation of Indigenous arts and culture in the community. The policy could also help foster youth engagement in community public art initiatives.
- ▶ **Action 5.3.3:** Consider reviewing the **City's Street Entertainer Program and the associated regulation bylaw**. Explore opportunities for leveraging the program for nightlife and community placemaking activities via collaboration with local businesses.
- ▶ **Action 5.3.4:** Consider establishing an **arts and culture committee** for the City to advise Council and Staff on priorities, activities, and initiatives related to arts and culture in Courtenay, including the implementation of the Strategic Cultural Plan and alignment with local tourism and economic development activities.
- ▶ **Action 5.3.5:** Include arts and culture in local area planning initiatives, with specific consideration **for identifying Downtown as an arts, culture, and heritage hub or district** in line with the OCP.



OBJECTIVE 5.4

Explore strategic ways to meet sector labour needs

- ▶ **Action 5.4.1:** Consider opportunities of **working with School District 71 and local organizations to integrate arts and culture into school curricula** to foster the interest of children and youth in the arts and cultural sector.
- ▶ **Action 5.4.2:** Support **collaborations between local organizations and educational institutions** (such as North Island College and Excel Career College) **to develop and fast-track technical and short courses related to arts and culture** including sound and lighting, stage management and crowd control related courses.
- ▶ **Action 5.4.3:** Investigate ways the City can support local arts and culture organizations to offer **volunteer, mentorship, and co-op educational opportunities** for youth and community members who are interested in developing a career in the cultural sector.
- ▶ **Action 5.4.4:** Support the approval of developments that **provide housing and workspaces for artisans and the cultural sector** in the community (similar to Tin Town). **Advance land use planning in Town Centres** where this type of use is allowed as per the OCP, and consider other tools such as pre-zoning specific areas (i.e. through the Downtown Local Area Plan) to enable the development of artist housing and workspace. This initiative can draw inspiration from successful models like Montreal and Vancouver, where affordable housing contributes to vibrant artistic communities and can also attract talent to support the cultural sector.



Conclusion

Courtenay's Strategic Cultural Plan establishes a strong framework for fostering a vibrant, inclusive cultural sector through five key focus areas: advancing truth and reconciliation, building community resilience, developing accessible cultural spaces, bolstering community arts, and supporting sector growth. The plan, built on extensive community input, outlines the economic, social, and tourism benefits of investing in arts and culture, with regional collaboration essential to its success. The Strategic Cultural Plan sets the stage for the next decade of work and investment in arts and culture in Courtenay. It remains a living document which will evolve into the future with guidance from Indigenous peoples and communities through long-term and meaningful relationships.

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Courtenay**