

CONNECTIONS & EXCHANGES ANNUAL UPDATE

Recommendation			
That the June 16, 2025, Community Services report CS02840, be received for information.			
Requested Action		Information only	
ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle		ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals	
CONNECTED This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.		Healthy City Urban Places Regional Prosperity Climate Resilience	
City Plan Values	BELONG. THRIVE. PRESERVE. CREATE.		
City Plan Big City Move(s)	A Community of Communities A Rebuildable City Inclusive and Compassionate	Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities	Arts and Culture
Corporate Business Plan	Serving Edmontonians		
Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage in Edmonton (2019-2029) 		
Related Council Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • February 17, 2021, Edmonton Arts Council report CR_6593, Progress on Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage in Edmonton - 2021 Annual Update • January 17, 2022, Edmonton Heritage Council Report EXT00883, 2020-2021 Edmonton Heritage Council Annual Report and Update • May 30, 2022, Edmonton Arts Council report EXT00901, Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage Annual Update • May 31, 2023, Edmonton Arts Council Report EXT01830, Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage Annual Update • November 7, 2023, Edmonton Heritage Council Report EXT02106, Annual 		

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- Report to City Council
- June 17, 2024, Edmonton Arts Council report EXT02503, Progress on Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts & Heritage - 2024 Annual Update

Executive Summary

- City Council has requested an annual update on *Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage (2019-2029)* (the Plan).
- The Plan is a collective effort to infuse culture, arts and heritage into every aspect of civic fabric, support cultural makers and interpreters and grow Edmonton's arts and heritage audiences.
- The Edmonton Arts Council, Edmonton Heritage Council and Arts Habitat Edmonton, as the three organizations responsible for the implementation of the plan, have worked together to provide the 2024 status updates.
- The Plan includes three Ambitions, eight Aims and 55 Actions with the various Actions assigned to each organization.
- Of the 55 Actions, one is complete, 29 are ongoing, 15 are in progress, three are not yet started and seven of the shared Actions are a mix of ongoing, in progress or not yet started (Attachment 2.)
- Detailed annual reports are provided by each of the three organizations as part of this report.

REPORT

Background

Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage in Edmonton was approved by City Council in October 2018. The plan came into effect in 2019 and replaced *The Art of Living* plan (2008-2018). It is the result of a collective effort between the Edmonton Arts Council, Edmonton Heritage Council and Arts Habitat Edmonton. The objective of *Connections & Exchanges* is to infuse culture, arts and heritage into every aspect of civic fabric, support cultural makers and interpreters and grow Edmonton's arts and heritage audiences.

Previously, the Edmonton Arts Council and the Edmonton Heritage Council provided separate annual updates to City Council. Following discussions during the June 17, 2024 Community and Public Services Committee meeting where report EXT02503 Progress on Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage -2024 Annual Update was received for information, Administration verbally committed to returning to Council with an annual update that covered all three organizations, rather than have each organization report separately at different times of year. Each organization has a specific focus within arts, culture and/or heritage:

- The Edmonton Arts Council supports, promotes and inspires the arts in the city through investment in artists, organizations, festivals and the greater arts community. On behalf of the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Arts Council administers grants for artists and arts organizations, develops city-wide animation and arts programming, operates the Edmonton Arts Council Shop & Services on Churchill Square and oversees special projects such as artist

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residencies and the Poet Laureate. In addition, the organization manages the City's Public Art Collection.

- The Edmonton Heritage Council connects people to the stories of Edmonton by helping Edmontonians research, preserve, interpret and advocate for the city's heritage. On behalf of the City of Edmonton, the Edmonton Heritage Council administers heritage grant funding, including the Heritage Community Investment Program, Funding Indigenous Resurgence Grants and the Edmonton City as Museum Project.
- Arts Habitat Edmonton is a social enterprise responsible for identifying, managing and building appropriate and accessible spaces for the arts in Edmonton. The organization also manages the Ortona Armoury (ArtsHub Ortona) on behalf of the City of Edmonton.

Additional details about each organization including an overview of governance structures, mandates, programs, initiatives and annual budget can be found in Attachment 1 - Overview of Organizations Leading Connections & Exchanges.

Overview - Connections & Exchanges: A 10-Year Plan to Transform Arts and Heritage in Edmonton

Connections & Exchanges promotes Edmonton as an arts, heritage and cultural centre and encourages recreational, cultural, artistic and entertainment opportunities for all residents. The plan continues to guide the development of Edmonton's arts and heritage landscape through the next five years.

The plan is presented in four books. The first book offers an overview of the plan. The three remaining books include the three Ambitions, eight Aims and 55 Actions with the various Actions assigned to each organization. An overview of the status (complete, ongoing, in progress, not yet started) for each of the 55 Actions is included in Attachment 2 - 2024 Status Markers for Connections & Exchanges Actions. Of the 55 Actions, one is complete, 29 are ongoing, 15 are in progress, three are not yet started and seven of the shared Actions are a mix of ongoing, in progress or not yet started.

A more detailed 2024 update for each organization's progress on Connections & Exchanges can be found within:

- Attachment 3 - Edmonton Arts Council - 2024 Update on Connections & Exchanges
- Attachment 4 - Edmonton Heritage Council - 2024 Update on Connections & Exchanges
- Attachment 5 - Arts Habitat Edmonton - 2024 Update on Connections & Exchanges

The Edmonton Arts Council, Edmonton Heritage Council and Arts Habitat Edmonton collaborate through Connections and Exchanges to support the arts and heritage communities in Edmonton. The organizations are actively engaged in strategic planning for the future, with a focus on sustainability, advocacy and expanding outreach to diverse communities. The information provided in Attachment 6 - Current State of Edmonton's Arts and Heritage Sector, underscores the positive economic, social and cultural impact of investment in the arts and heritage sectors within Edmonton. The organizations, however, are hearing concerns regarding financial instability within the sectors due to prevailing economic pressures and funding uncertainties. Despite these

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challenges, robust community engagement and active participation in arts, culture and heritage activities are reported by all three organizations.

Budget/Financial Implications

At this time, no additional funds are being requested to continue to implement the next two years of the *Connections & Exchanges* plan (2025-2026). As part of the 2027-2030 budget cycle process, the organizations will submit their budget requirements to support their programs, including the *Connections and Exchanges* plan.

The Edmonton Arts Council and the Edmonton Heritage Council are part of the Agencies, Boards and Commissions that are required to provide outcome reporting to Council through the Municipal Funding Arrangements process in the fall. Arts Habitat Edmonton provides annual audited financial statements to Administration for review and is determined to be in good standing.

Community Insight

Edmonton Arts Council

Recent Edmonton Arts Council community surveys¹ indicate that Edmontonians highly value the arts. From the Edmonton Arts Council's 2024 public survey, 85 per cent said that arts and cultural experiences help bring people from diverse backgrounds together as a community. They also agreed that participating in arts and cultural activities builds a shared sense of community identity (85 per cent), and that arts and culture activities are important to a community's economic well-being (81 per cent).

Artists and arts organizations agree with the public sentiment. Ninety-seven per cent of organizations and 83 per cent of artists feel that Edmonton has great arts and cultural experiences. The community also responds positively about their experiences with the Edmonton Arts Council as 98 per cent of organizations and 93 per cent of artists feel that Edmonton Arts Council's programs create a positive impact and great value to the arts community. Ninety-three per cent of organizations and 84 per cent of artists are satisfied with their experience with the Edmonton Arts Council overall (2025 survey). From the 2024 public survey, 61 per cent of Edmontonians are aware of Edmonton Arts Council programs and 23 per cent have attended or participated in Edmonton Arts Council programs in the past year.

Artists and arts organizations see a need for more support for the arts, however. In addition to Canada Council for the Arts survey findings², in which respondents from Alberta reported that additional public funding is critical, recent research by Hill Strategies³ indicated that Alberta ranked 5th lowest of all provinces in per-capita funding for the arts (ranking higher only than Atlantic provinces). Furthermore, Edmonton Arts Council surveys found that 67 per cent of organizations and 50 per cent of artists agreed that the City government is actively supporting the development of the arts and culture sector in Edmonton. This figure has steadily declined since 2022 when 79 per cent of organizations and 57 per cent of artists agreed. The Edmonton Arts

¹ <https://www.edmontonarts.ca/about/research-impact>

² <https://canadacouncil.ca/research/research-library/2024/12/arts-community-pulse-survey>

³ <https://statsinsights.hillstrategies.com/p/government-spending-canada-2023>

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Council interprets these results to indicate that artists and organizations are seeing static funding levels despite their requests for increases, and increased demand for Edmonton Arts Council grant programs is leading to declining success rates. A funding increase will allow the Edmonton Arts Council to increase investment in organizations and meet the growing demand for arts experiences and community engagement in Edmonton.

Edmonton Heritage Council

In early 2024, Edmonton Heritage Council conducted a survey of Heritage Practitioners. The survey demonstrated that 87 per cent of those who engaged with the Heritage Community Investment program were satisfied or very satisfied with the program, while 76 per cent of those who engaged with Edmonton City as Museum Project were satisfied with the program. The top three reported concerns for heritage organizations were financial resources (63 per cent), succession planning (54 per cent) and adequate staffing (50 per cent).

Edmonton Heritage Council met with Operational Grant recipients to learn more about the state of the sector and their respective organizations. This meeting resulted in a review of the Edmonton Heritage Council Operational Grants as part of the 2025 work plan. The improvements for the Operational Grants will also consider the feedback provided in the practitioner's survey.

Surveys are provided to participants after each event and program. The data collected helps to inform program development and how improvements can be made to Edmonton Heritage Council programs.

In early 2024, Edmonton Heritage Council engaged Hatlie Group to conduct a review of the Edmonton City as Museum Project. After meeting with key collaborators and staff, Hatlie Group's report proposed key strategic priorities for the Edmonton City as Museum Project programming which has informed the work of Edmonton City as Museum Project staff.

Arts Habitat Edmonton

In 2024, a large portion of Arts Habitat Edmonton's community engagement work focused on the development of Edmonton's first Cultural Infrastructure Plan in consultation with the Plan's Advisory Committee. This committee includes individuals with expertise from diverse backgrounds such as local business associations, cultural centres, museums, science centres, performing arts centres, art administrations, artists, Indigenous artists and leaders and urban developers. Throughout the year, Arts Habitat Edmonton shared findings from the initial research phase with the Committee and other *Connections and Exchanges* partners to establish understanding, gather feedback and inform the next phase of engagement.

The next phase of engagement aims to build upon existing knowledge rather than revisiting previously addressed questions. The focus is on delving deeper into identified gaps, determining cultural infrastructure needs in underserved areas of the city and ensuring that the Edmonton Cultural Infrastructure Plan serves as a functional document to guide future decision-making. To this end, Arts Habitat Edmonton is using various engagement methods, including ward-based small group discussions to gather diverse perspectives and insights, individual interviews to

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explore specific topics and leverage relevant expertise and lived experience, and a survey to reach a wider audience and provide anonymity for contested topics. The information from previous research and current engagement will be used to substantiate priorities for the plan.

As art space advocates and advisors, Arts Habitat Edmonton consulted with several organizations in 2024, providing tailored support as the organizations navigated challenges with their facilities, operational needs and future opportunities. Additionally, Arts Habitat Edmonton continues to connect with a number of professional artists, not-for-profit professional arts organizations, patrons and supporters of the arts, including its space licensees. These diverse connections inform its facility operations and Arts Habitat Edmonton's strategic priorities.

GBA+

Connections & Exchanges: Council's 10-Year Plan to transform Arts and Heritage in Edmonton identifies these organizations as the non-profit entities mandated to work with the arts, culture and heritage communities with the vision to promote Edmonton as an arts, heritage and cultural centre and encourage recreational, cultural, artistic and entertainment opportunities for all residents.

Each organization engages with a diverse range of artists, cultural and heritage practitioners, and organizations, striving for inclusivity across all genders, ages, races, ethnicities, religions and abilities. Guided by the Connections & Exchanges plan, there is a focus on contributing to placemaking through diverse cultural elements (landscape, history, language, etc.), promoting inclusive practices and supporting Indigenous cultural revitalization and participation.

Environment and Climate Review

This report was reviewed for environment and climate risks. Based on the review completed no significant interactions with the City's environmental and climate goals were identified within the scope of this report.

Attachments

1. Organizational Overview
2. 2024 Status Updates for Connections & Exchanges
3. Edmonton Arts Council - 2024 Connections & Exchanges Update
4. Edmonton Heritage Council - 2024 Connections & Exchanges Update
5. Arts Habitat Edmonton - 2024 Connections & Exchanges Update
6. Current State of Edmonton's Arts and Heritage Sector