

ACTION 25: *Implement a Community Support Officer Pilot Project by hiring 10 Community Support Officers. Review the project to be re-evaluated after one year. Estimated Investment: \$1 million*

Principle 3: Foster Authentic, Attractive Communities

Our third sustainability principle is to allocate funding that fosters authentic, attractive communities with a strong sense of stewardship of place.

Arts and Culture

The HRM has a history of making grand statements about the importance of arts, but provides little funding to actually support the creative sector's ability to thrive and grow. HRM's funding for the arts has decreased dramatically in 2012–13. The administrative budget for the Cultural Affairs office was eliminated, and the business plan for the department does not identify a single priority, objective or program for culture and arts beyond continued event funding and public art projects.

In 2006, HRM's Cultural Plan became part of the municipal functional plan processes. The 2006 document identified 'Arts' was identified as one of the seven pillars of the plan. The plan was accepted but never adopted as binding policy. At the time, the plan was considered by many both inside and outside the cultural community as grandiose and unachievable. Unfortunately, these critics were right. In the seven years since the plan was written, only Public Art has been clearly identified as a priority and resources put behind it. Nevertheless the Cultural Plan's Policy contains the laudable goal that "*HRM will strive to maintain a competitive level of per capita spending on Culture to position the Region in the top tier of comparable municipal investment across Canada*".⁸⁶

In reality, HRM provides the worst per-capita arts funding in the country for a municipality of its comparable size. A recent study for the City of Hamilton found Halifax provided only \$0.53 compared to the national average of \$5.35.⁸⁷

HRM Council and staff point to community grants (funding for community capacity building, such as sand castle competitions) and the Special Event fund (funding from a hotel room tax designed to support tourism initiatives) as examples of types of funding for arts. Yet, most all other municipalities offer comparable programs as well as offering dedicated arts funding.

HRM has, effectively, no existing professional arts programming that can be compared with any other medium-sized municipality in Canada. It is time to remedy this.

Current Programs

Current programs offered by the HRM range from specific grants to facilitative programming and, organizing public events and providing other kinds of supports. All these initiatives are marked by their insignificant funding base or ambiguity for what is included or excluded in support of art and culture. These programs are:

- **Open Projects:** HRM invites artists, designers, musicians, performers, curators and members of the public to submit temporary public art proposals.
- **Residency Initiatives:** HRM both provides grants to artist residencies or qualified arts organizations, and also hosts a 10 week residency in the Gatekeeper’s Lodge of Point Pleasant Park with a \$5000 artist fee.
- **Public Art:** HRM supports qualified professional artists and artist-led collaborative groups to participate in a design process for the inclusion of public art in public spaces, such as the Thomas Raddall and new central Library.
- **Tunes at Noon:** Each summer Tunes at Noon features Nova Scotian performers from a wide range of musical genres for a free, summer lunchtime concert series in Grand Parade.
- **Community Grants:** This program is a centralized program that provides annual cash grants to registered non-profit organizations and charities. Two types of grants exist: project grants of up to \$5,000 and capital grants of up to \$25,000. The program does not provide for annual operating assistance.

Moving Forward

ACTION 26: *Increase per capita arts funding to at least the national average (\$5.71) to reach a competitive level of per capita spending on culture in Canada. Estimated Investment: \$2.2 million for the first year, raising that to a target of \$3 million by year three, in order to achieve “top tier” investment in arts.*

ACTION 27: *To assist in attaining this funding level, the HRM should impose a mandatory Public Art Project Tax of 1% on every public capital development and HRM will continue to encourage private developers to do the same. Estimated Revenue: Unknown.*

The \$2.2 million will be used to implement the following actions:

Independent Arts Council: The HRM needs an independent Council to determine funding to arts and cultural organizations, and to provide advice on cultural policy development following other municipalities' best practices. The Council would be composed of artists, producers, curators, and promoters.

ACTION 28: *Immediately create an Arts Advisory Committee, with a goal to create an independent Arts Council in a year, which will include artists, producers, curators and promoters.*

Re-establish the Cultural Affairs Division for the HRM: Cultural Affairs division staff will engage and work in partnership with arts organizations and community groups to achieve their goals, rather than impose a vision and process from the top down. Current programs for open projects & public art, would be administered by this Cultural Affairs division. Cultural Affairs would also administer future, peer-reviewed arts-funding programs. The Cultural Affairs division will take over HRM's responsibility for cultural venues, both current and future, and directly owned or operated by partners. This would include venues such as Alderney Landing, Bicentennial Theatre, and Neptune Theatre, and possible future projects.

ACTION 29: *Re-establish the Cultural Affairs division for the HRM.*

Peer-Reviewed Project Grants: Funding needs to be made available to not-for-profit arts organizations and individual artists and arts administrators working in all artistic disciplines. All funding applications will be peer assessed, and the existence of high professional standards, community and audience support, and financial viability are key considerations in arriving at grant recommendations.

ACTION 30: *Develop additional peer-reviewed grant programs to makers, presenters, and organizations.*

Operational Grants: In addition to project grants, operating funding will be the most significant component of the Cultural Affairs budget.

ACTION 31: *Fund multi-year operating to institutional presenters and annual events intended to increase funding to national averages.*

Re-subscribe to the Creative City Network of Canada: Being a member of the Creative City Network of Canada⁸⁸ is an integral part of ensuring municipal staff learn and adopt best practices from the successes and failures experienced by other municipalities. Artists and municipal cultural staff will also be encouraged to suggest opportunities wherein other departments might incorporate art in their projects or procedures: design of clever advertising, performances or artworks in unusual or unexpected spaces (Metro Transit Ferry Service has successfully commissioned and produced live, on-site, theatre performances).

ACTION 32: *Re-subscribe to the Creative City Network of Canada.*

Create new purpose built performance venues: HRM has almost no purpose-built performance venues. The Rebecca Cohn is aging and by modern acoustical standards is woefully inadequate for symphonic and opera performance. Its location on the Dalhousie campus severely limits any economic benefits that might be generated for other businesses by a performing arts centre, were it located in the downtown. The Spatz Theatre (designed with almost no input from the arts community) is equally disconnected from local businesses, and its floor is unusable by professional dancers. The Dunn and the Neptune Studio come with exorbitant administrative and rental costs that make them largely unavailable to independent theatre artists.

ACTION 33: *Partner with federal and provincial governments to create purpose-built, acoustically designed performance venues, including a symphony/opera/ballet house with a proper floor for dancers; and a fully adaptable black-box theatre space of 300 seats.*

ACTION 34: *Make investment in community-owned and based cultural infrastructure a priority. The Bloomfield Centre is a good example where in revenue generated by the sales or rental of this space will be reinvested into the redevelopment, to enable arts and other community non-profits to create appropriate and affordable spaces.*

It is also important to encourage local businesses or community groups to adopt a public art work, enabling them to learn about and participate in its maintenance. This would save maintenance dollars and create pride of place. Better interpretation of public art and art institutions and practices

would encourage the public to engage and participate; generating an engaged, active and safe community.

ACTION 35: *Encourage ownership of local cultural assets.*

Public Libraries

The Halifax Public Library system is very impressive in many ways. The Halifax Regional Library (HPL) Board supervises a system of 14 branches, a website, books by mail and home delivery services, provided by 403 employees. HPL has 2.3 million in-person annual visits and 1.4 million on-line annual visits. In 2011–12, library users logged over 250,000 hours on outlet computers and logged into the wifi network 90,000 times. The HPL website has more than 5000 hits per day. HPL meeting spaces are available in many library outlets and provide a popular community resource, with 4,145 bookings by non-profit and for-profit groups. Currently 46% of HRM residents have a library card; this compares favourably to the national average of 44%.⁸⁹

HPL has very successful community and volunteer involvement. Over 20,500 volunteer hours are donated by adults and youth annually. Following a community-led model, the library has formed partnerships with over 300 community groups fostering learning, community development and engagement. Programs for all ages are delivered, including children’s story times, school visits, teen programs, computer learning, book clubs, heritage events, public lectures, income tax clinics, and seniors and family drop-ins. Over 125,000 residents attended more than 5,300 programs in 2011–12.⁹⁰

The people of Halifax strongly approve of the role of the Library “as a cultural hub, community meeting place and resource for culture and learning”. Over the last five years circulation has increased by 4.75%, program attendance by 16% and overall transaction volume by 13%. Residents of HRM want more hours of service at existing locations and system expansion and new services.⁹¹

Despite these wonderful statistics, the approved HRM 2012–13 budget provides only for a minimal 0.4% increase in funding for the regional library system.⁹²

The Library continues to experience consistent demand for increased open hours in its rural branches. For example, the rural communities of Musquodoboit Harbour, Sheet Harbour and Hubbards continue to request expanded hours to match demand. Currently, the rural branches are only open half of the hours of service of suburban and urban branches. Yet, HRM