



REPORT TO: Chair and Members of the
Integrated Community Planning Committee

SUBJECT: Niagara Culture Plan
Creative Niagara: Economy, Places, People, Identity

RECOMMENDATIONS

That this Committee recommend to Regional Council:

1. That the Niagara Culture Plan, attached as Appendix A be approved.
2. That staff prepare a report outlining implementation of the approved Plan.
3. That the Plan, and its adoption, be communicated widely (including, but not limited to circulation to local municipalities, cultural organizations, agencies of the Region, and chambers of commerce).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The completion of the Niagara Culture Plan is the result of a long process involving extensive and thorough public consultation. The completion fulfills a Council Business Plan Strategic Action under the Objective of Community and Social Well-being and positions the Region as a leader in cultural planning as one of the first upper-tier municipalities to undertake a Culture Plan of this type. Based on the principles of sustainability, the Niagara Culture Plan sets out Actions under four Strategic Directions that will serve Niagara over the long-term, these are Economy, Places, People and Identity. Once approved by Council, initial implementation will include communicating the Plan widely, reviewing the Terms of Reference and membership of the Culture Committee, and preparing a staff report to outline implementation and provide an estimate of costs.

Previous consultations have indicated that the cultural sector in Niagara is fragmented by not only location, but also by areas within the sector (e.g. music, digital arts, heritage, recreation, and ethnicity). The creation and adoption of the Niagara Culture Plan is a bold and needed step by Niagara Region Council to recognize the impact of culture on our community and economy, and it should be communicated and celebrated far and wide. It is also yet another mechanism to form partnerships with groups and organizations within our community to work together on a common purpose.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The approval of the Niagara Culture Plan may have financial considerations in addition to the \$100,000 already allocated in the budget for culture. Prior to any additional requests for resources, however, it is important to ensure that Council agrees to the strategic directions and actions listed in this long-term framework.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with the Niagara Culture Plan that has been created on their behalf to fulfill a Strategic Action in the Council Business Plan.

REPORT

Background

The Culture Committee was created as an advisory body of Council in late 2005. The Terms of Reference for the Committee included three things: to advise Council how to enhance culture in Niagara, to advocate for culture, and create a Cultural Policy. Since the time of its creation, the Culture Committee (formerly called the Arts, Culture and Heritage Committee) has been actively working on moving toward the creation of a Culture Plan for Niagara, while supporting current projects such as the Niagara tartan used by the NRPS Pipe Bands, the artsVest Niagara Public Art Program, the designation of the Welland Canal, and Bi-centennial of the War of 1812.

Prior to hiring a consultant to undertake the Niagara Culture Plan in 2008, members of the Culture Committee formed working groups to gather information on Niagara's cultural assets and provide background to the cultural policy work. Council was provided with a presentation regarding the cultural assets in November 2007 to demonstrate the number of assets and dramatic effect culture has on the Niagara community and economy. It was learned through this process that Niagara has an existing cultural asset base that is robust, yet underutilized that can be coordinated and capitalized for even greater economic benefit. Several workshops and meetings were held to provide background to the Culture Plan that served to help define the request for proposals to hire a consultant to conduct the Plan process (DPD 12-2008). The consultant hired for this project was a team led by AuthentiCity.

The 2007-2011 Council Business Plan identified the development of a Niagara Culture Plan as a Strategic Action that would help accomplish the Strategic Objective of Community and Social Well-being.

Plan Process

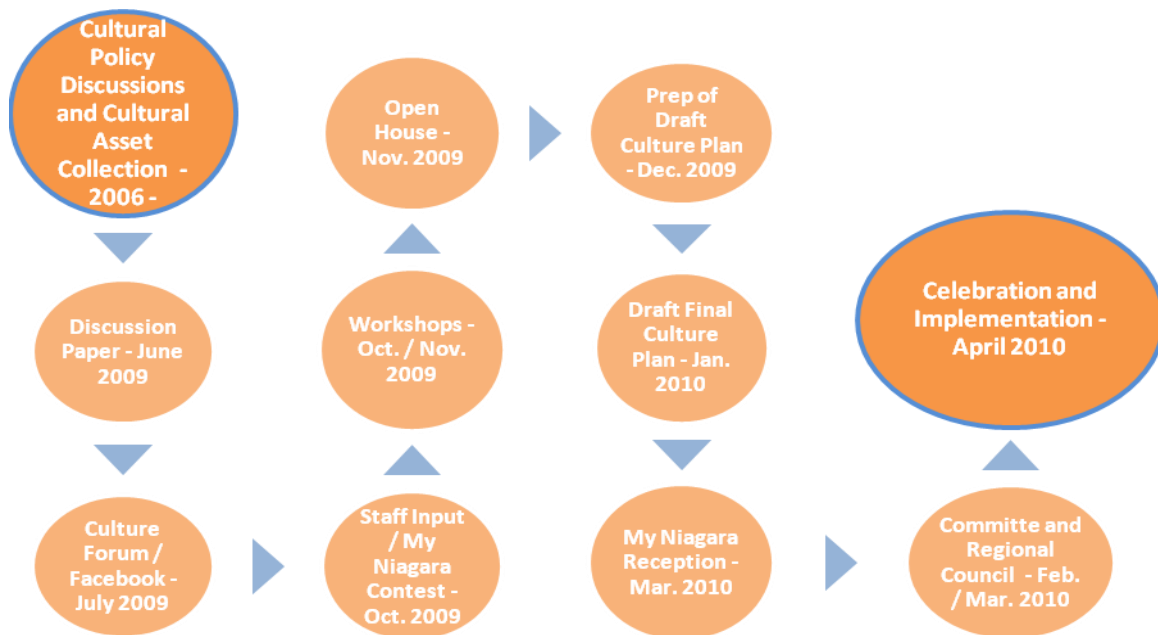
A fundamental principle used in the creation of the Culture Plan was the need to engage the community in creating a Plan that would meet the needs of not only the Region, but the wider community and our potential partners who will assist in its implementation.

A Culture Plan Advisory Committee, made up of Regional and local politicians, and members of the cultural, business and social sectors, was established in early 2009 to oversee the Plan process. An Internal Staff Working Group with representation from all departments was also created to review and provide input to the Culture Plan.

Significant engagement events in the process of the Plan included the Culture Forum held in July, sectoral workshops held in October/November and the Open House in November. Each successive event further refined the ideas and led to the Strategic Directions and Actions listed in the Culture Plan. The Culture Committee, Culture Plan Advisory Committee and Internal Working Group met in January and the Plan has been endorsed.

A contest, entitled My Niagara, was created to further engage resident's participation by asking for photos or videos of what Niagara looks like to them. This contest offered an avenue to engage people who might not otherwise be involved in a planning process through the use of the website and Niagara Culture Facebook page. The images submitted as part of the contest will be displayed in Regional Headquarters, a ceremony is being planned, and the photos are being used to decorate the pages of the Niagara Culture Plan.

The chart below, shown in the Community Open Houses and found in Appendix II of the Plan identifies the key steps in the engagement process.



Niagara Region is one of the first upper-tier municipalities to undertake work on a Cultural Plan that attempts to integrate policies and actions and take a wider view of culture. Staff have recently been contacted by the Ministry of Culture with interest regarding using our process and discussion paper as best practices for other municipalities undertaking a Municipal Cultural Plan.

Overview of the Niagara Culture Plan

The Niagara Culture Plan is a long-term framework Plan that sets out Strategic Directions and Actions to be acted upon over the coming years. It is founded on the principles of sustainability and will be an important component of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan work that is being undertaken.

There are four Strategic Directions to the Plan that can be summarized under the following terms - Economy, Places, People and Identity. Under each of the Strategic Directions are Strategic Actions that will help in their implementation.

The Creative Economy Direction includes Actions that will assess the value of culture to the economy, develop an investment strategy, strengthen the workforce, and cultural clusters. The Creative Places Direction includes Actions that will develop policies to support cultural spaces and facilities, tools to implement them, and the inclusion of public art in Niagara. The Creative People Direction includes Actions to engage to community, promote cultural representatives in decision-making, and refine the Culture Committee. Finally, the Creative Identity Direction includes Actions to promote a shared identity, market Niagara as a cultural destination, recognize and celebrate culture, and facilitate cultural learning.

Under each Strategic Action within the Plan is some helpful information that will assist with implementation, including a description of the Action, suggested timeframe and tasks, potential partners, resources and research sources, as well as ideas for implementation done locally or otherwise.

Implementation of the Niagara Culture Plan

Prior to moving forward with implementation, it is important to ensure that Council approves the Niagara Culture Plan that has been prepared for them to ensure that they agree with the directions set forth. Approval of the Plan ensures an effective use of community and staff resources, and provides confidence in moving forward.

Once approved, there are a number of initial steps that will have to be undertaken:

- communication of the Niagara Culture Plan;
- preparation of a staff report to outline implementation and estimate costs; and
- review of the Culture Committee Terms of Reference and membership.

Previous consultations have indicated that the cultural sector in Niagara is fragmented by not only location, but also by areas within the sector (e.g. music, digital arts, heritage, recreation, and ethnicity). The creation and adoption of the Niagara Culture Plan is a bold and needed step by Niagara Region Council to recognize the impact of culture on our community and economy, and it should be communicated and celebrated far and wide. It is also yet another mechanism to form partnerships with groups and organizations within our community to work together on a common purpose.

As the Plan is strategic in nature, many of the Actions are broad and will provide guidance over a long period of time. Included under each of the Actions are some tasks that could be undertaken to implement the Action, but these lists are not exhaustive, nor can we predict future tasks. Staff will prepare a report to outline how each action might be implemented with an estimate of potential costs, and potential partnerships that might have to be developed or furthered to implement the Action. Some of the Actions, however, will require further study to fully appreciate the long-term costs, investments and benefits to the Niagara community.

With the adoption of the Niagara Culture Plan the Culture Committee will have completed an essential item in its Terms of Reference. Through consultation, we have also understood the need to review the membership criteria to ensure we have a broad membership base that can assist in implementation of all aspects of the Plan. With the election of a new Council in the fall, there will be new appointments to the Culture Committee; therefore it is well-timed to review the Terms of Reference of the Committee prior to the end of the year.

Submitted by:

Approved by:

Patrick Robson
Commissioner
Integrated Community Planning

Mike Trojan
Chief Administrative Officer

This report was prepared by Terri Donia, Project Manager, Community and Corporate Planning, and reviewed by Kirk Weaver, Director, Community & Corporate Planning.

APPENDIX

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