

VanRIMS No.: 08-3000-11

*The Arts and Culture Advisory Committee is an advisory body appointed by Vancouver City Council to advise Council and staff on all civic programs that relate to arts and culture, and ensure that arts and culture are appropriately represented in City plans and policy initiatives. The following represents the views of the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee. The Arts and Culture Advisory Committee is not expressing views on behalf of the City of Vancouver.*

April 22, 2022

Dear Mayor and Council:

**RE: Letter of ACAC Recommendations for the 2023 - 2026 Capital Plan**

Please consider this letter signed by the individuals below who serve as members of the City's Arts and Culture Advisory Committee (ACAC) and who represent diverse perspectives on arts and culture in the City of Vancouver, located on the unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We thank the nations for having cared for these lands and waters since time immemorial, and look forward to working with them in partnership as we continue to build an equitable future on this land together.

**For consideration of the 2023-2026 Capital Plan<sup>1</sup>, the ACAC sends our recommendations in the form of this letter (in lieu of formal motions) in an effort to reflect an urgent and decolonized approach to our recommendations to the City. This letter was collaboratively created by the ACAC members as signed, below.**

**Background**

- Culture|Shift was the first long term corporate strategy that this Council approved in 2019, in recognition of the central role that Arts and Culture plays in the development of the City.
- As we know, Arts and Culture is one of Vancouver's key methods for economic stimulation; Arts and Culture in BC is a \$7.9B industry and the Music Industry is worth \$690M. BC's \$7.9B Cultural industry is larger than Utilities \$6.3B and Agriculture, Fishing, Forestry & Housing \$5.8B <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 2023-2026 Council Capital Plan Workshop - Main - Updated April 7, 2022

<sup>2</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - page 24

- Arts and Culture jobs, services, and products are a massive economic driver for the City of Vancouver and they influence many other products and services. Over 10% of Vancouver’s workforce, including artists, are cultural workers<sup>3</sup>.
- The COVID crisis has compounded the crisis of affordability that has hammered Vancouver’s Arts and Culture organizations over the past 15 years. We continue to lose affordable housing, studio and organizational space.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a sharp decrease in revenue and access to resources for the majority of arts and cultural organizations<sup>4</sup>. The Arts and Culture industry continues to struggle with COVID-19’s labour impacts with a third of workers “uncertain about their future in the arts” and only 6% of businesses reporting “normal or better revenues than usual”<sup>5</sup>.

**ACAC RECOMMENDED CONSIDERATIONS & CHANGES TO 2023-2026 CAPITAL PLAN: Chinatown Grants & Partnerships**

In 2018, when the City made its formal apologies to the Chinese community, the Council directed City staff to work with the community and to advance strategic initiatives supporting cultural redress, representation and community relations<sup>6</sup>. Culture|Shift identifies “the development of Chinatown intangible cultural asset mapping and management and UNESCO designation”<sup>7</sup> and acknowledges cultural redress and repairing the harm caused by historical discrimination<sup>8</sup>. We ask Council to honour commitments to Chinatown and Culture|Shift.

The proposed Capital Plan severely undercuts this initiative. Only \$1M or 20% of the needed total of \$5M, for the Chinatown Strategy has been included in the proposed budget. This would seriously limit the capability of the Chinatown Cultural Heritage Assets Management Plan (CHAMP), which will be presented to Council in June, to achieve its goals and waste the millions of dollars and years that have been poured into developing this strategy and neighbourhood.

**The ACAC recommends that the 2023-2026 Capital Plan include an additional \$4M, for a total of \$5M needed to support the Chinatown Strategic initiatives, in alignment with Council’s previous strategic commitments.**

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<sup>3</sup> Making Space for Arts and Culture - Vancouver Cultural Infrastructure Plan (approved 2019) - pg 6

<sup>4</sup> Statistics Canada - [Financial impacts of the pandemic on the culture, arts, entertainment and recreation industries in 2020](#)

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Association for the Performing Arts - [COVID Impact Statistics](#)

<sup>6</sup> City of Vancouver - [City of Vancouver’s Official Apology to the Chinese Community \(issued 2018\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - pg 63

<sup>8</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - pg 83

## Vancouver Cultural Spaces Fund & Cultural Land Trust

The proposed Capital Plan, while attempting to honour previous commitments, fundamentally excludes the future revenue potential and autonomy of many arts organizations by falling short of goals and targets identified by the Cultural Spaces Fund and Cultural Land Trust. In 2019 Council approved a \$4.8M investment which is intended to leverage over \$50M in private, provincial and federal funding<sup>9</sup>. The hope is that by 2025-2026 there will be sufficient funding to launch three community owned cultural space projects with the support of a Cultural Land Trust.

Community owned cultural space projects are tremendously beneficial to the longevity and sustainability of these spaces and actually lower City responsibility for their upkeep and maintenance over time. Several examples were provided in Culture|Shift and Making Space for Arts and Culture of past investments that have paid off ten-fold on their original seed funds. Investments in cultural space in earlier eras by groups like Western Front, Artspeak and grunt gallery have increased the stability of these organizations and continue to give ongoing benefits to the community<sup>10</sup>.

The City has the opportunity to capitalize on community momentum and invest now to support growth and capacity of the sector. The time to act is now as rising real estate costs only make these goals and targets less viable later on.

**The ACAC urges the Council to honour their past commitments and invest now, and recommends that the 2023-2026 Capital plan include \$4M for Vancouver Cultural Spaces Fund & Cultural Land Trust.**

## Firehall Theatre Renewal and Expansion

The Firehall Theatre does not meet contemporary building standards for a theatre for working artists. Nor does it meet accessibility standards for audiences, particularly DTES residents whose lives, compared to other areas in the city, include a higher frequency of disability and access needs. Culture|Shift as a plan specifically targets assessing and prioritizing accessibility for civic and cultural spaces<sup>11</sup>.

The Firehall, if not renovated, will be lost. If anything, one of the biggest elements of Culture|Shift is a repeated policy of “no net loss of cultural space”<sup>12</sup>. The Firehall is a well-used, centrally located space that is a hub for many groups including emerging and under-funded artists. This investment will ensure that the arts and culture community, in particular, sustains an affordable and centrally located performing arts space for emerging and less funded artists in the upcoming decades.

**The ACAC recommends that the 2023-2026 Capital Plan include the necessary \$11.3M investment for the Expansion/Renewal of the Firehall Theatre, an important**

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<sup>9</sup> City Council 2023-2026 Capital Plan Workshop - Service Category Presentations - slide 80

<sup>10</sup> Making Space for Arts and Culture - Vancouver Cultural Infrastructure Plan (approved 2019) - pg 34

<sup>11</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - pg 81

<sup>12</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - pg 67

cultural asset and landmark in the Downtown Eastside and as part of a strategic investment for affordable performance arts space.

### **Cultural Infrastructure Grants**

Cultural Infrastructure Grants are essential to secure and renovate space for arts and cultural organizations and develop cultural infrastructure in the city. These investments help stabilize organizations over the mid to long term and ensure spaces remain safe, accessible and available to the city's artists and public. In the wake of COVID-19, Cultural Infrastructure investment is crucial in supporting and sustaining infrastructure, companies, services and jobs that deeply suffered from local health orders and restrictions<sup>13</sup>. Cultural Infrastructure Grants provide critical emergency support for arts and cultural organizations. After witnessing the impact of the pandemic on the community, we know that access to Cultural Infrastructure Critical Assistance emergency support is needed to sustain arts and cultural organizations during dire times<sup>14</sup>.

Once again, Culture|Shift aims for “no net loss of cultural space”<sup>15</sup>. Cultural Infrastructure Grants provide an integral local resource that allow organizations to independently drive the maintenance and improvement of current assets as well as develop new creative spaces in this city. The Capital plan's \$1M shortfall to Cultural Infrastructure investments will result in 30 less grants supporting \$5M in infrastructure improvements, including City owned cultural spaces.

**The ACAC recommends that the 2023-2026 Capital Plan include an additional \$1M, for the necessary total of \$6M for Cultural Infrastructure Grants.**

### **Final Remarks**

**As representatives of the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee, we strongly recommend that Council re-commit to the goals and priorities originally decided upon in 2019 by directing the above mentioned changes to the proposed 2023-2026 Capital Plan.** While much has changed in our world since that time, it is imperative that City Council understand the long-term social, environmental and economic benefit of meeting Culture|Shift's goals. We hope that the Council will see the potential to grow economic vitality, and honour the City's commitments in advancing goals of reconciliation, equity, diversity and inclusivity, by driving capital investments through Arts and Culture. We broadly support these investments in arts and cultural infrastructure, but wanted to re-emphasize the importance of following the Culture|Shift plan as it provides the best long term road map for decision-making by the City of Vancouver to advance the arts and cultural sector.

This letter was collaboratively created by the ACAC members as signed, below.

Sincerely,

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<sup>13</sup> Statistics Canada - [Financial impacts of the pandemic on the culture, arts, entertainment and recreation industries in 2020](#)

<sup>14</sup> City Council 2023-2026 Capital Plan Workshop - Service Category Presentations - slide 80

<sup>15</sup> Culture|Shift - Vancouver Culture Plan 2020 - 2029 (approved 2019) - pg 67

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