

From: "Singh, Sandra" <Sandra.Singh@vancouver.ca>

To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council"](#)

Date: 5/20/2025 6:32:01 AM

Subject: Council Memo: Update to the Awards Programs at the City of Vancouver - RTS 17626

Attachments: ACCS - GM - Memo (Council) - Update to the Awards Programs -RTS 17626 (2025-05-20).pdf

Good morning Mayor and Council,

Attached is a memo from Margaret Wittgens, GM, Arts, Culture & Community Services regarding an update to the Awards Programs at the City of Vancouver - RTS 17626. Key content includes:

- An overview and update on the City of Vancouver awards programs.
- Report back on opportunities for revitalization and consolidation as directed by Council on October 22, 2024.
- Outlines staff plans to consolidate the Heritage Awards and Awards of Excellence as a pilot for 2025, for efficiencies in staff resources and budgets, and will evaluate the impact after.
- The rest of the City awards programs will continue in the same format unless otherwise directed by Council.

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact GM of ACCS Margaret Wittgens or Acting GM ACCS Celine Mauboules (May 20-June 2) and they will ensure a staff response through the weekly Council Q&A.

Thank you,
Sandra

Sandra Singh | Deputy City Manager
City of Vancouver

E-mail: sandra.singh@vancouver.ca

Pronouns: she/her

Assistant: Laura Holvor

Phone: 604.829.9602

E-mail: laura.holvor@vancouver.ca

Pronouns: she/her

The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the x m k y m (Musqueam), S wxlu817_wú7mesh (Squamish), and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

MEMORANDUM

May 20, 2025

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC
Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy, Mayor's Office
Josh White, General Manager, Planning, Urban Design, and Sustainability

FROM: Margaret Wittgens, General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Update to the Awards Programs at the City of Vancouver

RTS #: 17626

PURPOSE

This memo provides an update on the City of Vancouver awards programs and reports back on opportunities for revitalization and consolidation as directed by Council on October 22, 2024.

BACKGROUND

Civic awards programs are common in cities in Canada. The purpose of these programs is to encourage citizens to contribute positively to their communities, honour local achievements, encourage innovation, and celebrate the diversity of communities.

The City of Vancouver awards programs have evolved over time based on needs expressed by the community, a desire to commemorate people who have made significant contributions to the city, past Mayor and Council direction, and the strategic priorities and policies of the time.

Vancouver's Awards of Excellence program was established by Council in 2013 to recognize and celebrate the remarkable contributions of individuals, organizations, and initiatives that enhance the quality of life in Vancouver. Despite its initial success and positive reception, a

trend of low nominations raised concerns about the program's format and its relevance for Vancouver residents. This prompted a review of the program, which was presented to Council on October 22, 2024.

As a result, Council approved the revitalization of the Awards of Excellence program with updated awards categories and adjusted to a quadrennial cycle with the next event to take place in fall 2025. Council directed staff to report back on opportunities to revamp and energize the other existing awards programs at the City of Vancouver and identify potential opportunities to incorporate the presentation and celebration of all City of Vancouver awards programs together annually.

DISCUSSION

The awards programs at the City of Vancouver are delivered by different departments with varying budgets, selection processes, and formats for recognition. Appendix A provides an overview of these awards programs, with information on the format, frequency, audience served, community engagement, cost, and potential for consolidation.

The awards programs have been assessed to identify opportunities for revitalization and consolidation, according to these guiding principles:

- Alignment with civic priorities
- Community impact: relevance, inclusivity, community engagement, partnerships
- Efficiency: staff time, costs, consistency, duplication

A summary of the staff assessment is provided below, along with staff-determined actions for these awards programs.

Civic Merit and Freedom of the City Awards – no change identified

The Civic Merit and Freedom of the City awards are awarded through a Council motion, based on Council interest with no set schedule. These awards can be added to the Awards of Excellence should the timing line up or be presented in a stand-alone ceremony. Staff will support these awards on an ad hoc basis as approved by Council.

Arts & Culture Awards – no change identified

The Arts & Culture Awards include the Vancouver Book Award and the Vancouver Poet Laureate. The Vancouver Book Award is awarded annually at the Vancouver Book Award event, which serves the literary community in partnership with the Vancouver Public Library and Vancouver Writers Fest. The event is attended by authors, publishers, booksellers, and community members, and includes book readings by the winner, short-listed authors, and the Vancouver Poet Laureate. This event has a very small budget, a dedicated trust providing financial support for this initiative, and established partners who provide significant in-kind support.

The Vancouver Poet Laureate has a selection process that happens every 2-3 years, with the appointment announced at the Vancouver Book Award event. The Poet Laureate also delivers programming throughout the year.

As the Vancouver Book Award event has an engaged audience, longstanding partners, a small budget, and occurs annually, staff will continue to deliver as a standalone event, with the potential for highlighting the Vancouver Book Award winner and Poet Laureate at the Awards of Excellence.

Artist Studio Award – no change identified

This program provides three-year live-work or work-only studio leases, awarded in a similar fashion to a grant with no associated public event. Staff will continue delivering these awards as usual.

Heritage Awards – consolidate with Awards of Excellence as a pilot

The Heritage Awards recognize extraordinary efforts to safeguard and regenerate tangible and intangible heritage throughout Vancouver's neighbourhoods. Recipients include architects, community organizations, developers, writers, artists, and ordinary citizens. The event is a community celebration, reflective of new goals for reconciliation and equity, and includes performances showcasing cultural heritage.

Staff have identified the opportunity to combine the Heritage Awards with the Awards of Excellence as a pilot for 2025, to evaluate the efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and community impact of delivering these awards at the same event.

In delivering a combined event, staff anticipate the following efficiencies:

- **Staff Resources:** The two teams (PDS for Heritage Awards and City Clerk's Office for Awards of Excellence) will continue to manage their respective nomination and selection processes. However, staff resources are expected to be saved by executing the two awards together instead of separately, most notably in the areas of event planning and promotion.
- **Budget Savings:**
 - The current annual PDS budget for heritage programs is \$23,000, which supports the Heritage Plaque program and the Heritage Awards.
 - The Heritage Awards have typically been awarded at a biannual event, and in those years required additional funding from other areas of the PDS budget. In years where there are no Heritage Awards, the budget is used for the Heritage Plaque program.
 - In 2022, the total cost of the Heritage Awards and associated event was \$56,000.
 - It is estimated that PDS will contribute \$15,000 towards a combined event with the Awards of Excellence. In relation to the cost of the Heritage Awards in 2022, savings of \$41,000 (73%) are expected for this one-time pilot.

After the pilot, staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the event in meeting civic priorities, the community impact, and the staff and budget efficiencies to determine if running the two awards together is strategic in the long term or if these awards programs should be celebrated as standalone events.

NEXT STEPS

Staff from the City Clerk's Office and PDS will collaborate to deliver a joint event in October 2025, including both the Awards of Excellence and the Heritage Awards.

Arts & Culture staff will continue to deliver the Vancouver Book Award event in fall 2025, as part of the Vancouver Writers Fest. Artist Studio Awards will be awarded next in 2028.

The Civic Merit + Freedom of the City Awards can be awarded anytime at Council's discretion.

FINAL REMARKS

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me directly at margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca and staff will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'm Wittgens', is positioned above the typed name.

Margaret Wittgens, General Manager
Arts, Culture, and Community Services
margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca

APPENDIX

Overview of the City's Awards Programs

Table 1: Overview of the City's Awards Programs

City Awards Programs	Description	Format + Frequency	Potential for Consolidation
Awards of Excellence	Recognizes outstanding achievements made by individuals – adults, youth, and children – and organizations. Led by City Clerk's Office (Protocol)	Public event occurring once per Council term, last held in 2022, scheduled for fall 2025.	Yes
Civic Merit Award	Recognizes outstanding achievements in specific fields, with recipients' names inscribed in the Civic Merit Book. Requires unanimous vote of Council. Led by City Council	Council motion, no set schedule, based on Council interest. Last awarded in 2018.	Yes
Freedom of the City Award	The highest honour, awarded to those whose exceptional achievements bring recognition to Vancouver. Requires unanimous vote of Council. Led by City Council	Council motion, no set schedule, based on Council interest. Last awarded in 2023.	Yes Has been presented in conjunction with Awards of Excellence in the past.
Arts and Culture Awards	Celebrates literary achievement with the Vancouver Book Award (awarded annually) and Vancouver's Poet Laureate (appointed for a 2-3 year term). Winners are selected by a jury of peers. Led by Arts & Culture, aligned with <i>Culture Shift</i>	Awards programs include annual programming and a public event. The Vancouver Book Award event is held annually in the fall as part of the Vancouver Writers Festival, delivered in partnership with the Vancouver Public Library, and includes readings by the winner, shortlisted authors and the Poet Laureate.	Possible Event happens annually, and serves the literary community.
Heritage Awards	Celebrates achievements in heritage stewardship and historical preservation,	Public event taking place every two	Possible

	<p>and shared commitment to cultural redress and reconciliation. Winners are selected by a jury of peers.</p> <p>Led by Planning, Urban Design & Sustainability, aligned with Vancouver Heritage Program</p>	years in the spring (2025 event postponed until fall), including performances.	Potential to deliver in a more efficient way
Artist Studio Awards	<p>Supports professional artists with a minimum three-year term in live-work or work-only studios, fostering innovation and artistic excellence. Selected by staff through an open, competitive process, based on program criteria.</p> <p>Led by Arts & Culture, aligned with <i>Culture Shift</i> and <i>Making Space for Arts and Culture</i></p>	Recipients receive an official letter confirming the award, similar to a grant.	No

Table 2: Overview of Events Related to the City's Awards Programs

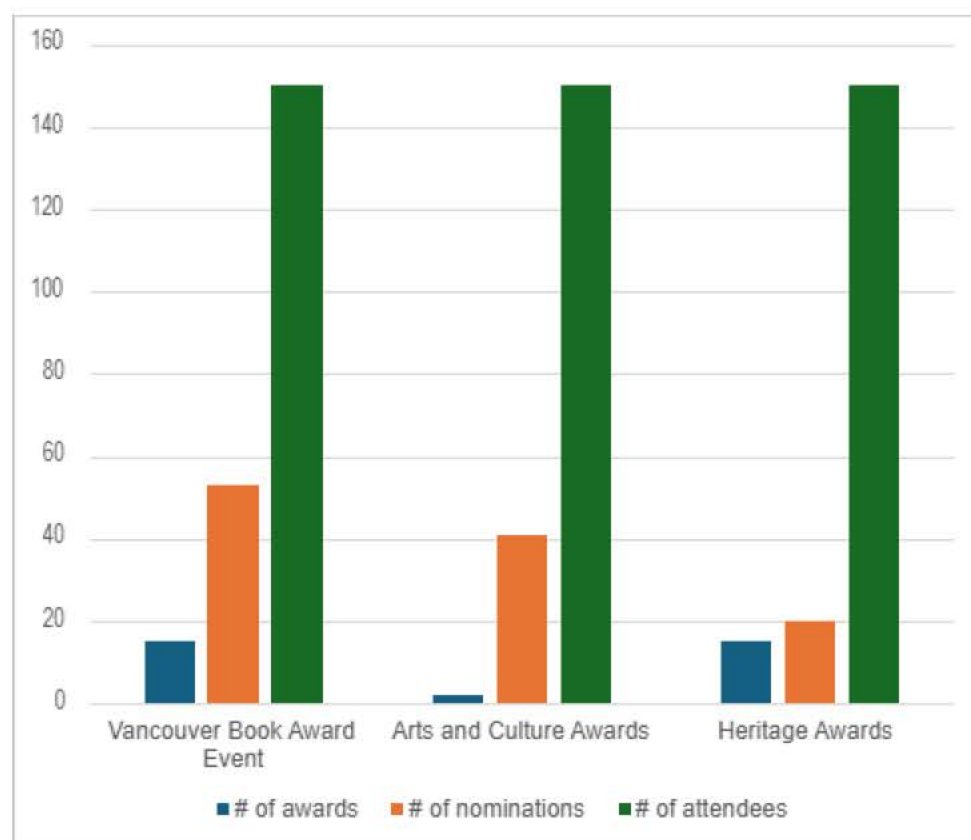
Event	Number of awards	Audience	Event Budget
Awards of Excellence	Up to 3 awards are given out across 6 categories plus the Mayor's Achievement Award, for a potential of 21 awards.	150 community members in attendance.	\$25,000+
Vancouver Book Award Event	One award, also recognizing up to 5 short-listed authors and the Vancouver Poet Laureate (with a new Poet Laureate announced every 2-3 years).	Serves the literary community, with approximately 150 readers, authors and publishers in attendance.	\$8.2k (\$5,600 from ACCS and Protocols budget, and \$2,600 from the Book Publishing Reserve trust and submission fees) + \$5.5 in-kind contributions provided by partners
Heritage Awards	15 awards in the categories of Living Heritage, Heritage Conservation, and Education & Awareness.	150 community members in attendance.	\$56,000 (from PDS operating budget)

Table 3: Stats on Events Related to the City's Awards Programs

Event	Cash Expense	Awards presented	Nominations	Nominations per award	Cost per award	Attendees
Awards of Excellence (2022)	\$25,000	15	53	3.5	\$1,667	150
Vancouver Book Award Event (2024)	\$8,200	2	41	20.5	\$4,100	170
Heritage Awards (2023)	\$60,000	15	20	1.3	\$4,000	150

* Stats relate to the most recent event, included above in parenthesis.

Table 4: Community Engagement Related to Awards Events



* Stats relate to the most recent event.