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

Date: 11/7/2025 12:04:48 PM

Subject: Memo to Mayor & Council: Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces and Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure (RTS 16431 and 18125)

Attachments: ACCS - GM - Memo (Council) - Urgent Infrastructure Investment for Arts and Culture - RTS 16431 and 18125 (2025-11-07).pdf

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Dear Mayor and Council,

This email provides an update on work completed and underway in response to the May 29, 2024 motion: *Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* (RTS 16431) and the July 23, 2025 motion: *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure* (RTS 18125). Key content includes:

- Overview of progress and next steps for both the *Taking Action* and *Urgent Investment* motions, including: defining and convening a Sector Working group in Q4 2025, the consideration of a Cultural Land Trust and a report back planned in 2026
- Appendix A: Report back on resolutions A and C of the *Taking Action* motion, including significant work advanced on regulatory support
- Appendix B: Overview of key achievements in support of *Culture/Shift* and the accompanying strategies

If you require additional information, please feel free to contact [margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca](mailto:margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca) and she will ensure a response through the weekly Q&As.

Thank you,  
Sandra

Sandra Singh | Deputy City Manager

City of Vancouver

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*The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the x m k y m (Musqueam), S wxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.*

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## MEMORANDUM

November 7, 2025

TO: Mayor & Council

CC: Donny van Dyk, 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 & Deputy Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Corrie Okell, General Manager, Development, Buildings and Licensing  
Lon LaClaire, General Manager, Engineering  
Josh White, General Manager, Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability

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

SUBJECT: Update to the May 29, 2024 motion: *Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* and the July 23, 2025 motion: *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure*

RTS #: RTS 16431 and 18125

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### PURPOSE

This memo provides a report back on resolutions A and C of the Council motion *Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* (May 29, 2024; RTS 16431) (Appendix A), and an update on staff work to advance the Council motion *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure* (July 23, 2025; RTS 18125) (Appendix B).

### BACKGROUND

On May 29, 2024, Council passed the *Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* [motion](#), which directed staff to report back with recommendations on a range of measures including removing regulatory barriers, providing regulatory supports,

considering community amenity or zoning reform tools, establishing an interdepartmental working group exploring a Cultural Land Trust, and recommending options to update change-of-use conditions.

On July 23, 2025, Council approved the [motion](#) *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure* that directed staff to work with the [Arts and Culture Advisory Committee](#) (ACAC) to establish a working group, engage with senior government partners, articulate the sector challenges and report back on strategies to strengthen City and senior government support. The motion identified strategies to be considered including increased funding, supports for cultural infrastructure and spaces, improved data gathering opportunities, and streamlined permitting and licensing.

Both motions closely align with the directions articulated in the City's overarching arts and culture strategic plan, *Culture | Shift* as well as other key City strategies and plans driving the City's work to support the sector such as *Making Space for Arts and Culture*, the *Vancouver Music Strategy*, the *UNDRIP Action Plan*, and various area plans (e.g. *Granville Street Plan*, *False Creek Flats Plan* and *Broadway Plan*). The needs and challenges facing the sector have been amplified over the past five years by ongoing impacts of the pandemic, changing economic context (e.g. tariffs), and affordability issues.

## DISCUSSION

The following summarises the specific actions undertaken that advance both motions.

### Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces motion (RTS 16431)

Staff in Development, Buildings and Licenses (DBL) have advanced a number of initiatives to address Council's directions relating to resolutions A and C including pilots aimed at regulatory support and use flexibility. Appendix A outlines work completed to address resolutions A and C of this motion.

In response to the *Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* motion resolution B (RTS 18125), staff are scoping the City's potential role in supporting a Cultural Land Trust (CLT) model, which prioritizes community ownership to increase sector resilience and long-term affordability of cultural space. Staff will report back in 2026 with findings and recommendations.

### Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure motion (RTS 18125)

Staff are also progressing a review and response to the *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure* motion. Progress includes:

1. Engaging ACAC and other industry interest-holders on the project approach, Sector Working Group composition, project objectives and deliverables.

2. Defining the Sector Working Group Terms of Reference and member composition. The group will be appointed and convened in Q4 2025. Composition will be based on representatives from the ACAC, Public Art Committee, Music Taskforce, Special Events Task Force, and other sector and equity group representatives.
3. Advancing the best practice assessment, of funding strategies for grassroots festivals and cultural facilities.

#### Related Work to Implement *Culture | Shift*

Since the 2019 approval of *Culture | Shift* and accompanying strategies, there has been significant progress to advance key directions, with an ultimate vision of *Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture*. Appendix B provides a high-level overview of some of these initiatives.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

In Q2, 2026 staff will report back to Council on the *Urgent Investment in Vancouver's Arts and Culture Infrastructure* motion with staff recommendations to further strengthen policies and strategies in support of the arts and culture sector. These recommendations will reflect the best practice scan and industry engagement, and be grounded in existing City strategic priorities, including *Culture | Shift*. In addition, staff will articulate key gaps in city supports as a result of the impact of the pandemic, tariffs and other impactful affordability and economic pressures.

#### **FINAL REMARKS**

This memo and appendices provide a high-level summary of the work completed and underway to address two motions related to the City's support for the arts and culture sector as well as related progress on *Culture | Shift*.

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me directly at [margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca](mailto:margaret.wittgens@vancouver.ca) and we will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.



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

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**APPENDIX A – Report back on Resolutions A and C:  
*Taking Action to Protect and Expand Arts and Culture Spaces* motion (RTS 16431)**

This appendix provides a summary of the work undertaken and underway in response to Council's direction in resolutions A and C. The initiatives outlined collectively work towards strengthening the arts and culture sector and align to Council-approved strategies including *Culture|Shift* and *Making Space for Arts and Culture*. Future progress will be reported as part of these broader strategic plans.

**Resolutions A.a. & A.b.: Regulatory Support and Staff Resources for Arts and Culture Use Permitting**

Common regulatory barriers that arts and cultural uses encounter include by-law conflicts (e.g. noise regulations, non-conforming zoning and/or building code uses), and licensing, renovations and/or development permit challenges – particularly when involving change of use and multi-use facilities. Staff continue to utilize existing City tools in addition to testing refinements through pilot projects, as resource capacity permits. In addition, these known challenges and barriers are actively considered as part of interdepartmental learning and improvement efforts, with the intention to mitigate and reduce regulatory barriers where feasible. Three specific initiatives are outlined below:

- **Support via the Commercial Renovation Centre (ongoing):** The concept of an "arts concierge" role was considered, however at this time DBL is not resourced to provide dedicated support for individual uses. This service is currently offered under the broader umbrella of the Service Centres and specifically to small, one-time applicants through the Commercial Renovation Centre, to ensure equitable support across all projects.
- **Interdepartmental Collaboration (ongoing):** DBL and Arts, Culture & Community Services (ACCS) actively collaborate to troubleshoot specific permitting challenges. In addition, ACCS works with other City departments to proactively improve the City's collective understanding and responsiveness to non-traditional cultural uses and the barriers the sector faces.
- **Cultural Spaces Regulatory Consultant Pilot (In Progress):** Started in 2025, this pilot provides independent architectural and regulatory support to select arts and culture organizations navigating regulations related to operating, licensing, renovating and/or

developing non-City owned cultural spaces. It has been effective in supporting applicant readiness and in building internal City capacity.

### **Resolution A.c. – Zoning Tools in Commercial and Industrial Areas**

Several completed and ongoing zoning tool initiatives include providing density incentives for arts and culture spaces in area plans, such as the Rupert and Renfrew Station Area Plan and the Granville Street Plan, as well as expanding industrial uses to include higher impact Artist Studio (Class B). This work supports Council's direction to expand or retain cultural space in commercial and industrial zones. The following are examples of zoning related initiatives:

- **Density bonuses industrial zones (2023):** Through the Broadway Plan and the Industrial Modernization and Intensification Framework, density bonuses were introduced into industrial zoning districts in Mount Pleasant, Burrard Slopes, South Vancouver, and Rupert Renfrew areas (I-1, I-2, IC-2). Projects may now earn density in exchange for providing secure, affordable, work-only artist studios.
- **Industrial zoning changes (2023):** This change recognized Artist Studio (Class B) as an industrial use which allowed this use to meet industrial floor area requirements and therefore expanded use options for property owners.
- **Transit-Oriented Areas Rezoning Policy (2024):** Implemented in response to Bill 47, this policy supports the City's goal of "no net loss" of existing arts and cultural space through rezoning applications, by setting expectations for their replacement in the redevelopment phase.
- **Introduction of home-based business (HBB) licenses (2024):** This change provided a low-barrier pathway for small-scale arts and cultural businesses to operate from home, in mixed commercial-residential zones. This allows for on-site employees and customers by appointment, and limited sale of items. In 2024, 598 licenses were issued to Arts, Culture, and Creative Industries businesses, including 230 to artists.
- **Artist Studio Guideline update (2024):** The guideline was revised in 2024 to align artist live-work studios with the updated HBB regulations.
- **Eastside Arts District Study (2024):** Council approved a \$250,000 grant (RTS 16099) to the Eastside Arts Society to recommend land use policies for cultural spaces in the proposed District.
- **Rupert and Renfrew Station Area Plan (2025):** This Plan allowed additional height and density for rezoning applications within Employment Lands that renew, enhance,

or provide artist studio spaces. The I-2 density bonus adopted in 2023 may also apply to rezonings.

- **Granville Street Plan (2025):** This Plan included policies to strengthen Granville Street as an arts and entertainment hub. Density incentives encourage new and retention of existing arts and culture spaces, especially for music.
- **Vancouver Plan – Villages Area Planning (in progress):** Staff are currently exploring allowing low-impact artist studios as an outright use in commercial (C-2) zone, which will support the achievement of complete neighbourhoods within Village areas.

### **C. Change-of-Use Conditions for Office and Warehouse**

The following initiatives support the objective of making underused office and warehouse space more available to the cultural sector while balancing the need to protect industrial spaces for warehousing uses that are crucial to the health of the local economy.

- **Expanded Arts and Cultural Event License (2023):** This initiative expanded the number of arts and culture events allowed to six per month per venue. A public webpage provides information to assist applicants. While it predates the current motion, it provides a useful precedent for temporary cultural activation of space.
- **Temporary Occupancy Pilot Program in the Downtown Eastside (In Progress):** Initiated under the *Vacancy to Vitality – Pilot for temporary use for empty storefronts in the DTES Council motion*, and building on previous change of use exemption work, this pilot explores temporary uses of vacant commercial spaces without rezoning or change of use. DBL will report back to Council on November 4, 2025. This pilot can benefit arts and cultural uses and organizations by allowing them to activate vacant storefronts on a temporary basis. ACCS will continue to collaborate with DBL to include flexibility for low impact artist studio use.



## APPENDIX B – Overview of key *Culture | Shift* Achievements

The following outlines some highlights in the supports that the City has advanced since the approval of *Culture | Shift : Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture*, generally aligned with the motions discussed in this memo.

<p>Direction 1.</p> <p><b>Arts and Culture at the Centre of City Building</b></p> <p>(Vibrant Vancouver #1, #8)</p>	<p><b>4 new area plans</b> included arts and cultural policies and priorities to build a more vibrant Vancouver, integrating arts &amp; culture into planning policies, public benefits plans, and inclusion within community amenity contribution priorities.</p>
	<p><b>105 organizations</b> advancing <i>Culture   Shift</i> brought into multi-year operating grants to increase stability and reduce administration</p>
	<p><b>195 Projects</b> funded through the Vancouver Music Fund, supporting equity-seeking musicians and music businesses, through three cycles of grants administered by Creative BC. A fourth cycle is currently underway.</p>
	<p>Integrating design requirements for public realm programming opportunities within community plans including Northeast False Creek and Granville Plan and partnering with ENG and/or development on <b>5 public realm spaces</b> including plazas that accommodate arts and culture programming and events.</p>
<p>Direction 2.</p> <p><b>Decolonization &amp; Reconciliation</b></p> <p>(Vibrant Vancouver #1, #8)</p>	<p><b>\$40,000</b> in capacity funding is directed in 2023, 2024 and 2025 to each xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations to support engagement with the City in monthly Cultural Liaison meetings on a broad range of departmental and interdepartmental cultural project and policy work.</p>
	<p><b>\$65,000</b> provided in 2024 to each xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, for self-determined cultural and language revitalization projects.</p>
	<p><b>\$160,000</b> provided to five Urban Indigenous organizations through Cultural Indigenous Grants, with 3-5 new groups invited into the program for 2025</p>
	<p><b>\$579,000</b> provided to xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations and urban Indigenous non-profit associations to plan for or renew self-determined cultural spaces</p>
	<p>From 2020 to 2025, <b>19 public art calls</b> have contributed to advancing the cultural visibility of xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations in the Public Realm.</p>

	<b>Four UNDRIP Action Groups</b> advancing the cultural visibility in the public realm, major events, public education materials, and in the governance of arts and culture institutions are led or supported by Arts & Culture including AG9 Public Realm, AG10 Major Events, AG 11 Historical Atlas, and AG12 Institutional Representation.
Direction 3. <b>Cultural Equity &amp; Accessibility</b>  (Vibrant Vancouver #1, #7)	<p><b>13 organizations</b> representing equity-denied communities receive \$340,000 through Cultural Equity Grants, with 5-7 new groups invited into the program for 2025.</p> <p><b>Over 50%</b> of assessment committees and selection panels for grants, awards, and commissions represent priority groups. Equity priorities have been embedded into all cultural grant programs, included in program priorities, application questions, and assessment criteria.</p> <p>A Memorandum of Understanding signed with the <b>Hogan's Alley Society</b> to deliver housing, public benefits, and amenities for the Black community, including a cultural centre.</p> <p>Formal Council apology for historic discrimination against passengers on the <b>Guru Nanak Jahaz</b> (Komagata Maru), and Canada Place secondary honorary naming as <b>Guru Nanak Jahaz</b> (Komagata Maru) Place reflected through commissioning artistic street signs.</p> <p>Since 2023, <b>\$1,125,000</b> in grant funds awarded to 4 Chinese-Canadian organizations for <b>Chinatown Cultural Partnership Capital Grants Funding</b> to support cultural space planning and improvements.</p> <p>In 2021, awarded all 7 units of the <b>Artist Studio Awards</b> to low-income Vancouver-based artists who are Indigenous and/or racialized with a first priority for eligible xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) artists.</p> <p>Council approval of 2024 <b>Chinatown Cultural District Framework</b> proposing a cultural district as a guiding and comprehensive approach to supporting Chinatown's renewed vibrancy, including both economic and community development.</p> <p><b>2019 Public Art's Artist-Initiated program</b> selected Japanese-Canadian artist Jon Sasaki to develop a public artwork at Hastings Park set to be installed in November 2025. The art is an anti-monument of the political figure responsible for the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II.</p> <p>Commissioned a local artist to produce a visual identity graphic for the <b>Anti-Black Racism engagement work.</b></p>
Direction 4. <b>Making Space for Arts &amp; Culture</b>	<p><b>70% of the 650,000sq ft.</b> 10 year goal for new cultural space has been secured</p> <p><b>20 projects</b> are secured for development, and <b>9 projects are under construction or completed</b>, including the cultural hub at 825 Pacific</p>

<b>(Vibrant Vancouver #1)</b>	and the City's first artist social housing and shared production space at 187 E 3 <sup>rd</sup>
	Each year, delivered approximately <b>\$1.5 million</b> in Cultural Spaces capital grants and <b>\$300,000</b> in Affordable Spaces grants—a 2019 newly developed program to support cultural space operators who provide subsidized affordable cultural space for professional artists and cultural non-profits.
	Supporting <b>increased community ownership</b> of cultural spaces through 2024 <i>Making Space for Arts and Culture</i> priority grants: <b>\$1.5 million to the Dance Foundation</b> for acquisition of the Dance Centre site, and <b>\$250,000 to the Eastside Arts Society</b> to advance planning for the Eastside Arts District including acquisition of affordable artist production spaces.
	Supporting artist studio development by <b>introducing density bonuses in key industrial zones</b> to incentivize affordable and secure artist studios, and removing floor area limitations for new artist studios
	<b>Changes to CAC Rezoning policy and DCL policies, and introduction of new tools in area plans to support delivery of cultural facilities</b> , including reduced DCL rates for cultural facilities, CAC exemptions for eligible cultural facilities, and enabling Indigenous or non-profit ownership of an in-kind CAC.
<b>Direction 5. Collaboration &amp; Capacity</b>	<b>Launched REFLECT</b> (Radical Empathy for Leaders: Equity, Connection, and Time) to support, develop and enhance leadership in the cultural sector for equity-deserving individuals and communities. The program was launched in 2023 with an 8-person cohort, and applications will open for the second cohort early 2026.
	<b>Hosted the Creative City Network</b> of Canada's annual summit in October 2024, raising Vancouver's cultural profile, centring the histories and cultural practices of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, and creating a platform to share municipal best practices.
	<b>Supported the 2025 JUNO Awards</b> in partnership with Destination Vancouver and the Province. In addition to the dozens of performances featuring local artists, the event engaged over 28,500 attendees and generated \$15,700,000 in economic activity in the city.