



WOOD BUFFALO CULTURE PLAN



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Arts Council Wood Buffalo www.artscouncilwb.ca

Fort McMurray Heritage Society www.fortmcmurrayheritage.com

Fort McMurray Tourism www.fortmcmurraytourism.com

Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre www.keyano.ca/Theatre

McMurray Metis (MNA Local 1935) www.mcmurraymetis.org

Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo www.mcawb.org

Oil Sand Community Alliance www.oscaalberta.ca

Regional Recreation Corporation of Wood Buffalo www.rrcwb.ca

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo www.rmwb.ca

Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts www.secpa.fmcschools.ca

Alberta Foundation for the Arts www.affta.ab.ca

CONSULTING TEAM

Catherine C. Cole & Associates

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Front Cover Images from left to right:

- Traditional Beading Workshop

- Multicultural Expo Dancers

- Hudson's Bay Company Cairn, Fort Chipewyan

- Singer Cara McLeod



*As a recognized pillar of sustainability,
culture is an integral feature of everyday life.
It is both a source and product of individual
expression and community engagement.*



MacDonald Island Dance Academy



TOTAL Aboriginal Interpretative Trail -
Erin Stinson, Foxy Loxy

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Fiddler at Multicultural Expo

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2018-2021 Strategic Plan identified support for arts and culture as Strategy & Initiative #3f, with the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan (the Culture Plan) as a key component of this initiative. The Municipality developed the Culture Plan in collaboration with a Community Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee). It outlines a vision for arts and heritage, priorities and strategies to support decision-making and resource allocation to maintain a vibrant, sustainable community and quality of life for current and future residents. The Culture Plan will serve as a guiding document to support and enhance arts and heritage initiatives over the next ten years. Development of the Culture Plan has been informed by dozens of one-on-one interviews, five focus group sessions, an extensive literature review, an environmental scan of the Wood Buffalo region as well as comparable districts with an urban service area and surrounding rural communities and municipalities in Alberta, public engagement at regional events, and opportunity for online engagement at www.rmwb.ca/cultureplan. Five Priority areas, each with its own strategies, have been developed to focus the efforts of all partners and stakeholders toward achieving the Vision for culture in the region.

UNESCO defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.” The Advisory Committee supports the broad definition of culture presented by UNESCO, and indeed by the Province of Alberta. For the purposes of this plan the Canadian federal government definition is used: “creative artistic activity and the goods and services produced by it, and the preservation of heritage.”

Culture plays an important role in communities, providing many benefits including:

- Improving personal health and wellbeing, addressing social issues, allowing intergenerational contact, supporting balanced human development, and fostering innovation and creativity
- Making our community a better place to live, improving quality of life, helping to reduce vandalism
- In terms of heritage specifically, building blocks for regional development, social infrastructure and the creation of green jobs
- Direct economic impacts (jobs, earned revenues) and indirect benefits (attracting visitors through cultural tourism, retaining residents)

Vision

Wood Buffalo is a culturally diverse and socially inclusive municipality in which arts and heritage are vital to its social, economic, and environmental well-being.

Priorities:

- Foster healthy environment for culture: arts and heritage
- Further develop cultural facilities and resources
- Support collaboration and innovation
- Encourage diversity, inclusivity and accessibility
- Improve awareness of the value of culture

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan, the following definitions have been accepted:

Accessibility:

- making arts and heritage organizations, facilities, programs and events affordable, available, reachable and physically accessible to the entire population

Art:

- creative/cultural Industries (e.g., film, television, publishing, sound recording, and new media)
- literary arts (e.g., fiction, poetry, drama, graphic novel, children and young adults' literature, or literary non-fiction)
- performing arts (e.g., theatre, circus arts, music and sound, and dance)
- visual arts (e.g., drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, fine craft)

Artist Work Studios:

- individual workshop spaces with adequate light, ventilation and security, for the purpose of making artistic works

Capacity Building:

- the process by which individuals and organizations obtain, improve and retain the skills, knowledge, tools, equipment and other resources needed to do their jobs competently or to a greater capacity (larger scale, larger audience, larger impact, etc.)
- within organizations it often refers to budget and number of staff available to undertake initiatives as well as their expertise

Collaboration:

- refers to working together for a common purpose – in a true collaboration, for example, artists influence one another's practice
- creative collaboration is stronger than cooperation or coordination where organizations and individuals may each contribute but do not necessarily impact one another

Community Art:

- artists working with communities; communities working with artists providing arts access to all; community art is valued for its ability to bring people together in shared, collaborative, creative experiences to express the things that have meaning: where we've come from, where we're going, our world, our fears, our dreams, our aspirations
- strengthens the community, builds identity, develops creativity, and increases awareness of the arts in our lives

Contemporary Art:

- the art of today, produced in the second half of the 20th century or in the 21st century, which is culturally diverse, eclectic and global – spanning continents, regions and nations; increasingly, it has become part of a conversation taken up with matters of personal and cultural identity, mobility, community and nationality

Craft:

- handmade, unique objects, primarily made by one accomplished person or a small cluster of skilled individuals in small quantities, in a range of traditional craft materials
- a wide range of object forms that can be functional, ceremonial or religious, expressive, visual, sculptural, or some combination
- often with a strong emphasis on personal expression and/or cultural content (Alberta Craft Council)

Creative Space/Hub:

- a physical place that brings together creative and cultural professionals, artists, hobbyists, and artisans from all backgrounds, experience levels and ages to engage with, and create artistic works

Cultural Facilities:

- facilities, spaces and sites where cultural activities take place
- can include spaces in the public, private and non-profit sectors, everything from purpose-built facilities to facilities that include cultural programming: art galleries, art studios, dance studios, farms/orchards, green space and parks, leisure centres and community halls, libraries, museums, theatres/performing arts centres

Cultural Resources:

- physical evidence or place of human activity; a site, structure, landscape, object or natural feature of significance to a group of people traditionally associated with it
- more narrowly speaking can include facilities, programs and practitioners

Cultural Tourism:

- tourism that focuses on the culture of a region, whether lifestyle, history, art, architecture, festivals, etc.; includes Indigenous Tourism and Heritage Tourism

Culture:

- distinctive spiritual, materialistic, intellectual, and emotional features that characterize a society or group; includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, fundamental human rights, value systems, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 1982)
- that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society." (UNESCO, 2001)
- the glue that connects us as individuals to our communities, fostering unity, civility and a sense of belonging, pride and caring for our fellow citizens (Alberta government)
- creative artistic activity and the goods and services produced by it, and the preservation of heritage (Canadian federal government)

Flagship:

- major arts and heritage organizations such as a museum and/or heritage park, art gallery, theatre company or multi-purpose cultural facility

Heritage:

- a legacy inherited from the past, valued in the present – which it helps interpret – and safeguarded for the future – which it helps shape (Cole & Dubinsky, Ottawa Heritage Plan), including:
- built heritage: e.g., buildings, structures and sites
- natural heritage: elements of biodiversity including flora and fauna, ecosystems and geological structures
- cultural landscapes: significant historic landscapes which are meaningful to particular groups, cultures or populations
- cultural heritage: an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including both intangible and tangible cultural heritage
- documentary heritage: e.g., documents, records, artifacts, and images
- intangible heritage: traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as beliefs, languages and attitudes, oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts (UNESCO)

Heritage Resources Management Plan:

- A Plan that outlines how a municipality will protect built heritage and cultural landscapes and promote an awareness of local heritage in order to ensure its stewardship according to the heritage framework of the national Historic Places Initiative (HPI) and the provincial Historical Resources Act.

Inclusivity:

- the practice or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who have physical or mental disabilities, members of ethno-cultural communities, seniors, youth, etc.

Innovation:

- programming, planning and delivery that complements or replaces traditional models; often entrepreneurial and requiring collaboration

Placemaking:

- enhancement of a community's key characteristics – its social environment; access and connections, use and activities, comfort and image through physical improvements, programming, partnerships and people (RMWB)

Public Art:

- art that exists in the public realm and is free and accessible to everyone
- may be fixed or freestanding, permanent or temporary, within external or internal settings
- may be undertaken by a professional artist(s) in the form of a commission or another adjudication
- may be a community-based project, such as a mural, with a particular public purpose and not necessarily involving professionals

Artist in Residency

Wood Buffalo is a culturally diverse and socially inclusive municipality in which arts and heritage are vital to its social, economic, and environmental well-being.



Professional Artist:

- has specialized training in the artistic field (not necessarily in academic institutions but can include mentorships, self-study, academic training or combinations of these types of training)
- is recognized as a professional by his or her peers or by their community as an artist of achievement or potential
- receives compensation and/or recognition in a manner consistent with the standards of their practice, community or Indigenous protocols
- is committed to devoting more time to artistic activity, if possible financially
- has a history of public presentation or publication

Emerging Artists:

- are professional artists in the early stages of their career

Indigenous Artists:

- are committed to the creation and dissemination of original contemporary or customary works of art, and to the ongoing development of skills and practice
- committed to their own artistic vision, regardless of its commercial potential, and retain creative control of their work (Canada Council for the Arts)

Public Art Gallery:

- institution with a mandate to exhibit visual works of art and provide programs in the visual arts for the general public
- employs professional staff who engage in ongoing development, implementation and promotion of visual arts programming as their core primary activity in an annual program for public presentation and operate a gallery and/or exhibition space that is publicly accessible and fulfills the minimum requirements for the security and presentation of exhibited work
- contracts with exhibiting artists and provides professional artists' fees according to copyright legislation and schedules recommended by the Canadian Artist Representation Copyright Collective (CARCC). (Alberta Foundation for the Arts)

Sustainable Development:

- development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Our Common Future, UN World Commission on the Environment and Development (the Bruntland Commission, 1987))
- the Wood Buffalo Social Sustainability Plan, as approved as a guiding document in 2018, states that:
 - Our community is sustainable when we are resilient and are engaged and supported to thrive physically, socially, mentally, spiritually, and economically.
 - Our community builds and sustains the necessary community-based resources and partnerships to support working collectively to meet the basic needs and social wellness priorities of residents and continue to improve our quality of life
 - Social sustainability is grounded in empathy and inclusivity and promotes connection and engagement in the community - one plan with many partners.

Fort McMurray
Heritage Shipyard



Culture is a shared responsibility, not a service that a municipality can provide independently. Therefore the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan (the Culture Plan) was developed as a community plan. It involved individuals, cultural organizations and other social profits, Municipal government, business and industry, and diverse sectors who helped to frame the vision and provided input to the guidelines.

Community Advisory Committee

A Community Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) was struck early in 2018 to guide and support the development of the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan. The consulting team engaged to support development of the Culture Plan first met with the Advisory Committee at the end of June to initiate the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and develop a Community Engagement Plan. The engagement plan took into consideration recent engagement processes, previous reports and plans, and community activities taking place during the engagement period. Throughout the process, committee members provided project oversight and regular input into the public engagement process, vision, strategic priorities and recommended actions either in person, by teleconference and/or email.

Municipal Administration

Staff from the Recreation & Culture Branch, Department of Public Works managed the project and the interaction between the Advisory Committee and the consultant. Input was provided by staff in other departments as required to develop a full understanding of the Municipality's current and potential role and commitment to culture and the relationship between arts and heritage and other municipal priorities, as well as to identify ways in which culture could be better integrated into municipal planning. Indigenous

Peoples were also engaged with the support of the Municipality's Communications, Stakeholder, Indigenous and Rural Relations Department.

Consulting Team

The consulting team consisted of Catherine C. Cole, Catherine C. Cole & Associates and colleagues Lon Dubinsky, Ellen Doty and Sarah Pocklington, with graphic design by Matthias Reinicke, Lime Design.

Literature Review

The literature review considered an extensive collection of documents containing information relevant to the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan. Because culture is a shared responsibility among all three levels of government, Indigenous Peoples, as well as social profit organizations and individuals, the consultants drew upon their extensive knowledge of the federal and provincial contexts and the review included planning documents of flagship cultural organizations. The review of municipal planning documents identified ways in which culture is – or could be better – integrated into municipal planning. Consultants prepared a summary report which helped to shape the public engagement process and inform the Plan.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan reviewed cultural facilities and programs in comparable districts with an urban service area and surrounding rural communities. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is unique given its sheer geographical size and urban-rural interface, culturally diverse and transient population, and many distinct

Indigenous communities throughout the region. Wood Buffalo faces specific economic and environmental challenges, the current downturn in the oil and gas industry and a reduction in tax revenues, as well as the post-fire and flood redevelopment. Therefore, it was important to consider situations in other communities that demonstrated resilience and sustainability. Particular attention was also paid to responses to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action that may be applicable to Wood Buffalo or indeed are underway. Finally, there was an attempt to identify appropriate benchmarks and gaps and best practices in arts and heritage including those related to resilience and reconciliation nationally and internationally.

The environmental scan consisted of comparative analyses of arts and heritage facilities and programs in five different communities in Canada that speak to the present circumstances and potential for cultural activity in Wood Buffalo: Yukon Territory; Kamloops/Thompson Nicola Regional District; Prince George/Fraser-Fort George Regional District; Thunder Bay; and St. John's/Newfoundland and Labrador.

Also provided are comparisons of per capita spending on culture in cities of similar size in Alberta together with comparisons of arts and heritage organizations and facilities, with special attention given to Red Deer, St. Albert and Grande Prairie relative to Wood Buffalo.

Interviews, Small Group Discussions and Public Engagement Opportunities

The Engagement Strategy was developed with the Advisory Committee, resulting in substantial engagement undertaken across the region between June-December, 2018, including:

- More than 60 interviews with residents of the municipality, members of municipal staff and the arts, culture, heritage, tourism, education, government and social profit sectors, and the public in general.
- Visits to communities in the region and to a number of cultural facilities including: Heritage Village and Heritage Shipyards, Oil Sands Discovery Centre, Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre, the Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts, MacDonald Island Park, the Fort Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum, as well as Points North Gallery, the Fort McMurray Potters' Guild, and artists' studios.
- Participation in the Fort Chipewyan Municipal Open House in July, Fort McKay during Métis Days in August, and Fort McMurray during Alberta Culture Days in September (the Wood Buffalo Culture Festival 2018 and The World Meets in Wood Buffalo).
- Engagement opportunities posted on the Municipality's website and shared through various methods by organizations represented on the Advisory Committee.
- Five small group sessions held in September with residents interested in visual arts, performing arts, cultural industries, heritage, and youth.
- Participation in the Fort McMurray Christmas Show and Market at MacDonald Island Park in November and the Mayor and Councillors Holly Jolly Party in December.
- Ongoing updates and opportunity for engagement online at www.rmwb.ca/cultureplan.



WHAT IS CULTURE?

UNESCO defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society.”¹ More recently UNESCO and other international bodies have emphasized the importance of social inclusion in nurturing cultural development, expression and preservation. The definition is broad yet it speaks to Wood Buffalo as a region given its cultural diversity, landscape and history.

The Advisory committee supports the broad definition of culture presented by UNESCO, and indeed the Province of Alberta, which states that “culture is the glue that connects us as individuals to our communities, fostering unity, civility and a sense of belonging, pride and caring for our fellow citizens.” For Indigenous Peoples, moreover, culture and its significance go well beyond the narrow limits of art and heritage to encompass ways of life and forms of knowledge with deep connections to the region that are passed down across generations and are very much present today. For the purpose of this Culture Plan the federal government definition is used: “cultural facilities and programs taken up with the arts, heritage and ethno-cultural traditions, creative artistic activity and the goods and services produced by it, and the preservation of heritage.

For more than a decade, Canada’s Creative Cities Network has recognized culture so defined as the fourth pillar of sustainability along with economic, social and environmental pillars. The vision for the Creative City Network of Canada is: “Culture is a core pillar of sustainability, facilitating positive change through creativity and innovation, and creating healthy, vibrant and engaging communities in Canada.”² In this regard, culture in its various forms and modes, be it for example, artistic creation, heritage conservation or ethno-cultural traditions, is considered fundamental to individual and collective well-being. Closer to home, the Alberta Museums Association’s *Sustainability Working Group Recommendations Report*³ also references culture as a pillar of sustainability as do sustainability plans developed by a number of Alberta municipalities.⁴



The Value of Culture

As a recognized pillar of sustainability, culture is an integral feature of everyday life. It is both a source and product of individual expression and community engagement. Indeed, for decades researchers, commissions and engagements in Canada and elsewhere have demonstrated that cultural activities and resources contribute to both personal development and community-building and cohesion.⁵ Sharon Jeannotte complements this perspective by incorporating an Indigenous perspective. For her, the value of culture is implicit in the four pillars of sustainability which she likens to the four directions of the medicine wheel.⁶ The Community Foundation of Canada and CAPACOA's *Vital Signs: Arts and Belonging*⁷ speak to how arts participation enhances residents' feelings of belonging in a community.

Much has been written about the social value of arts and heritage.⁸ Arts and heritage can improve personal health and wellbeing. For example, they can help to address health issues (e.g., dementia) and social issues (e.g., isolation), provide an opportunity for intergenerational contact (e.g., Elder/youth activities), and help us to make sense out of life.⁹ Community participation and engagement have become increasingly significant in recent years.¹⁰ Arts and heritage support balanced human development by providing opportunities for lifelong learning; they foster innovation and creativity. They make our communities better places to live – they improve our quality of life and can help to reduce vandalism by fostering community pride.¹¹ The Municipal Development Plan states, "Investing in the region's arts and cultural infrastructure can strengthen regional pride and identity, as can promoting and supporting the local arts and cultural sector, and integrating culture and heritage into the design of neighbourhoods."¹²

Heritage is a necessary component of the cultural landscape, be it conserving, preserving or commemorating the past. It is about deciding what is important to pass on as Wood Buffalo continues to grow and inevitably change especially given the recent fire and flooding, attempts at reconciliation and the frequently uncertain resource-based economy. In this respect, the value of culture is to be found in encouraging residents – long-standing, recent and transient – to share and record their pasts and to celebrate traditions that are both distinctive and universal.

Heritage resources offer opportunities as building blocks for regional development, cultural tourism activity, social infrastructure, and the creation of green jobs. Heritage places have been called "cornerstones of our national identity."¹³ The United Kingdom's Museums Association provides leadership to the museum community globally, stating simply: "Museums change people's lives."¹⁴ Museums enrich the lives of individuals, contribute to strong and resilient communities, and help create a fair and just society, and are in turn enriched by the skills and creativity of their publics.

In terms of economic impact there are both direct and indirect benefits. Direct benefits include jobs and earned revenues (e.g., admissions, sales), while indirect benefits include attracting visitors through cultural tourism and attracting and retaining residents.¹⁵ There is potential to increase the economic benefit of culture through development of festivals, events and products that would attract more cultural tourism. Waterfront and downtown revitalization plans also have great economic potential if cultural facilities and programs are fully integrated.

The value of culture translates into a wide range of arts facilities, programs and resources. The rewards of participation are accomplishment, enjoyment and recognition for individual citizens; the sum total of cultural participation provides Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo as a whole with the realization that people are doing it, here, in this region. Whether an adolescent engaged in the District Recording Studio, a community theatre group member, a craftsperson with the Fort McMurray Potters' Guild, an emerging Indigenous filmmaker, a volunteer engaged in public art initiatives or an audience member – all contribute to making culture a valuable and diverse asset.

Vision for the Development of Arts and Heritage in Wood Buffalo

Residents were asked what culture means to them, what makes arts and heritage in Wood Buffalo unique, and what they would like to see in terms of arts and heritage development over the next decade. The concepts of inclusivity, diversity and recognition of the value of arts and heritage came through as being most important.

The vision statement for the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan as developed by the Advisory Committee describes the Wood Buffalo region, and arts and heritage specifically, once the work outlined in this plan is completed:

Wood Buffalo is a culturally diverse and socially inclusive municipality in which arts and heritage are vital to its social, economic, and environmental well-being.

Kirschner Family Community Art Gallery



COMMUNITY VALUES THAT SUPPORT ARTS AND HERITAGE

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo 2018-2021 Strategic Plan called for the development of an Culture Master Plan “through collaborative partnerships that will outline priorities that each community partner and key stakeholder, including the Municipality, can use to align policies, strategies, and actions to support decision making and resource allocation to maintain a vibrant, sustainable community and quality of life for current and future residents.”¹⁶

The *Wood Buffalo Social Sustainability Plan* recognizes the importance and potential of arts and heritage as a component of community development. In particular it recommends “the creation of gathering places to support expression and celebration and engaging youth in identifying and developing non-organized recreation and active living activities.” The plan goes on to suggest that “such strategies will help to increase interpersonal and cross-community interactions and build a stronger sense of community by increasing awareness and appreciation for the rich culture, knowledge and experience in the region.”¹⁷ These perspectives are consistent with the community values of Wood Buffalo which were expressed during the public engagement process, can be articulated as follows, and inform and situate the development of arts and heritage in the region;

- Arts and heritage are valued as contributing to quality of life in the region
- Artists and heritage practitioners should be able to earn a viable living
- Everyone should feel they belong and have the ability to contribute to their community
- The region is richer for its cultural diversity and inclusivity
- Together, we can create the type of community we want to live in – it’s a ‘can do’ place

Taken together, these values may be summarized as:

Resilience

Wood Buffalo is a resilient region with its resolve continually tested. All of the region’s communities are surrounded by large tracts of wilderness and as a result, the threat from natural hazards such as floods and wildfire is an ongoing concern. Additionally, the region is regularly impacted by the boom and bust of a resource-based economy. Residents and social profit organizations, including those in the arts and heritage and other sectors, local government and the corporate sector are taking on the complex challenges of recovery, seeking to make the region stronger and more desirable as a community in which to live and work. While rebuilding is a long and difficult process, it is nevertheless about renewal and therefore of significant social benefit.

Canada Day Parade



Reconciliation

Indigenous Peoples hold a unique place in the region. Indigenous Peoples used and occupied the region well before the arrival of Euro-Canadians and were among the earliest founders of Fort McMurray. With its significant Indigenous population throughout the region, the Municipality recognizes the importance, if not the necessity, of addressing the findings and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action* and has begun to do so. Arts and heritage are especially relevant as they are means for acknowledging past injustices and paths for creative healing in the present and the future.

Inclusion

Wood Buffalo recognizes that it is an increasingly culturally diverse community consisting of many groups each with its own traditions,

Miquwakhesis Project Youth Workshop



religion, language, and history. Yet they have principles and values that are shared and universal and through arts and heritage foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among long-standing residents, transients and newcomers.

Collaboration

Collaboration and cooperation are particularly important values in arts and heritage because culture is a shared responsibility. Municipalities, large and small, benefit from collaborative partnerships within the local cultural community and among governments, corporations and the social profit sector locally, provincially and nationally to enhance the quality of life.

Innovation

Recreational facilities in Wood Buffalo are among the most extensive in Canada relative to the size of the population. This commitment to the well-being of the community is in many ways innovative given the range and type of resources. It is thus suggestive of the ingenuity and determination available to support arts and heritage in terms of their potential to enhance living and working in the region. The Municipality and community partners have established innovative relationships and approaches. For example, Oil Sands Community Alliance (OSCA) members work with the Municipality, business leaders and local stakeholders to address the most pressing regional planning and economic issues, and priorities in the Municipality. This type of approach extends into the way cultural and recreational facilities and programs are provided locally.

* For more information about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action visit www.trc.ca.



PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES THAT WORK TO SUPPORT ARTS AND HERITAGE

Individual citizens, personnel in cultural organizations, other social profits, Municipal staff, the corporate, business and tourism sectors, the education sector, and public at large contributed to framing the Culture Plan's vision. They shared what they consider to be the challenges, opportunities and priorities for culture in the region and provided input for guidelines that give purpose and direction to the Culture Plan. The following principles and practices underline the plan.

Principles

In addition to the community values outlined above which also speak to guiding principles, there are three related considerations.

Accessibility: Arts and heritage must be culturally, intellectually, physically and financially accessible to all people across the Wood Buffalo region whether they live in Fort McMurray, in rural communities, or are part of the transient population.

Assets: Arts and heritage are a strategic investment for community development and social sustainability.

Belonging: Arts and heritage foster a culture of community participation in which both a sense of belonging and differences co-exist and are celebrated.

Practices

There is an identified need to research, think and plan for the short, medium and long-term and in doing so recognize the critical importance and impact of small incremental changes and substantial future accomplishments. Coincident with the commitment to accessibility, the development and planning of arts and heritage should be undertaken with the entire region in mind.



igNIGHT Festival

David Robinson, Reflections on the River

Created in 2014, the Municipal Public Art Program will continue to develop a dynamic collection of art that celebrates Wood Buffalo's culture, history and people while enhancing the visual and aesthetic impact of the region.



UNDERSTANDING THE WOOD BUFFALO CONTEXT

Basic demographics together with economic facts and infrastructure realities provide an initial context with respect to the planning and development of arts and heritage. Census 2018 recorded an overall population of 111,687, which is a decrease of 10.67 percent over the 2015 population of 125,032. The total permanent population is 75,009 and the total shadow population is 36,678, a decrease of 14.9 percent from 2015. The average income in Wood Buffalo is one of the highest in Canada. The median age is 33 and the population is becoming increasingly diverse, factors that also suggest that arts and heritage activities may be both desired and supported by a population which is projected to grow by 20,000 by 2021.¹⁸

Whether the focus is Fort McMurray in particular or the entire population, Wood Buffalo is the size of a typical small or medium-size city in Canada which is a regional service centre such as Red Deer and Grande Prairie in Alberta, Kamloops and Prince George in British Columbia, or Thunder Bay in Ontario. However, Wood Buffalo does not have some of the equivalent cultural facilities that are found in some or all of these locations. Yet Wood Buffalo is more isolated so it could be argued that cultural facilities are even more important in Wood Buffalo than elsewhere. It might also be argued that the fact that the region does not have all of the cultural infrastructure that some other communities do is attributable to Fort McMurray being a relatively young urban centre in comparison to other cities listed. While the region has a deep connection to Indigenous Peoples and an oil and gas-based economy that began in the 1960s, the development of cultural infrastructure in the city of Fort McMurray dates from the 1980s; and when the amalgamation occurred in 1995 it created a unique urban/rural dynamic.

There are extensive elite recreational facilities in the region, yet the development of arts facilities has not kept pace. Efforts to integrate cultural spaces into recreation facilities fall short – for example,

the Kirschner Family Community Art Gallery at MacDonald Island Park does not fulfil the role of a professional public art gallery or community arts centre. There is no gallery that provides professional artists' fees or space that fulfills the minimum requirements for the security and presentation of exhibited work. There is also an identified need to develop a heritage resources management plan.

The range of flagships generally is expanding to include festivals and new media organizations. While libraries are recognized as flagship cultural institutions, they operate under specific legislative and funding structures and therefore are not included in comparative data.

Despite the equally high cost of living, disposable income is also significantly high proportional to other large, mid-size and small cities across the country. While economic uncertainty is always a factor, the amount of income generation, including the discretionary portion, suggests that the Municipality is positioned to encourage, if not support, further cultural development given current levels and resources.

The 2016 Horse River Wildfire and the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission are two factors which have dramatically altered the region. The social, economic and environmental effects of the fire remain as individuals, families and the Municipality engage in the long, arduous processes of healing and rebuilding. While the resilience is remarkable, it is difficult to forget that at one point over 88,000 people were evacuated and 5,890 km of land burned – roughly the size of Prince Edward Island. The Red Cross points out that recovery at both an emotional and practical level takes several years and that the third year is particularly challenging for community renewal – the point at which arts and heritage can have an especially stabilizing effect.¹⁹

As to the latter, the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report clearly and urgently convey the need to address past injustices and to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Arts and heritage potentially have an enabling role as a creative bridge for learning and understanding. To illustrate, a recent cultural initiative "Youth Voices Rising: Recovery and Resilience in Wood Buffalo" involved youth in Janvier who, through photography and other media, addressed both natural devastation and injustices.²⁰

Local Cultural Organizations

There are a number of significant cultural organizations in the region.* For example, Arts Council Wood Buffalo (ACWB) is a not-for-profit organization established in 2012 to "support the growth and success of the arts." ACWB advocates on behalf of artists and builds the capacity of the arts sector.

The performing arts centre belongs to the Keyano College and community theatres are fledgling. Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre serves the community providing a combination of professional touring and community theatre, as well as access by local school boards and community users. The Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts (SECPA) at Holy Trinity Catholic High School is a state of the art performing arts centre created through a partnership between the Fort McMurray Catholic School Board, Suncor Energy and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. The centre is a cultural hub for community members and groups.

The Fort McMurray Heritage Society (Heritage Society) operates the Fort McMurray Heritage Village and Fort McMurray Heritage Shipyard. The Heritage Village and Heritage Shipyard, as well as the independently operated Fort Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum, house exhibitions, artifacts, local archives and reference libraries,

provide cultural classes and participate in community events. The Heritage Society's proposed Interpretive Centre, once developed, will allow it to interpret broader heritage themes. The Oil Sands Discovery Centre, also located in Fort McMurray, is a provincial facility that interprets one aspect of the region's history.

Fort McMurray Métis Local 1935, is one of a number of Indigenous organizations in the region with strong cultural mandates. For McMurray Métis, culture extends beyond the realm of art and the preservation of heritage; it is the living embodiment of a way of life, knowledge, and practices of its members and their deep connections to Fort McMurray and the wider region. In this spirit, McMurray Métis is planning to develop a cultural centre which will include museum exhibition and collections spaces, workshop spaces, theatre, music and dance facilities, and outdoor education facilities for cultural activities. The plan for the cultural centre is to ensure the continuity of the Métis way of life, knowledge and cultural practices are celebrated in Fort McMurray and the region. Furthermore, McMurray Métis intend to foster greater understanding of Métis culture, history and facilitate reconciliation with non- Métis peoples and governments.

The Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo (MCA) is an umbrella organization for over 70 cultural groups from around the world, including Indigenous cultures. The MCA helps newcomers overcome isolation resulting from language and cultural barriers to enable them to fully contribute to the community. The MCA also works to celebrate and showcase our community's cultural diversity and educate the people of our region about the rich multicultural heritage of Wood Buffalo.

* There are many more cultural organizations and assets in the region. To learn more go to www.rmwb.ca/culturemap



Red River Wagon



Fort McMurray Heritage Shipyard

Local Cultural Initiatives

There are several initiatives that have the potential of serving as a foundation for future development. Foremost, and in need of reemphasis, is Wood Buffalo's cultural diversity, which includes a significant Indigenous population. It is seen in cultural events, such as those undertaken by the Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo and those organized by rural and Indigenous communities. It is apparent in the Artist in Residency program, and in other programs supported or delivered by the Recreation and Culture Branch. These include, for example, participation in Alberta Culture Days, the Heritage Calendar and Heritage Plaque programs as well as coordination and support for several festivals. Also notable, for example, on the part of cultural organizations in the region are the artists represented by the Points North Gallery, the Chevron Open Minds Heritage School programs of Heritage Village, the over-subscribed dance classes, and the cultural programs of the Fort Chipewyan Bicentennial Museum.

This said, there are also social and economic factors that must be addressed including the needs, opportunities and contributions of professional artists, and the sustainability of activities and programs across the arts and heritage spectrum that are directed at non-professional practitioners. The Wood Buffalo Culture Plan recognizes all these facets of cultural expression and development.

An initiative which is doing just that is Public Art Wood Buffalo. Although in its early stages, preliminary policies, a commissioning program, operation and funding provide a potential template for other arts and heritage development. Similarly, the TOTAL Aboriginal Interpretive Trail, located at MacDonald Island Park, is reflective of Wood Buffalo's diversity and its attendant community values such as collaboration, inclusion and innovation. Notable is its engagement of professional artists from the region and elsewhere together with contributions from local residents and schools.

Several developments in contemporary art in Alberta, Canada and elsewhere are also instructive to understanding the context for culture production in Wood Buffalo. Many contemporary artists are taken up with environmental changes to the land and climate, and its human impact. In Alberta, for example, the sculpture and public art of Peter Von Tiesenhausen and the work in various media of Alberta First Nations artist Faye Heavysield are very relatable to the environmental realities and challenges of Wood Buffalo. Another major theme in contemporary art is the social and cultural transformations of places, whether urban centres or rural communities – a focus also relevant given Wood Buffalo's increasing cultural diversity.

As well, the Culture Plan addresses the acute urban/rural differences with respect to the provision of resources and programs given that over 70 percent of the population is concentrated in Fort McMurray, and the remaining in nine rural communities spread across the region and in a shadow population. Most cultural organizations do not have the capacity to deliver programs in the rural areas. However, the Wood Buffalo Regional Library is addressing the urban/rural imbalance through online resources, outreach programs such as Words-in-Motion, and by offering books by mail to residents of Fort Chipewyan.

Nevertheless, there are gaps in both Municipal and community support of arts and heritage when measured against facilities, programs and other cultural assets in cities with comparable populations in Alberta and British Columbia. While Wood Buffalo is distinguished by its Public Art initiative, it does not have a heritage resources management program or plan which most other municipalities this size have, nor does it have a municipal museum, public art gallery or professional theatre company. Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre as a performing arts venue and presentation company is comparable to that of many small cities as are some of the activities of Arts Council Wood Buffalo.

There are also gaps in terms of Wood Buffalo's funding streams and services for artists, both professional and amateur, as well as for smaller cultural organizations. Whatever the support, the trend for several decades has been a mix of Municipally-owned or operated organizations and programs, and not-for-profit entities, that normally receive support from various levels of government.

Comparison of Cities, Regions and Governments: Significant Findings

To further understand the Wood Buffalo context, it is instructive to provide comparative data from five areas in Canada whose funding and programs may have applicability. These are: City of Kamloops, British Columbia and the Thompson Nicola Regional District (TNRD) in which it is located; City of Prince George, British Columbia and the Fraser-Fort George Regional District (FFGRD) in which it is located; City of Thunder Bay, Ontario; and St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The Yukon may seem an unlikely comparison but it has a very large investment in arts and heritage proportional to its population, which is significantly Indigenous and rural. Kamloops and Prince George, like Fort McMurray, make up over 75-80 percent of the population of their respective regions but whereas the City of Kamloops contributes almost 100 percent of all cultural funding, the Fraser-Fort George Regional District provides 8 percent of the support with the City of Prince George contributing the remainder.

Moreover, support in Kamloops and Thunder Bay is directed primarily at flagship cultural organizations such as a substantial public art gallery, municipal museum or theatre company/venue. The FFGRD and the City of Prince George have these commitments but support, both financial and in-kind, is shared and also diffuse, extending to several other arts and heritage organizations and programs. The District has five year agreements with eight sites which include two flagship organizations and smaller recipients.

Finally, St. John's, while much larger in population than any of the other cities, like Whitehorse, has a much smaller financial commitment to culture which translates into per capita spending of a mere \$8.00. Yet organizations, programs, facilities and artists in the city receive approximately 60 percent of all the funding from the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council which represents an additional approximately \$1.2 million of cultural support. Taken together, all the cities, and as the case may be their districts, territorial or provincial counterparts, demonstrate the various funding streams that may be applicable for a regional municipality like Wood Buffalo as it weighs its financial options with respect to Fort McMurray and its rural dimension which currently translate into approximately \$1.8 million per year and per capita spending of about \$16.00.

Reflected in the streams and amount of funding are various administrative approaches to supporting culture. In the Yukon, funding for arts and heritage is provided by the Department of Tourism and Culture through multiple channels. There is, for example, annual and major funding for flagship organizations such as the Yukon Arts Centre and support for operations and programming for a diverse range of arts organizations through an arms-length mechanism with peer-review panels with 19 recipients currently receiving funding. Additionally, 19 museums and cultural centres currently receive support from another funding stream along with programs to fund historic sites and other heritage resources. Support by municipalities, such as Whitehorse and Dawson City, is limited to meager support for museums, whereas in the case of First Nations Cultural Centres, eight are owned and operated by First Nations governments. There are also budgets for both arts and heritage designated for conservation and storage, professional development, capital, and tourism initiatives. Indigenous artists, programs and organizations are integrated in all funding programs and streams.

Kamloops, Prince George, Thunder Bay and St. John's all fund arts and heritage organizations, but in varying degrees with respect to support for operations, capital and programs. As noted, there are multiple-year service agreements in place with organizations in Prince George and the FFGRD, and in the case of the latter they include expectations beyond financial support. Kamloops has multi-year agreements with flagship organizations which also was the case in Thunder Bay until this past year when one-year agreements were put in place owing to a current budget freeze. As well, in Prince George and St. John's there is support for operations and programming available to a range of local organizations on a yearly or multi-year basis through a community investment fund mechanism, such as Prince George's My PG program. Recipients include, for example, artist-run galleries, community arts councils and other service-oriented organizations, cultural festivals, music societies and artisan groups, such as a potters' guild. Kamloops and Thunder Bay provide a small percentage of funds in this regard although the latter operates a city-wide cultural events program with a healthy budget and often in partnership with local organizations. In St. John's as noted, substantial funding comes to the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council and in this particular instance through grant programs for operations, projects and 'sustaining' support subject to an arms-length/peer review process as in the Yukon.

Beside the arms-length approach, multi-year agreements, and specific grant programs for operations and programming, some arts and heritage organizations also receive extensive in-kind support or exemptions. As to the former, and like other not-for-profit organizations, they may be housed in city-owned facilities as is the case with three flagship organizations in Thunder Bay. In other instances, such as Prince George, a nominal rent is paid and maintenance is covered. In the latter, municipal tax exemptions or another type of waiver or concession may apply. Finally, there are a number of instances where arts organizations are directly owned by the municipality. Such is the case with the Kamloops Museum whose

staff is therefore city employees, although there is also a Friends of the Museum not-for-profit society to enable access to other funding, both private and public.

While the amount and type of resources varies among these five places, as do the administrative structures and funding mechanisms, all demonstrate significant capacity to support culture. For some, this support has developed incrementally over decades hand in hand with the very arts and heritage organizations funded. These organizations, such as Western Canada Theatre and the Art Gallery in Kamloops BC, and the Art Gallery in Thunder Bay, have also matured. For others, such as the Fraser-Fort George Regional District it applies to the implementation of multi-year agreements. Capacity is not confined to providing funds; it also refers to expending other municipal resources efficiently and instituting various mechanisms to enable arts and heritage to not only survive, but flourish. To illustrate, in the Yukon, an arms-length adjudication process has been deemed the most effective and fair means to support arts organizations whereas in several places there are policies aimed at enabling cultural development such as heritage resources management, public art guidelines, fee for service delivery, or in the form of benefits and exemptions for not-for-profit organizations.

Taking all the data into account, it is instructive to compare per capita spending in the cities/regions/governments and funding by Alberta municipalities. The range is very wide from a staggering \$433.00 in the Yukon to between \$8.00-\$9.00 in Airdrie and St. John's, although in the latter case this does not include support from the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council. However, when looking at cities with similar populations to Fort McMurray and the Wood Buffalo region the range significantly narrows from \$26.00 to \$32.00, yet the funding responsibilities, streams and priorities vary, for example, in Prince George/FFGRD and in Grande Prairie, St. Albert, Red Deer, and Sherwood Park/Strathcona County in Alberta. What's more, Wood Buffalo's per capita spending of approximately \$16.00

is lower, and particularly so, when compared to Red Deer (\$33.50), Grande Prairie (\$31.30) and St. Albert (\$26.00). Yet it must be pointed out that these communities have significant arts and heritage infrastructure, such as professional art galleries and several other not-for-profit cultural organizations that have received substantial municipal support for considerable lengths of time.

A final observation which solely distinguishes Wood Buffalo is its inordinate high level of corporate support for the cultural sector. In all cities and regions scanned, municipal, regional or territorial governments are the principal funders. There is support by major companies and local businesses in the form of funding, sponsorship, or in-kind contributions, but nothing approaching the investments made in Wood Buffalo by the corporate sector.



Multicultural Expo Dancer



WOOD BUFFALO

ARTS AND HERITAGE PRIORITIES

The Advisory Committee discussed findings of the literature review, environmental scan, interviews, and small group meetings, and with the consultants identified priorities, challenges, strategies, opportunities, and potential actions, and suggested roles and responsibilities to address actions. The priorities and strategies are elaborated upon in the Proposed Action Plan that accompanies the Culture Plan.

Foster Healthy Environment for Culture: Arts and Heritage

Challenges

There is currently a lack of understanding about the needs of the cultural community, the expectations community members have of Municipal government and vice versa as well as of the role of the corporate sector. The community feels that the Municipality does not understand the difference between the needs of professional, emerging and recreational artists and cultural practitioners.

Opportunities

A vibrant arts and culture community is a factor in attracting visitors and new residents, encouraging transient workers to become residents, and retaining youth in the community. There is an opportunity to highlight the importance of arts and heritage in the waterfront and downtown revitalization planning currently underway, as well as in future municipal planning. There is an opportunity to improve the regulatory environment and investment programs for arts and heritage, to reduce duplication and improve collaboration between the Municipality and various cultural organizations, and to provide more activities to support professionalization.

Strategies

- [Champion the Wood Buffalo Culture Plan](#)
- [Clarify roles and responsibilities of all levels of government, Indigenous groups, social profit, educational and corporate sectors, and individuals](#)
- [Integrate culture more effectively in government and organizational planning](#)
- [Strengthen current strategies and seek opportunities to enhance cultural programming provided by the Municipality and not-for-profit cultural organizations](#)
- [Provide recommendations to Mayor and Council re: Municipal bylaws that should be revised to encourage cultural entrepreneurialism](#)
- [Develop capacity of cultural organizations as well as individual artists and heritage practitioners](#)
- [Explore opportunity to develop multi-year agreements between the Municipality and educational institutions, cultural organizations, and Indigenous governments and organizations](#)
- [Introduce designated cultural investment streams to support capital development, festivals, operations, projects, travel, etc.](#)
- [Develop an investment plan for culture](#)
- [Develop a Public Art Plan](#)
- [Improve relations between Indigenous organizations, artists and other residents in the region](#)

Further Develop Cultural Facilities and Resources

Most communities with a population the size of Wood Buffalo have a number of flagship cultural institutions, such as:

- [a public art gallery,](#)
- [a stand-alone professional theatre company and/or symphony,](#)
- [a municipal museum and archives, and](#)
- [a multipurpose arts and cultural centre.](#)

They also have specific municipal funds, programs and criteria for supporting arts and heritage organizations and programs.

Many municipalities this size have a combined use theatre, art gallery, museum and library complex – or spaces in adaptive re-use facilities – rather than incorporating arts spaces into recreational facilities which are not necessarily compatible. There are often smaller arts and heritage facilities and resources in surrounding rural areas. These facilities are often developed in partnership between municipal, provincial and federal governments, the corporate sector and private patronage. Indigenous groups may develop their own facilities, often with support from various levels of government as well as the community. Many small cities in Alberta have developed heritage resource management plans and programs.

Challenges

While there are a number of cultural facilities in the municipality, there are gaps. Residents involved in the cultural planning process identified a number of challenges, particularly the lack of a public art gallery that would primarily exhibit the work of established

contemporary artists, both local professional artists as well as artists from outside the region, and an arts centre/creative space to foster the work of amateur and emerging artists. Multipurpose spaces are often not suitable for particular uses and/or are too expensive for artists/arts organizations to use. Heritage resources, particularly the Heritage Society in Fort McMurray and the Bicentennial Museum in Fort Chipewyan, require additional financial support and there is a lack of understanding in the community of the potential to identify cultural landscapes, sites and heritage interpretation. A number of people commented that there are no heritage resources, that everything was lost in the fire, but they have a limited view of what may be considered heritage resources.

Opportunities

Recreational facilities in Wood Buffalo are among the most extensive in Canada relative to the size of the population yet cultural facilities have not kept pace. Educational institutions provide community access to cultural facilities such as the Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre, the Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts/Holy Trinity Catholic High School, District Recording Studio/Composite High School, and the Association Canadienne Francaise/École Boréal. There is an opportunity to establish even stronger links between arts organizations and educational organizations. The proposed Interpretive Centre at Heritage Village could enable broader themes to be incorporated. There is funding available from both federal and provincial governments to support the development of cultural spaces and preservation of heritage resources.

Strategies

- Conduct cultural facilities' needs assessment
- Increase support for existing cultural facilities
- Develop more indoor and outdoor resources
- Provide affordable artist work studios
- Explore possibility of creating a public art gallery
- Conduct a survey and inventory of heritage resources and develop a Heritage Resources Management Plan
- Provide support to provincially designated heritage resources as well as to any resources listed under a future municipal program
- Provide support to Indigenous cultural facilities that are currently in the planning stages



Performer at WinterPLAY Festival

Support Collaboration and Innovation

Collaboration refers to working together for a common purpose – in a true collaboration artists influence one another's practice; creative collaboration is stronger than cooperation or coordination where organizations and individuals may each contribute but do not necessarily impact one another. True collaboration leads to innovation.

Challenges

The Municipality, cultural organizations and individuals currently work primarily in silos, coming together as required to support events and programs. The size of the region makes collaboration between urban and rural communities and among rural communities very difficult. The fact that so much financial investment has come from the corporate sector is both a benefit and a constraint; local arts organizations are out of step with national and provincial trends because, with few exceptions, they have traditionally not had to access funding programs of other levels of government. The lack of opportunities for professional/emerging artists especially precludes them from applying to other levels of government for support, which normally require an exhibition, performance or publication history.

Opportunities

There are opportunities for Indigenous and culturally diverse artists to collaborate with other members of the cultural community, as well as with other social profit agencies, and for arts and heritage practitioners to work together not just side by side as they do now. There are opportunities for Municipal staff to engage more fully in the programs and activities of the cultural community, not just to provide funding

and coordination, and for members of the cultural community to engage more fully in the activities of provincial, federal and international organizations.

Strategies

- Foster an environment of true collaboration in which organizations have equal voice and power
- Explore joint usage agreements as indicated in the RMWB 2018-2021 Strategic Plan
- Approach Indigenous governments and organizations to discuss potential for agreements
- Provide opportunities for professional artists in all disciplines as well as heritage practitioners and cultural leaders
- Develop capacity of the cultural community in terms of the number and experience of professional staff
- Encourage individuals to participate in activities outside the region
- Develop resilience through arts and heritage activities that seek opportunities and collaboration within the economic climate, social sector, youth, and senior strategies

Encourage Diversity, Inclusivity and Accessibility

There are a number of distinct cultures in the region: Indigenous people from across Canada, Francophones, and a wide diversity of newcomers. The Municipality recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to preserve and practice their traditional cultural practices as they see fit. The Culture Plan is intended to consider ways that Indigenous culture may be presented throughout the region in order to promote reconciliation and enhance economic, social and other benefits.

Challenges

Members of various cultural communities may not know much about one another. The new education curriculum has a focus on Indigenous history, but adult Canadians and newcomers often know little about the experience of Indigenous Canadians – nor do Canadians necessarily know much about the cultures of newcomers. Although the average income of residents in the region is relatively high, there is disparity and it is important to provide for accessibility and reduce barriers to participation such as cost and transportation. Organizations need to develop innovative programming that is accessible to all.

Opportunities

Recent immigrants and migrants are interested in learning about the culture and history of Canada/Alberta; Canadians, and newcomers from other countries, are interested in learning about the cultures and values of newcomers. Arts and heritage programming provides opportunities to learn about one another in a non-threatening way.

The current focus on reconciliation, stemming from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, provides an opportunity for cultural organizations in the region to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents.

Strategies

- Routinely include Indigenous and culturally diverse artists in planning, development and implementation of cultural programming, including exhibitions, and respect appropriate protocols
- Conduct traditional land use/place names study, to identify and locate significant areas (e.g., lakes, creeks, streams, areas, portage sites, landings, and old communities), protect traditional harvesting and safeguard activities such as trapping, hunting, gathering foods and medicinal plants, and cultural events
- Reflect Indigenous identities, where appropriate in the design and form of new structures, public art, signage and interpretive panels to contribute to the sense of place
- Support cultural programming related to historical Indigenous Peoples that promotes reconciliation and addresses the many Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action related to culture
- Support cultural programming in rural areas
- Support cultural programming that is accessible to all residents in the region

Improve Awareness of the Value of Culture

Culture is an integral feature of everyday life. Arts and heritage facilities and programs provide multiple community benefits. Culture fosters a sense of both personal and community identity and wellbeing while stimulating creativity and economic development. The value of culture is to be found in encouraging residents – long-standing, transient and recent – to share and record their pasts and to celebrate traditions that are both distinctive and universal.

Challenges

There is little understanding about the potential of culture to contribute to community life, whether in terms of social cohesion, wellbeing, education and economic development. Residents engaged in arts and heritage spoke about the lack of understanding of the value of culture within the broader community – including Municipal government and the public at large. They also spoke about the difficulty in promoting programs and activities, including the lack of an up-to-date, centralized, calendar of events.

Opportunities

There’s potential to develop a collaborative approach to marketing and promotions, and to work together to improve understanding of both cultural activities in the region and the value of these activities. As noted above, culture has social and economic value that can only be fully realised if supported and allowed to flourish.

Strategies

- Plan and implement an awareness campaign re: value of culture, e.g.:
 - Promote through workshops, social profit board presentations, cultural community, Council, and the broader community
 - Include culture as a theme for political meetings during upcoming elections and in all stakeholders strategic planning and campaigns
 - Integrate statements of ‘what culture means to me’ into campaign (e.g., Library model, template/tool kit)
- Brand the Arts District with street sign identifiers/banners
- Expand use of heritage photos (e.g. utility boxes, garbage cans, bus shelters etc.)
- Market cultural facilities and programs
- Improve communication of events as they’re being planned
- Position Wood Buffalo as a destination for provincial, national and international cultural conferences and events

Footnotes

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- 13 Canada's National Trust <https://nationaltrustcanada.ca/what-we-offer/advocacy>
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- 17 Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo. *Wood Buffalo Social Sustainability Plan: A Community Plan for the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo*, Approved June 2018.
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- 19 Interview with the Canadian Red Cross
- 20 <http://resiliencebydesign.com/youthvoiceswb/>

Multicultural Expo Dancer



Wood Buffalo Culture Plan Vision

Wood Buffalo is a culturally diverse and socially inclusive municipality in which arts and heritage are vital to its social, economic, and environmental well-being.



www.rmwb.ca/cultureplan