

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Chief Administrative Office

Community Culture & Connections

To: Mayor and Members of Council
From: Audrey Ansell, Director, Community Culture & Connections
Date: April 13, 2026
Subject: Supporting Culture: Chatham Cultural Centre Plans & ARTspace Relocation

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. Consulting services be procured in order to undertake a conceptual review and develop cost estimate(s) for potential future renovations to the Chatham Cultural Centre, and that the project be funded by a transfer of \$100,000 from the Strategic Development Reserve (#17266).
2. To support a vibrant arts community, the operations of ARTspace be relocated to the Chatham Cultural Centre, funded through the current Arts & Culture/ARTspace operational budget.

Background

On November 6, 2023, Council approved the following motion presented by Councillor Crew regarding future renovations of the Chatham Cultural Centre:

“Whereas: Arts, culture and performing arts are vital within our communities of Chatham-Kent and falls within this Council’s term of priorities.

Be it resolved that:

1. Staff prepare a report to present to council for future renovations of the Chatham Cultural Centre, including Thames Art Gallery and Kiwanis Theatre seating and other capital enhancements.
2. This report in consultation with related community and user groups
3. This report includes estimated costs and funding sources
4. This report be presented to Council by March 2024.”

The Chatham-Kent Community Hub (CKCH) project has been an area of focus over the past couple of years and received an important approval milestone on October 20, 2025, when Council voted to award the tender for the project. As a result of this

direction and confirmation that the Chatham-Kent Museum (CKM) is to be relocated from its current location within the Chatham Cultural Centre (CCC), administration has begun to plan for the CKM's move as well as to also start to consider space usage at the CCC. The CKM's move to the CKCH offers a unique opportunity to reimagine the space and layout of the CCC and this report outlines administration's planned approach to respond to the motion regarding Chatham Cultural Centre plans.

In tandem, the Cultural Plan Update Project is also in development and is providing important and up-to-date information to inform cultural sector development.

Comments

The CKM's allocated space within the CCC is 11,700 sq ft, including 2,800 sq ft of exhibition space, as well as storage, administration and shared facility space.

The CKM will vacate the CCC by moving exhibition space, artifact storage, archives and staff to the CKCH. This move will free up to 8,700 sq ft of dedicated museum space at the CCC.

Considerations for reimagining and repurposing the CCC space:

The following is a list of areas that, in addition to community input, will need to be taken into consideration when looking at options for reimagining the space:

- Gallery needs – including for exhibitions and storage.
- Theatre rentals, including ancillary/back-of-house space needs.
- Studio One rentals
- Box office operations.
- Programming needs (current and future) – art classes, pottery classes, camps (summer and PD days)
- Meeting and office space needs for administration
- Space needs for the community within the CCC
- Residual/temporary space needs for the Museum connected to the CKCH move
- Asset Management Plan – Arts & Culture

Since there are a number of considerations, a recommended course of action is important and is set out below, in summary and detailed form.

Recommended course of action - Summary:

Action Item	Detail
Action 1	Project Charter and Consultant Procurement: Finalize a Project Charter and procure consulting services to undertake a conceptual review and develop high level cost estimate(s) for potential future renovations to the CCC.

Action 2	Consultations and Vision: Administration work with the consultant to gather input through consultations with the community and user groups to develop a vision for potential renovations and capital enhancements to the Chatham Cultural Centre.
Action 3	ARTspace Relocation: To better support the arts community, relocate ARTspace to the Chatham Cultural Centre by June 2026 funded by the current operational budget. This move will allow artist members to leverage the supports, services and foot traffic at the CCC. The optimal long-term location for ARTspace within the CCC will be considered as part of the consultant's assessment of space allocation and conceptual review. Of note, administration will also be considering opportunities to integrate aspects of ARTspace within the CKM's operations at the CKCH e.g., artworks from members on display and available for purchase in the CK Museum's gift shop.
Action 4	<p>Funding - Capital Budget, Grants and Sponsorships</p> <p>Administration to return to Council with recommendations for potential renovations and capital enhancements to the Chatham Cultural Centre.</p> <p>Projects identified through the consultant's work will be brought to Council for approval as part of future Capital Budgets.</p> <p>Administration will also continue to consider grant and sponsorship opportunities.</p>

Detailed Background on Action Items 1–4

Action 1 – Project Charter and Consultant Procurement

- Develop a project charter with the municipal Engineering division.
- Procure the services of consultant(s) to undertake consultations, and a conceptual review and develop high level cost estimate(s) for proposed renovations to the CCC.

Action 2 – Consultations and Vision

- **Past CCC consultations** as part of the development of various master plans have included:

A [Municipal Cultural Master Plan - 2007](#) was created to consider cultural development in Chatham-Kent.

The [Chatham Cultural Centre \(CCC\) Master Plan - 2009](#) was approved by Council. A great deal of effort and consultation with stakeholders and staff went into the creation of the CCC Plan. The Plan contained a variety of recommendations, from small-scale improvements to multi-million dollar building renovations and construction. Many of these recommendations were implemented while some were cost prohibitive.

The [CK Cultural Plan Implementation Project - 2014](#) recognized the 2009 work, integrated the findings from the 2007 plan, and remained cognizant of the prevailing economic climate. The 2014 plan encompassed actions for municipal galleries, museums and theatres, the Chatham Cultural Centre as well as broad sector goals.

In relation to implementing recommendations in the 2014 Plan, a [Report presented to Council on March 2, 2020](#), approved a request to transfer \$177,000 from the Kiwanis Theatre Improvement Fund Reserve for improvements to the Kiwanis Theatre. The improvements were to cover two projects; 1) lighting & sound, and 2) seats. The lighting & sound project was completed. A tender for the refurbishment of the Kiwanis Theatre seats was released in 2021. The lowest bid came in at close to three times the projected budget of \$177,000 and the work was suspended. Around this time, the CKCH project discussions also commenced and the combination of the costs as well as the unknowns of the CKCH project meant that the CCC/Kiwanis Theatre plans were paused.

A [Municipal Theatres Overview](#) report presented to Council in April 2025 highlighted that the Kiwanis Theatre continues to be a much-used and loved space for both community groups and commercial renters. In 2025, over 10,000 patrons attended events at the Kiwanis Theatre; many of these events were smaller scale or community events more suited to the Kiwanis Theatre or were redirected there as the Capitol Theatre was already booked. Upgrading the Kiwanis Theatre remains an important project.

- **Current consultations** – With the most recent Master Plan work dating back to 2014, the [Chatham-Kent Cultural Plan Update Project](#) commenced in 2025 and is expected to be completed by May 2026. Based on preliminary findings, the CCC has been identified as an important cultural and community space that is centrally located within Chatham-Kent.
- **Planned CCC consultations** - To determine potential CCC space usage and needed renovations, the intent is for the consultant and administration to work with the community regarding a vision for the CCC and potential renovations and capital enhancements and to connect with groups including:
 - User groups and renters
 - Gallery Advisory Committee and ARTspace members
 - Program participants (pottery, camps, classes)
 - Municipal employees working from the CCC

Action 3 – ARTspace Relocation

ARTspace was formed in 2008 as a collaborative initiative between the Thames Art Gallery and an interested group of Chatham-Kent artists who proposed to operate ARTspace as an artist-run centre for local artists and artisans to exhibit and sell their work.

- Located in a rental space at 165 ½ King Street West, Chatham, the artist-run model operated independently for less than one year. In 2009, the municipality assumed responsibility for the operations of ARTspace.
- The landscape in downtown Chatham has changed significantly since ARTspace first opened. Now several cultural businesses can be found downtown, including Art & Heirloom Shoppe, an art gallery showcasing more than 50 local artists and artisans at 137 King Street West, and Crow City Café which also features local CK artists.
- Visitation levels at ARTspace have declined since 2019 and despite numerous promotional activities, have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.
- It is proposed therefore that ARTspace be relocated to the Chatham Cultural Centre. This move will:
 - Enhance access to accessible parking, entrances and exits.
 - Increase ARTspace access as a result of alignment with existing CK Museum and Thames Art Gallery opening hours.
 - Provide greater exposure for local artists by strengthening the integration of ARTspace with other cultural services, including the Kiwanis Theatre, Studios One and Two, the CK Museum and the Thames Art Gallery.
 - Allow ARTspace to continue to contribute to the quality of life in Chatham-Kent through exhibitions and community programming that showcase Chatham-Kent artists in a vibrant and active space at the Cultural Centre

A permanent location for ARTspace within the CCC will be included as part of the broader CCC conceptual review for improvements to the space. Further, the potential for aspects of ARTspace to also have a presence within the Chatham-Kent Community Hub will be considered e.g., artworks from members on display and available for purchase in the CKM gift shop.

Action 4 – Funding - Capital Budget, Grants and Sponsorships





Administration will return to council with recommendations for potential renovations and capital enhancements to the Chatham Cultural Centre. Projects identified through the consultant's work will be brought to Council for approval as part of future Capital Budgets.

With a conceptual review and high-level cost estimate(s), administration will be positioned to pursue grants and partnerships that support enhancements to cultural assets and spaces, including prioritizing accessibility enhancements (e.g., internal wheelchair lift for access to the Kiwanis Theatre). Municipal advocacy efforts will be leveraged when grant applications are submitted.

Administration will also pursue sponsorships and naming rights to support maintaining the CCC as a vibrant and cornerstone cultural space for the community.

Council Term Priorities

This report supports the following Council Term Priorities:

			
Deliver Excellent Service	Promote Safety & Well-Being	Grow Our Community	Ensure Environmental Sustainability
2d, c	1a, c 4c 6c	4d, e 5a	

Consultation

Consultations with the community regarding cultural assets and spaces are underway as part of the Cultural Plan Update Project.

Members of ARTspace were consulted – the responses received from members indicated support for the relocation to the Chatham Cultural Centre. The Gallery Advisory Committee (a Committee of Administration) discussed the relocation of ARTspace.

The Director, Engineering and the General Manager, Infrastructure & Engineering Services were consulted regarding project planning. The General Manager, FBITT, CFO/Treasurer was consulted regarding reserve funding.

Communication

The strength of the cultural community in Chatham-Kent stems from strong engagement and the connections between people and organizations and to key cultural assets like the Chatham Cultural Centre. In addition to this report being included on the Council agenda and minutes, communication is an integral part of ongoing connections with the Arts & Culture community and with user groups of the various facilities within the Chatham Cultural Centre. ARTspace members will be updated on the relocation to the Chatham Cultural Centre.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Justice (DEIJ)

The Chatham Cultural Centre is a cornerstone asset contributing to Chatham-Kent's cultural sector and is a welcoming space for all. Gallery and theatre story telling serves to help bring communities together by building connections, supporting inclusion and providing an outlet for the expression of differing viewpoints, including those of people traditionally marginalized. The plans for space utilization and conceptual review will consider user and employee needs, prioritizing creativity, and flexibility as well as the accessibility needs of patrons.

The relocation of ARTspace to the CCC has been evaluated through a DEI lens to ensure that the move enhances access to arts and cultural programming for all members of the community, particularly equity-deserving groups. The CCC offers a more central, accessible, and visible location for ARTspace, which is expected to increase participation from a broader and more diverse audience. Specific benefits include:

- Improved physical accessibility for individuals with disabilities through enhanced infrastructure and building design, including accessible washrooms and doors.
- Improved access to parking, including accessible parking spaces.
- Increased visibility and inclusion of racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, and newcomer artists and audiences by situating ARTspace within an inclusive cultural environment.
- Opportunities for cross-cultural programming that reflect the diversity of Chatham-Kent.

Financial Implications

A budget of \$100,000 be approved to procure the services of consultant(s) to undertake a conceptual review, develop high level cost estimate(s), and fund any associated costs during this phase of work, and that this be funded from the Strategic Development Reserve (#17266).

Costs to renovate/redesign the CCC are unknown pending consultations to determine ongoing/future user needs and undertaking a conceptual review and developing high level cost estimate(s). Administration will bring funding requests related to the projects identified through the consultant's work to Council for approval as part of future Capital Budgets.

The costs to relocate ARTspace and prepare the Chatham Cultural Centre will be funded through the Arts & Culture/ARTspace operational budget.

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Attachments: none