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Town of Aurora  
**Information Report**  
No. CMS26-011

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**Subject:** Cultural Services Program Delivery and Aurora Town Square Business Plan Update

**Prepared by:** Phil Rose, Manager, Cultural Services

**Department:** Community Services

**Date:** May 12, 2026

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**In accordance with the Procedure By-law, any Member of Council may request that this Information Report be placed on an upcoming Committee of the Whole or Council meeting agenda for discussion.**

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides the first of two updates for 2026 regarding Cultural Services Program Delivery and the Aurora Town Square (ATS) Business Plan, including 2025 financial results, attendance and booking metrics, and programming outcomes.

- Cultural Services expenditure performance demonstrates effective cost containment across most expense categories.
- Revenue generation will require continued attention to support long-term fiscal stability.
- 2025 provided an opportunity to offer a diverse portfolio of programming at ATS and to better understand the types of programs that resonate with the public.

## **Background**

On November 25, 2025, Council passed a resolution directing staff to report back twice a year with an ATS performance update that includes financial results, attendance and booking metrics, programming outcomes, and progress toward the revenue and utilization targets identified in the ATS Business Plan.

## Analysis

### **Cultural Services expenditure performance demonstrates effective cost containment across most expense categories.**

The Cultural Services Division demonstrated strong fiscal stewardship on the expenditure side, achieving meaningful savings across multiple categories, with the only notable exception being Salaries and Benefits, which closed with a variance of -\$34,900. This variance reflects staffing-related pressures experienced during the year. In particular, the contracted Exhibitions and Program Assistant position was extended into 2025 to assist with unpacking the Museum's collection following occupancy of ATS. To balance this overage, the Museum operating budget was underspent by approximately \$14,000.

Materials and Supplies recorded a favourable variance of \$296,989, with actual spending of \$357,833 against a budget of \$654,822. Savings were largely attributable to deferred purchases and program adjustments.

Services and Consultants finished the year \$134,688 under budget, with actual expenditures of \$843,787 compared to a budget of \$978,475. The favourable outcome reflects reduced consulting usage and careful cost management across service agreements.

Collectively, these results contributed to total expenses being 11.5 per cent below budget, demonstrating strong overall expenditure control.

While Special Events is now part of the Cultural Services Division, these expenditures and revenues are tracked and monitored separately and not reflected in this report.

### **Revenue generation will require continued attention to support long-term fiscal stability.**

Total revenues for the year amounted to \$440,444, compared to a budget of \$900,370, resulting in a variance of -\$459,926, which was experienced across rentals, events, and program registration. Contributing factors include fluctuations in participation and attendance. During year 1 of ATS operations, staff also ensured that all programs were as financially accessible as possible by keeping program fees and ticket prices at a minimum. While this remains an ongoing goal for the Town, there is an opportunity to increase fees to better offset program expenses.

After accounting for both expenditures and revenues, the net levy requirement increased to \$2.60 million, compared to the budgeted \$2.54 million, representing a levy variance of -\$63,376.

Going forward, the results highlight two key priorities:

1. Sustaining prudent expense management, ensuring that program quality and service levels remain aligned with community expectations while maintaining cost efficiency.
2. Continued monitoring of revenue recovery, particularly in rentals and event programming.

**2025 provided an opportunity to offer a diverse portfolio of programming at ATS and to better understand the types of programs that resonate with the public.**

Overall, staff delivered over 50 cultural experiences at ATS in 2025, including special events, concerts, film screenings, cultural festivities, and museum exhibitions, achieving a 4.7 out of 5 rating for both the quality and diversity of programs.

Approximately 8,400 monthly visitors and 100,800 annual visitors came through ATS in 2025, with approximately 3,200 of those participating in Town programs (not including Recreation programs and camps, sports watch parties, Aurora Cultural Centre, and Aurora Public Library programs).

In 2026, staff will host a minimum of 51 cultural activations, with a goal of achieving an average fill rate of 70% in Cultural Services programs. Additional targets include increasing attendance to ATS by 5% and implementing a cost-recovery model for ATS programs.

Staff will provide Council with a second update regarding Cultural Services Program Delivery and the ATS Business Plan in the Fall of 2026.

### **Advisory Committee Review**

None

### **Legal Considerations**

This report is provided in accordance with Council's reporting direction, approved on November 25, 2025, respecting ATS operations and performance.

## **Financial Implications**

The ATS operating budget, a total of \$1,070,000 in incremental funding requirements have been phased onto the tax levy in support of the ATS' ongoing operations. \$720,000 of this amount was phased in over the period of 2020-2023; the remaining \$350,000 in identified incremental funding was phased in over 2024-2026.

The 2026-2027 ATS Business Plan does not identify any further incremental funding needs for the Aurora Town Square.

## **Communications Considerations**

The ATS Marketing and Communications Strategy is the foundation upon which all current and future marketing efforts will be built. It leverages ATS branding that was established in 2021, ensures alignment across Town of Aurora and ATS communications, and creates long-lasting recognition amongst target audiences. Through the Marketing and Communications Strategy – which includes a variety of communications tools, channels and tactics – the Town will inform the public about its own special events, rental opportunities, and the various the initiatives of our cultural partners.

## **Climate Change Considerations**

The recommendations from this report do not impact greenhouse gas emissions or impact climate change adaptation.

## **Link to Strategic Plan**

Aurora Town Square supports the following Strategic Plan goals and key objectives:

- Supporting an exceptional quality of life
- Investing in sustainable infrastructure
- Celebrating and promoting our culture
- Encouraging an active and healthy lifestyle
- Strengthening the fabric of our community
- Enabling a diverse, creative, and resilient economy
- Promoting economic opportunities that facilitate the growth of Aurora as a desirable place to do business

## **Alternative(s) to the Recommendation**

1. Council may provide further direction.

## **Conclusions**

Strong fiscal stewardship achieved meaningful savings across multiple categories within the Cultural Services Division in 2025. Staff will continue to prioritize revenue recovery initiatives, combined with sustained expenditure management, to ensure ATS continues to meet its targets and establish itself as a vibrant community hub in the heart of Aurora.

## **Attachments**

None

## **Previous Reports**

CMS23-038, Aurora Town Square Business Plan, September 25, 2023

CMS25-032, Aurora Town Business Plan Update, November 11, 2025

## **Pre-submission Review**

Agenda Management Team review on April 23, 2026

## **Approvals**

**Approved by Robin McDougall, Director, Community Services**

**Approved by Doug Nadorozny, Chief Administrative Officer**