



An Investment in Calgary's Creative Sector is an Investment in Calgary's Future

APRIL 26, 2021

Today, I voted to allocate \$80 million to complete the long awaited Arts Commons transformation. When the federal government provided additional funding, I knew we had to act. Arts & culture is a growing part of our economy with the creative sector generating over \$2 billion dollars in GDP impact in our city since 2016, through over 4,000 businesses driving this sector.

That's why I first supported a \$5 million increase to arts funding in 2018 and have fought annually to protect funding for this contributor to our economic engine. We cannot take the arts & culture scene in our city for granted, nor can we treat it like a charitable cause.

In addition to the business case, arts & culture also plays a role in societal health and wellbeing. There are impacts to brain health, children's developmental milestones, seniors' health, newcomers' integration and Indigenous reconciliation efforts that rely heavily on investments in the arts. With our provincial government showing little interest in the education, health and inclusion benefits that would flow from an investment in the arts, it is left to municipalities to fund this important work.

In 2019, my Ward 3 team compiled an annotated bibliography that provided a preliminary look into the empirical evidence that supports investment in the arts and creative sector. That was two years ago when the pandemic was nowhere on anyone's radar. Since then, we have all seen our reliance on the arts increase with subscriptions to on-demand viewing services, as well as embracing virtual theatre and concert performances. What does this mean for our future?

Let me start with the business case for the arts. According to Statistics Canada, cultural industries accounted for 2.7% of Canada's overall GDP in 2017. We saw significant gains in sound recording, audio-visual & interactive media, and visual & applied arts. Culture accounted for 3.6% of all jobs in the economy. Culture jobs in live performance also increased 2.4%. There is clearly momentum and opportunity available through this sector of the economy.

In short, we can see that the creative sector has much to offer our efforts in economic diversification as a city. The recent reversal by the provincial government to once again encourage film credit incentives means that they are also seeing the opportunity. Now is the time to make a statement on the global stage that Calgary understands the value of arts & culture by investing in this sector's success, through bold moves like increased funding to the Arts Commons transformational redevelopment project and support for Calgary Economic Development's pursuit of film & television production opportunities.

Let me wind down with the wellness case for the arts. Brain development in children is enhanced with exposure to the arts, whether it's learning to paint, playing an instrument or acting in a play. Those are also the very things that are being removed from school curriculums, essentially denying our kids an opportunity at a fulsome learning experience. Our arts & culture institutions have become de facto educational partners in children's developmental journey, by creating field trip experiences that are intended as substitutes for the programming kids used to receive in schools. Our arts & culture partners provide the live performances, art gallery visits and musical experiences that enrich our children's lives.

Our seniors also thrive when their brains and bodies are kept active through the arts. We must serve this segment of the population by offering public opportunities to engage with art, music and other creative endeavours that stimulate the brain and enhance overall health outcomes.

Our commitment as a city to White Goose Flying and reconciliation with our Indigenous communities also relies heavily on our commitment to the arts. It is storytelling, leveraging oral and visual narratives, that enables the Indigenous people of Treat 7 to reclaim their space in this city.

For all of these reasons and many more, investment in the arts and creative sector is crucial to Calgary's future.