

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Finance and Corporate Services Committee

**DATE OF MEETING:** March 17, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Andrea Hallam, Manager, Arts & Creative Industries, 519-783-8269

**PREPARED BY:** Eric Rumble, Coordinator, Arts & Creative Industries, 519-783-8294

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** Ward 9

**DATE OF REPORT:** February 24, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2025-062

**SUBJECT:** Public Art Commission for Mill Courtland Community Centre

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## RECOMMENDATION:

That the commission and creation of a new public artwork, “Swoop,” by Agnes Niewiadomski and Michelle Purchase, to be installed at Mill Courtland Community Centre as part of its expansion renovation, be approved; and further,

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to implement an agreement, satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with the artist team, outlining the obligations of the commission.

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to explain the selection rationale and recommended proponent from the 2024-25 Mill Courtland Community Centre public art competition.
- The key finding of this report is the jury selection of one proposal, which resulted from a successful open call for submissions and a three-stage selection process.
- The financial implication is a \$25,000 allotment from the facility renovation budget, plus approximately \$10,000 from the consolidated public art account.
- Community engagement included a diverse jury composition, endorsement from the Arts & Culture Advisory committee and feedback from users of the community centre.
- This report supports the delivery of core services through the 1% for public art policy.

## BACKGROUND:

City of Kitchener’s public art program installs site-specific artworks at newly constructed facilities such as libraries, community centres, fire stations, parking garages, and other public spaces and civic buildings. These artworks include permanent installations in a wide variety of styles and materials, chosen with a preference for artistic merit and material innovation, site responsiveness, public engagement and accessibility, durability and sustainability.

Mill-Courtland Community Centre (MCCC) is eligible for a public artwork allotment through the City of Kitchener’s public art policy, [GOV-COR-816](#).

MCCC will soon be renovated to increase the footprint of the building and update existing infrastructure to meet its current and expected demand for services and programs. The planned expansion of the facility involved community consultation to determine priorities for the centre's indoor and outdoor spaces, which informed a business case and then a detailed design, led by a project team including City staff and neighbourhood association members. Renovations will begin this spring and are expected to be completed in 2026.

## **REPORT:**

The MCCC public art competition was open to artists or artist teams based in the Waterloo Region with experience creating public art and/or participatory artworks with community contributions. The open call requested ideas for a \$30,000 commission, which would need to cover the successful artist's or team's design and production fees, insurance and other administrative costs, as well as materials, fabrication and installation expenses, including studio space, transportation or travel. Interested artists were encouraged to visit MCCC and learn about its active uses before applying, and to respond to a theme of "togetherness" that was highlighted during expansion consultations with residents.

Staff assembled a jury to evaluate the expressions of interest received, determine a short list of potential proponents to be paid to further develop their ideas, and recommend a final selection after considering further input from citizens with connections to MCCC. Jurors were carefully chosen to include the following members:

- Mélika Hashemi (professional artist)
- Jason Panda (professional artist)
- Jacob Irish (professional artist & Public Art Working Group representative)
- Nicola Martin (representing the Mill-Courtland Neighbourhood Association)
- Lisa Lambourne (representing MCCC staff)
- Cassandra Cautius (representing the renovation architect, Barry Bryan Associates)
- Debbie Chapman (Ward 9 councillor)

## ***Competition***

After determining a selection process and timing in collaboration with Community Services staff, Arts & Creative Industries (A&CI) staff shared an open call for expressions of interest on the City's website for 90 days from March until June 2024. In addition to a togetherness theme, the call identified a clear preference for ideas featuring hands-on opportunities for community members to help create the artwork and/or programming or interactive potential once installed. Other evaluation criteria included:

- Artistic merit of a proposed concept to enhance or activate public space at MCCC.
- Appropriateness of the scale, visibility and/or presence of a proposed artwork.
- General technical feasibility (durability, assembly, safety, accessibility).

The open call was promoted via City communications channels, local e-newsletters and emails to appropriate arts sector workers based in the region. A public information session was held at MCCC in April 2024.

Eleven submissions were received before the deadline. In stage one, the jury reviewed, rated and discussed their preferences of all submissions. The jury selected four submissions to advance to stage two.

In September 2024, A&CI staff met on site with the four remaining artists or artist teams. Each proponent was paid \$500 to further develop their artwork proposal and then present it to the jury in early November. The jury was tasked with eliminating one proposal during its stage two meeting and it easily reached consensus on that decision. Another proposal was subsequently eliminated by A&CI staff due to substantial technical and feasibility concerns. The remaining two options were progressed to stage three.

Stage three involved sharing the two finalist options with a display at MCCC and a request for public input on the facility expansion project's [Engage WR webpage](#) for three weeks in January 2025. More than 80 responses were received to a series of questions about each option, with a clear preference for one of the proposals.

The selected concept (see appendix A) was indicated as “strongly” or “very” representative of the togetherness theme by 95.1% of respondents, and its potential to enhance MCCC and make its users happy was confirmed by 91.6% and 97.6% of respondents, respectively. The jury met again in late January to review the public input and determined its support for the community’s preference.

### ***Jury Statement***

*Swoop* proposes an eye-catching reimagination of the vaulted ceiling area inside MCCC — a great, cannot-miss-it location that will attract interest from everyone who enters the facility. The artwork will engage with the community that relies on the Centre by providing opportunities to contribute to its fabrication and an ongoing source of inspiration for activities or programs after it is installed.

The renewable, natural and locally sourced willow will bring a unique material language into the space, balancing strong craftsmanship with a handmade quality that aligns with the centre’s well-established character. The sense of motion and collective flow of the piece will beautifully mirror the communal interaction and movement of people in the building as well.

Citizen input on two finalist options also indicated a clear preference that the jury wanted to respect. Residents confirmed that *Swoop* represented the concept of togetherness well and that it would enhance the space. Comments about the idea’s appeal included its repurposing of renewable, low-impact materials, its use of vertical space at MCCC, the hands-on involvement of the community in its production, and the positive symbolism and multicultural resonance of swallows and flocks of birds.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports the delivery of core services.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The recommendation has no impact on the capital or operating budget.

Guided by the City’s public art policy, 1% of the facility renovation budget was determined to be a \$25,000 allocation. Because the policy indicates \$30,000 as the minimum amount required to produce an artwork for the City’s collection, and selection processes have further costs such as compensating artists to develop proposals, honoraria for jurors and jury meeting costs, A&CI contributed another \$10,000 from the consolidated public art account.

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – The call for expressions of interest was created in collaboration with MCCC staff and informed by previous A&CI efforts to refine its open call template to reduce barriers to inclusivity and attract more equity-seeking applicants. The selection jury for this process attempted to be representative of community demographics and include both visual arts professionals and locals with active involvement in MCCC activities.

The soliciting of citizen input using the Engage WR platform was motivated by consultation with centre users that indicated a high priority on their involvement in things that happen inside MCCC. Without past outcomes to reference the success of the effort, staff felt that the community response was general positive and useful to the selection process.

At the Arts & Culture Advisory meeting on Tuesday, February 18, 2025, all members present voted to “endorse the jury selection of the artist team, Agnes Niewiadomski and Michelle Purchase, and their proposed artwork, *Swoop*, for the Mill Courtland Community Centre.”

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

- [CSD-2022-422](#) Mill Courtland Community Centre Expansion Business Case

**APPROVED BY:** Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – Stage two proposal for *Swoop* public artwork at MCCC