

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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

**DATE OF MEETING:** June 2, 2025

**SUBMITTED BY:** Andrea Hallam, Manager, Arts & Creative Industries, 519-793-8269

**PREPARED BY:** Karoline Varin, Program Administrator, Arts & Creative Industries, 519-793-8302

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** 4

**DATE OF REPORT:** May 13, 2025

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2025-244

**SUBJECT:** 2025 Artist in Residence Appointment and Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre Public Art Commission

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Tara Cooper be appointed as the 2025 City of Kitchener Artist in Residence as recommended by the selection committee and the Arts & Culture Advisory Committee; and,

That the commission and installation of Tara Cooper's proposed artwork at Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre be approved, pending consultation and technical review by Facilities Management and Arts & Creative Industries staff; and further,

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to execute an agreement, satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with Tara Cooper, outlining the obligations of the Artist in Residence appointment and the public art commission design, fabrication and installation.

## **REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:**

- The purpose of this report is to recommend the appointment of the 2025 Artist in Residence and to request authorization to enter into a legal agreement with the artist to execute a public art commission at Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre (DPPCC).
- The key finding of this report is that Tara Cooper has been selected by a selection committee and recommended by the Arts & Culture Advisory Committee (ACAC) as the 2025 Artist in Residence and as the artist to realize the public art commission for the Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre.
- The financial implications are a \$10,000 artist honorarium from the existing Arts & Creative Industries budget, and a \$30,000 artwork commission allotted by the 1% for Public Art policy (GOV-COR-816).
- Community engagement included consultation feedback from community centre staff, a juried selection process, consultation with ACAC and will include further

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consultation and technical review of the final artwork design by city staff during the development phase, prior to fabrication and installation.

- This report supports the delivery of core services through the Artist in Residence program and the 1% for Public Art policy.

## **BACKGROUND:**

Established in 1995 as the first municipal program of its kind, the City of Kitchener Artist in Residence program aims to engage the community in the production of contemporary art that reflects community identities and supports the development of local artists. The program delivers on the understanding that meaningful engagement in the arts and the growth of the creative sector contribute positively to the dynamism, authenticity, attractiveness and overall competitiveness of the City of Kitchener.

Link: [Learn more about the City of Kitchener's Artist in Residence program.](#)

The Artist in Residence program continues to emphasize interactive community engagement and encourages applicants to see the residency as an opportunity to advance their own practice. The Artist in Residence is provided with an honorarium as compensation for their time commitment.

The program is open to artists working in a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to, visual arts, performing arts (theatre, music), dance, design, digital and media arts, folk and traditional arts, literature and spoken word, and multidisciplinary works. Staff and the advisory committees have been exploring options to widen the scope of the residency to provide inspiring opportunities for artists.

The City's public art program installs site-specific works throughout the city. Public art is usually created in conjunction with new major construction or renovation of City-owned facilities or public spaces. These artworks include permanent installations in a wide variety of styles and materials, selected with a preference for innovation, responsiveness to the site, low-maintenance, and durability. In 2019-2020, DPPCC underwent a renovation and expansion of its indoor and outdoor spaces. As such, it received a public art allotment through the public art program, guided by policy GOV-COR-816.

For the 2025 Artist in Residence call, the residency and its objectives are combined with an opportunity to develop a permanent, site-specific public art installation for DPPCC, to be added to the City's public art collection.

## **REPORT:**

DPPCC is a neighbourhood hub with amenities that welcome and serve more than 20,000 residents, with shopping, restaurants and sports fields located nearby. In 2019, the centre was renovated and expanded to continue providing highly valued recreation, social services and continuing education programs that meet community needs. Many outreach and support agencies also make this a hot spot for the community, including a local branch of the Kitchener Public Library located within the building.

An artist team was initially selected in 2019 and approved by Council. The pandemic halted and then significantly delayed the project. Furthermore, because of significant cost increases in materials and fabrication, including leaving the artists with no commission for

services, the artist team was not able to realize their proposal. No agreement was completed, and the relationship was terminated.

Arts & Creative Industries (A&CI) staff continued to communicate closely with DPPCC staff to establish parameters for a new call for proposals. A new site for a new artwork installation was identified: a renovated patio located at the back of the building, accessible from the outside and inside, intended for future community use and programming. Staff determined that the Artist in Residence program mandate would align well with the type of engagement and artwork installation the centre was seeking, whilst also supporting local artists trying to extend or expand their practice into the public art realm.

The combination of two A&CI programs results in a yearlong commitment focusing on research and community engagement to inform the development, fabrication and installation of a permanent, site-specific art installation at DPPCC. Starting in July 2025, the first six months of the residency are expected to be dedicated to researching, developing and finalizing a design concept for the public art installation, supported by participatory community engagement. Starting in January 2026, the next six months shall be dedicated to the fabrication and installation of a permanent, site-specific art installation, following successful development consultation and technical review with City staff.

### ***Competition***

The call for proposals was advertised for seven weeks. Eight proposals from artists living in the region were submitted by the competition close date. Members of the selection committee comprised of DPPCC manager, Ward Councillor, a Doon Pioneer Park Community Association member, ACAC member and local visual artist/Kitchener Waterloo Art Gallery curatorial assistant, assessed the entries based on:

- demonstrated commitment to artistic practice
- strength and clarity of concept and overall proposal
- artistic merit of proposal and/or past work
- capability of artist to enable meaningful community engagement to activate a public space
- impact on current artistic development
- relevance of the proposed residency activities and proposed artwork installation to facility priorities and local culture
- capacity to collaborate with other professionals to realize an outcome
- qualifications and ability to produce high-quality artworks
- capacity to successfully complete and install an artwork

The selection committee reached consensus on April 25th, selecting Tara Cooper as the recommended 2025 City of Kitchener Artist in Residence and as the artist to complete the public art commission to be sited at DPPCC.

### ***Residency and artwork commission proposal***

Tara Cooper's art practice embraces the combination of media from print, ceramics, film, installation and book arts. Her subject matter draws from storytelling, with an eye for graphic design, pattern and poetics. She has exhibited her work across Canada (from coast to coast), as well as in New York, California and Europe, receiving numerous grants from Canada Council for the Arts, Ontario Arts Council, Kitchener Waterloo Community

Foundation and a Humanities and Social Sciences Award. Tara is an associate professor at the University of Waterloo, although she will be on sabbatical during the residency period.

Employing the idea and symbolism of a potluck which shares an ethos with the folktale "Stone Soup," the artist proposes to host a series of hands-on workshops using library resources such as cookbooks. Each workshop will target a different audience (e.g. kids, families, adults, teens, date night) and introduce the participants to different art mediums such as zines, recipe cards, accordion books and pop-ups, using methods like letterpress, collage, drawing, linocuts and screen printing. The artist will include prompts connected to family recipes, favourite foods and food culture. The artist brings a wealth of workshop facilitation experience.

The resulting content – imagery and text – generated from these workshops would form the design ideas to create the proposed public art commission: a cut-out collage of symbols in Tara's colourful and whimsical style bolted to the exterior wall within the patio area, making a cohesive composition. Fabrication would employ a range of materials such as aluminum made for outdoor signage, steel shaped by a CNC router, ceramics and marine plywood that is laser cut and shaped by hand with a band saw.

The jury appreciated Tara's well-thought-out workshops, the relevancy of these activities to the final public art installation, and the plan to engage groups of all ages and abilities. She also plans to enlist and mentor emerging artists during her fabrication process. Tara's colourful visual language would connect well with the many families and children attending activities at the community centre, animating the patio area.

#### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

This report supports the delivery of core services.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The \$10,000 artist honorarium and up to \$2,500 allocation for expenses are supported by the Arts & Creative Industries budget.

The public artwork installation is funded by allocations in accordance with Public Art policy GOV-COR-816. The renovation of the community centre resulted in a \$29,000 allotment in 2020, inclusive of artist and collaborator production fees, materials, fabrication and installation, of which \$2,809.60 was spent on the original commission prior to termination.

In 2024, another \$3,809.60 was transferred from the consolidated public art account to reach the current allotment of \$30,000. This was done to meet the minimum allocation for adding a permanent artwork the City's collection (GOV-COR-815, section 4.4a), as established by A&CI staff's recent policy review (DSD-2024-026).

Any ongoing maintenance costs will be funded through the City's Public Art maintenance budget.

#### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:**

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

CONSULT – Currently, the Arts & Culture Advisory Committee (ACAC) serves as the consulting body on the Artist in Residence call for proposals. Arts & Creative Industries staff produced an open call for proposals which was published on the City’s website and promoted on its social media. An information session took place for interested applicants prior to the closing date.

ACAC considered and supported the motion to select Tara Cooper as the 2025 City of Kitchener Artist in Residence, on May 20, 2025.

COLLABORATE – An important component of the Artist in Residence program is the requirement for meaningful public engagement. City staff will work with the artist to support the identified opportunities for public engagement in the proposal. Community centre users will be active contributors in the preliminary stages of the design of the artwork commission.

**PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:**

[GOV-COR-816 Public Art Policy](#)

[DSD-2024-026 Public art policy review and revisions](#)

[DSD-21-004 Doon Pioneer Park Community Centre Public Art](#)

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

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A – call for proposals

Attachment B – Tara Cooper’s proposal