

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Finance and Corporate Services Committee

DATE OF MEETING: August 11, 2025

SUBMITTED BY: Andrea Hallam, Manager, Arts & Creative Industries

PREPARED BY: Elin Moorlag, Manager, Service Coordination & Improvement, Community Services Department

WARD(S) INVOLVED: Ward 5

DATE OF REPORT: August 1, 2025

REPORT NO.: DSD-2025-263

SUBJECT: Kitchener Indoor Recreation Facility Public Artwork Commission

RECOMMENDATION:

That the commission and installation of a new artwork “Gidinawendimin” by Jackie Traverse, at the City of Kitchener’s new indoor recreation complex at RBJ Schlegel Park, be approved; and,

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to implement an agreement, satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with the artists’ representative, Highness Global Inc., outlining the obligations of the facility public art commission.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation for a public art commission for the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex.
- The recommendation for this public art commission was made by a jury of Kitchener arts professionals assembled for the purpose of selecting public art for the facility; the recommendation by this jury has been unanimously endorsed by the City’s *Arts & Culture Advisory Committee*
- The financial implication is \$320,000 from the consolidated public art account.
- Community engagement included a diverse jury composition as well as consultation with the *Arts and Culture Advisory Committee* and *Public Art Working Group*.
- This report supports the delivery of core services through the 1% for Public Art Policy.

BACKGROUND:

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

Kitchener's forthcoming new indoor recreation complex is eligible for a public artwork allotment through the City of Kitchener's percent for public art program, guided by the Public Art Policy (GOV-COR-816). Once complete, this facility will be Kitchener's premier indoor recreation destination, providing a diverse selection of recreational opportunities for residents, including an aquatics centre with two pools, an indoor turf, two cricket practice nets, a walking track, a quad gymnasium, multi-purpose rooms for community use and dedicated team change rooms. The facility is expected to attract more than 570,000 visits per year, including more than 100,000 event-related visitors.

This facility will be the City's first ever net-zero carbon sport and recreation building and one of the most environmentally sustainable recreation facilities in Canada. Envisioned as a sports venue where community comes together, this facility will serve as a gathering place, thoughtfully designed to be comfortable, welcoming and accessible for the diverse needs of Kitchener residents.

The open call for proposals that went out for this commission aimed to prioritize submissions from underrepresented artists, including those by artists of Indigenous background. The proposal submission process allowed artists to self-identify as a member of an equity-deserving group, including but not limited to, Indigenous identity, racialized people, immigrants and refugees, women, 2SLGBTQ+ identified, and people living with disabilities.

While the open public art call was underway, City staff from the facility design and construction team also explored opportunities for invitational art commissions in other areas of the recreation complex identified as benefiting from artistic enhancement. Given the facility's size, scope, and overall budget, additional funds were allocated for this purpose, and consideration was given that artists submitting to the open call could also be considered potential candidates for these invitational commissions.

REPORT:

The Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex art competition was open to artists or artist collaborations with experience in creating site-responsive public art projects. A commission of \$300,000 was available, which promotional content indicated must be used to cover the artist's or collaborative's design and production fees, insurance and legal costs, materials, fabrication and subcontractors' costs, studio, storage and installation expenses, including transportation of artwork to the site, any required official documentation, and any travel expenses.

Staff in Arts and Creative Industries (A&CI) assembled a jury to recommend one proposal from those submitted to the selection process for the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex. Jurors for this commission were considered carefully, and included the following members:

- Rick Haldenby (representative from the City of Kitchener's citizen advisory Public Art Working Group & Professor of Architecture at the University of Waterloo School of Architecture)
- Danille Byers (representative from the Kitchener Soccer Club)
- Logan MacDonald (Kitchener citizen & professional artist & Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Art at the University of Waterloo's department of Fine Arts)
- Margaret Lam (representative and past chair of the City of Kitchener's Arts & Culture Advisory Committee)

- Soheila Esfahani (Kitchener citizen & professional visual artist & curator)
- Elin Moorlag (City of Kitchener staff & representative from the facility design & construction team)
- Margaret Johnston (Ward 8 councillor for City of Kitchener)

Open Public Art Competition

A two-stage public art competition for the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex was announced in August 2024. An open call for expressions of interest was posted and promoted on the City's website for 90 days from August 7, 2024 to November 4, 2024. Of all the Expression of Interests received, one-third of submissions were eliminated due to a failure to include all eligibility requirements, misinterpreting the commission available, or otherwise not aligning with the A&CI team's preference to realize a made-in-Canada proposal. After completing a comprehensive review of all expressions of interest, staff identified 28 proposals that were eligible, which were then reviewed and rated by members of the jury.

From December 2024 to February 2025, jurors independently reviewed and rated submissions. In February the jury met to discuss the highest-rated 10 to 12 proposals in detail, and as a first step, five artists were selected and discussed further as potential candidates for the next round of consideration. Three of those top five artists were asked to provide more detailed and in-depth concepts of the artwork they proposed in the first round for a suspended artwork located in the main lobby, based on the project team's preference for animating that space. Each of the three artists selected were paid the stage-two fee of \$2,500 to develop this second-round concept.

In May 2025, the three shortlisted proposals from the second round for suspended artwork in the main lobby were presented to the public art jury for final deliberation. Each concept demonstrated artistic merit and originality; however, the jury encountered a significant challenge due to major design changes to the facility since the open call was issued in August 2024. Most notably, the addition of a quad gymnasium altered the spatial character of the lobby. Originally envisioned as a light-filled, open area with exterior windows on one side, the lobby is now fully enclosed, bordered by the gymnasium on one side, the aquatics centre on the other, with the registration area, stairwell, and corridor to the indoor turf field directly ahead from the main entrance.

Given these substantive design changes, and after careful consideration of how each proposed suspended artwork would function in the newly configured space, the jury decided to terminate the public art competition, which the City has the express right to do at any time throughout an open call process as per Public Art Policy GOV-COR-816.

Additional Artwork for the Facility

Responding to the team's interest in pursuing additional artworks for the facility, city staff began coordinating a new location opportunity within the facility by inviting a revised pitch from one of the artists identified by the jury as the top five contenders in the first round, contemporary Indigenous artist Jackie Traverse. The proposal submitted in response to the open call by this artist was no longer feasible due to design changes in the facility, but members of the jury were supportive of city staff reaching out to this artist to explore a

potential invitational commission. That artist's representation firm, Highness Global Inc., had recently completed installation of Nyle Johnston and Isaac Murdoch's *Wintertime Stories* at KPL Southwest, and were asked to prepare a new proposal for a feature wall inside the aquatic centre.

In response to this request, Traverse's proposal, *Gidinawendimin* (see Appendix A), was presented to city staff and was shared with members of the jury as a potential alternative once the public art call process was terminated. The proposal outlined a 95-square-metre tile mosaic featuring four women interwoven with flowing lines of water, rendered in vibrant blues with black and white accents. Following a fulsome discussion, the jury unanimously recommended proceeding with this artwork as an invitation-based public art commission, with the funding originally allocated to the suspended artwork competition to be redirected to support this installation. While this recommendation marks a departure from the initial direction for the public art commission, the jury was confident that this striking piece of art will be a powerful and fitting addition to the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex, as captured in the jury statement below.

Jury Statement

***Gidinawendimin* by Jackie Traverse will be a stunning addition to the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex. The beauty and depth of this piece tell a story that will be broadly appreciated, and the theme of the work fits beautifully with the overall architectural style of the facility and the aquatics centre.**

Covering a 95-square-meter space (roughly 70 feet across), the mosaic tile piece captures the theme of women and water, featuring four figures interwoven with the flowing lines of water on a palate of bright and vibrant blue tones with white and black accent. Not only does this piece have incredible artistic appeal, it is also a fitting, durable and practical choice for the facility, requiring very little ongoing maintenance. In particular, the use of vitreous glass tile is an excellent choice for this mosaic, as the light will shine through the glass, accentuating the vibrant colors which will never fade over time.

The decision to select this piece of art required flexibility from the jury and an openness to providing opportunity for the artist to present something that was more suitable to their skillset than what was set out in the original call. This process resulted in an amazing piece of art coming forward, and the jury is thrilled with the commission of this piece. *Gidinawendimin* will be a striking and memorable piece of the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex's aquatics centre for kids and families using the facility for many years to come.

Artwork

Gidinawendimin ("We Are All Related") is a striking tile mosaic by Anishinaabe artist Jackie Traverse that explores the deep connection between women and water. The artwork honours the leadership of women, their intergenerational strength, and the ways in which their voices, like water, flow outward in protection of land, life, and spirit. This relationship is rooted in both ceremony and everyday practices, such as water walks, offerings, and advocacy to protect water for current and future generations.

The piece reflects a powerful Indigenous worldview, celebrating the sacred feminine through themes of continuity, collective responsibility, and reverence for life, and will certainly serve as a compelling cultural statement and a meaningful addition to the City's public art collection.

The original painting has been meticulously translated into a mosaic through a digital rendering process, which maps the artwork onto a carefully selected palette of vitreous glass tiles. This adaptation preserves the integrity of Traverse's original composition—retaining its bold lines, dynamic colour transitions, and expressive forms—while accommodating the geometric and material properties of mosaic art. The mosaic is composed of vitreous glass tiles, known for their rich colour, durability, and resistance to fading or staining. These tiles are suitable for both indoor and outdoor use, including high-moisture environments, ensuring that the artwork will remain vibrant and resilient over time.

Highness Global is a Toronto-based artists' representation firm whose mandate is to translate Indigenous artists' visions to new scales, materials and audiences. Their involvement in the project is an essential factor in this selection and recommendation. Recently, Highness Global support the recent public art installation at KPL Southwest. The development experience at KPL Southwest clearly indicated the Toronto-based artists' representation firm's adaptability, careful collaborative approach and incredible production capability. Their involvement aligns with the priorities of the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex.

Next Steps

On July 15th, 2025, the recommendation to commission the tile mosaic by Jackie Traverse made by the jury was unanimously endorsed by the *Arts and Culture Advisory Committee* (ACAC), a committee of citizens in place to provide advice and recommendations to city council and staff on arts and culture matters to further the city's strategic directions. The ACAC committee meets monthly and is comprised of local arts professionals representing a diverse range of specialities.

Since the jury recommendation was made to commission this work, City staff have been working closely with the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex design and construction team on integrating the installation of this piece into the schedule for the aquatics centre to facilitate a seamless process and ensure installation is complete well before the facility opening.

In addition to the \$300,000 commission for *Gidinawendimin*, a second public art opportunity for the Kitchener Indoor Recreation Complex will be launched in Fall 2025. Recognizing the size, scope, and significance of the facility as a central gathering space for the community, an additional \$200,000 has been allocated to support this next public art initiative. This upcoming call will follow a similar process to the initial one, emphasizing public engagement, transparency, and collaboration. A jury process will be used to ensure community involvement in decision-making, while close coordination with the design and construction team will support the successful integration of the selected artwork within the facility and its construction timeline.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services through the 1% for Public Art Policy.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – Funding for this public art commission has already been allocated to the consolidated public art budget in accordance with Public Art Policy GOV-COR-816. The construction costs of the new Indoor Recreation Complex resulted in a \$300,000 allotment, which is what was offered as commission in the open call for expressions of interest. Any ongoing maintenance costs for this work will be funded through the City's Public Art maintenance account.

The A&CI team has used additional funds generated by other project allotments from the consolidated account to support this selection process, including stage-two artists payments and jury fees informed by the CARFAC (Canadian Artists' Representation/le front des artistes Canadiens) industry standards, meetings and marketing costs.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

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

CONSULT – Staff produced an open call for expressions of interest that was posted on August 4, 2024, remaining up until November 4, 2024. The open call was published on the City of Kitchener website and promoted on its social media and by paid advertising.

COLLABORATE – The jury included representatives from the City's *Public Art Working Group* and *Arts and Culture Advisory Committee*, both of which are made up of citizens. The jury also included visual arts professionals and local citizens, a representative from a sports club with a vested interest in the facility and a staff representative from the recreation complex design and development team. On July 15th, 2025, the recommendation of this jury was unanimously endorsed by the *Arts and Culture Advisory Committee*.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- GOV-COR-816 Public Art Policy

APPROVED BY: Barry Cronkite, Acting General Manager, Development Services Department

ATTACHMENTS:

Appendix A – *Gidinawendimin* proposal by Jackie Traverse