

# Staff Report



Development Services Department

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**REPORT TO:** Council Meeting

**DATE OF MEETING:** May 4, 2026

**SUBMITTED BY:** Andrea Hallam, Manager, Arts & Creative Industries, Economic Development

**PREPARED BY:** Karoline Varin, Program Assistant, Arts & Creative Industries, Economic Development, DSD

**WARD(S) INVOLVED:** All wards

**DATE OF REPORT:** April 13, 2026

**REPORT NO.:** DSD-2026-128

**SUBJECT:** Outdoor Public Art Commission near Cowan Recreation Centre

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## RECOMMENDATION:

**That the commission and installation of a series of outdoor sculptures titled “Let’s Play!” by Pierre Poussin, as described in DSD-2026-128 be approved; and,**

**That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to implement an agreement, satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with the artist, Pierre Poussin, outlining the obligations of the facility public art commission.**

## REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a recommendation for an outdoor public art sculpture commission in Schlegel Park, near the Cowan Recreation Centre.
- The recommendation for this outdoor 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*.
- Community engagement included an open call for proposals posted and promoted by the City of Kitchener, along with diverse jury composition of community members.

## BACKGROUND:

The 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.

The open call that went out for this commission invited artists or artist teams to submit proposals for exterior sculptures that were imaginative, engaging, visually striking, that invite public interaction, and inspired by the theme of *Sport*. This outdoor sculpture competition was open to artists or artist teams with experience in creating site-responsive public art projects.

## **REPORT:**

In September 2025, the City issued an open call for expressions of interest for a two-stage outdoor public art competition to be located in Schlegel Park, near the Cowan Recreation Centre. That call was open for 75-days and closed on December 15, 2025.

Two outdoor locations within Schlegel Park and near the entrances into the Cowan Recreation Centre were included in the call: one near the facility's main (west) entrance, and one near the facility's back (north) entrance. Proposals were required to include outdoor sculpture ideas for both identified sites, to be ground mounted on a hardscape surface. A vital component for proposals was the ***theme of Sport***, which invited creativity and interpretation, and specified representation of at least one of the principal sports to be played at the facility in throughout the park (e.g. soccer, lacrosse, cricket, basketball, pickleball, and volleyball). Proposals were also expected to be ***playful, engaging and invite public interaction***.

After completing a comprehensive review of all submissions received, staff identified 21 proposals that met the eligibility criteria for the public art commission, which were advanced to the review process. Staff in the Arts and Creative Industries team assembled a jury to review all eligible proposals and work through the two-stage selection process to make a recommendation for this commission. Jurors for this commission were considered carefully, and included the following members:

- Danielle Byers (citizen 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 (citizen representative and member of the City of Kitchener's Arts & Culture Advisory Committee)
- Soheila Esfahani (Kitchener citizen & professional visual artist & curator)
- Margaret Johnston (Ward 8 councillor for City of Kitchener)
- Mairin Scannell (City of Kitchener staff & representative from the Cowan Recreation Centre Management team)

From December 2025 to February 2026, jurors independently reviewed and rated all eligible submissions using an evaluation rubric created for this public art commission. The evaluation rubric (which was provided to artists as part of the open call for proposals) included the following categories listed below.

### Stage one Evaluation Categories:

- Artist or team **qualifications and ability** to produce high-quality artwork(s)
- **Artistic merit** of the proposed concept to enhance or activate public space
- Proposal is in alignment with the **core theme of sport**; representing at least one of the principal sports played at the facility
- The artwork **invites public interaction** in a way that is playful and engaging
- The proposed artwork is **feasible to install** within the context of additional site considerations (durability, minimal maintenance & cleaning requirements, public safety, sustainability, accessibility, and inclusion)

In early February 2026 the jury met to discuss the highest scoring proposals in detail, to determine the most suitable proposals to move forward to stage two. Through this discussion, four artists or artist teams were selected to move to the second round of the selection process. Each of these artists/teams were asked to provide more detailed and in-depth concepts of the outdoor sculpture artwork they proposed in the first submission. Each of the four artists selected were paid the stage-two fee of \$2,500 to develop this second-round concept.

In March 2026, the four second-round artists/artist teams were invited to present their proposal to members of the public art jury. Each artist or team provided a short presentation for the jury accompanied by visual materials, after which members of the jury had the opportunity to ask questions of the artists. The second stage jury review process did not include a detailed points-based evaluation rubric, though jury members were asked to consider each of the following categories listed below.

### Stage two Evaluation Categories:

- **Artistic merit** of the proposed concept to enhance or activate the public space
- Alignment with the **core theme of sport**
- Artwork provides opportunities for **sustained ongoing public interaction**
- Artist or team **capacity to successfully complete and install** their proposal
- Artist or team **capacity to collaborate** with project design professionals
- Appropriateness of the proposal to the **budget, scope and timelines** available
- Suitability and **sustainability of material** and maintenance requirements
- General **technical feasibility** (fully interactive, safe, accessible)

After careful consideration and a fulsome discussion of each of the four proposals, members of the jury agreed on a recommendation for the public art commission: a series of sculptures titled *Let's Play!* by artist Pierre Poussin. The proposed bronze-cast sculptures feature a diverse cast of local animal characters playing a variety of sports, with a joyful emphasis on celebration and whimsy that children and families can genuinely delight in. The sculptures offer an interactive experience, inviting residents of all ages to touch, engage with, and pose alongside them for photographs. Members of the jury were taken with the imaginative and engaging sculptures created by the artist and agreed that the user groups expected to use the facility would be drawn to the characters as well, as captured in the jury statement below.

## ***Jury Statement***

***The jury is pleased to share our enthusiasm for the proposed sculpture series Let's Play! by Pierre Poussin. Driven by a genuine passion for creating works that inspire happiness and laughter, Poussin has crafted a charming collection of sculptures that truly capture the spirit of play, imagination, and the celebratory nature of sport.***

***Let's Play! brings together a lively cast of local animal characters, each captured mid-action playing sports that will be represented in the facility. Their poses radiate movement, teamwork, and friendly competition, creating scenes that feel both familiar and full of energy. We could easily imagine children running up to pose beside a character, or families taking a quiet moment to pause, interact, and celebrate simple moments of connection.***

***The proposed use of bronze, finished with a patina that echoes the warm natural tones of the facility, reflects a thoughtful commitment to durability, beauty, and sustainability. These sculptures are designed to welcome years of hands-on interaction, seasonal weather, and the constant flow of community life—while aging gracefully and remaining safe for all ages.***

***Above all, Let's Play! offers something truly special: public art that feels open-hearted and full of joy. It is an installation that encourages memories, sparks imagination, and invites everyone - kids, teens, adults, and families - to play! We believe this art installation will become a cherished part of the site, enriching the space and the community for many years to come.***

### ***Artist and Artwork***

Pierre Poussin is a Queer French Mauritian Canadian artist specializing in large-scale sculpture and public art based in North York, Ontario. For the past 18 years, he has worked with architectural and landscaping firms, developers, private collectors, and civic public art programs for cities and municipalities across Canada.

Pierre's art celebrates shared identity and placemaking amongst communities with projects installed in Edmonton, Kelowna, Toronto and Collingwood amongst others. He works with a team of world-class fabricators, finishers and installers, as well as with material, structural and electrical engineering teams to complete these large-scale projects.

Pierre's work often revolves around themes of nature, celebration and whimsy supported by research of the proposed site including the demographics of neighbouring communities. With the Cowan Recreation Centre expecting a wide range of users, from local families and youth to athletes attending regional and national tournaments, the artwork will become part of the rhythm of arriving, meeting, waiting, and celebrating, creating a sense of identity.

The artwork *Let's Play!* is composed of two groupings of exterior sculptures of animal characters playing sport, with a joyful emphasis on movement, teamwork, and friendly competition. A grouping of three characters/sculptures will be at the main or West Entrance, and a grouping of two characters/sculptures will be located at the side or North Entrance. To respond to the City's desire to include as many sports themes and as many animals as possible, *Let's Play!* is envisioned as a cohesive series that incorporates soccer, lacrosse,

cricket, volleyball and basketball - most of the principal sports played at the facility. These sports moments are expressed through a diverse cast of local animal characters, such as foxes, squirrels and beavers.

Materially, the sculptures will be fabricated in bronze, with a patina selected to harmonize with the building's natural hues and architectural style. Because the two locations are both exterior, ground mounted, and situated on concrete hardscape in high traffic areas, the sculptures are envisioned to be robust, non-corrosive, and designed for easy cleaning and minimal maintenance. All figures will be constructed using a combination of 5/16" (7.9mm) and 1/2" (12.7mm) thick cast-bronze shells, cast in sections, welded, ground and finished with patina and wax coatings. Each sculpture will be supported by an internal steel structure and securely anchored to the foundation using cast-in anchors. The intent is to create a durable, welcoming, and visually striking series that will age beautifully through all seasons, while remaining safe and engaging for high traffic public interaction. All forms would be developed and refined to avoid sharp edges, protruding hazards, trip points, pinch points, and detachable elements. Surfaces would be shaped to reduce snow and leaf build up, and to withstand Kitchener's seasonal operations, including adjacent snow removal equipment moving near the works.

The proposed sculptures will be reviewed through the City's standard technical review process to ensure compliance with accessibility requirements and public safety standards, including clearance, reachability, sightlines, and surface conditions. The artwork is designed to welcome physical interaction while avoiding hazards such as sharp edges, entrapment points, or trip hazards.

Importantly, *Let's Play!* also aims to support the City's equity affirming intent by presenting sport and play as inclusive, welcoming, and shared. The characters are designed to feel joyful and approachable to people of many backgrounds, ages, and abilities, while ensuring that the work does not obstruct movement or compromise accessibility standards.

### ***Next Steps***

On April 20th the recommendation to commission *Let's Play!* by Pierre Poussin made by the jury was 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 Cowan Recreation Centre design and construction team on integrating the installation of this piece into the construction to facilitate a seamless process with the goal for the installation to be completed by the time the facility opens. Issuing this call for outdoor public art and running it in tandem with construction of the recreation facility has meant more efficient installation without the need to redo cement pads, which has also made the proposal more cost efficient than installing the outdoor public art at a late date.

### **STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

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

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Capital Budget – The upper funding limit for this outdoor public art competition was advertised at \$200,000. The artist's initial proposal came in under that upper limit, however, after further discussions with city staff and some refinements/additions to the proposed statues, the total cost of this proposal is now \$250,000. The cost for this outdoor public art will be funded through existing funds previously earmarked for outdoor park art in Schlegel Park. By installing this outdoor art at the same time as outdoor elements of the recreation centre are being constructed, the City has been able to save some costs vs. installing the sculptures later. Any ongoing maintenance costs for this work will be funded through the City's Public Art maintenance account.

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 September 29, 2025, remaining up until December 15, 2025. 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 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 April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026, 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:** Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Appendix A – *Let's Play* by Pierre Poussin (preliminary design)