

Halton Hills where culture matters Cultural Master Plan



The following is an excerpt from the executive summary of the Town's Cultural Master Plan

In Halton Hills we are living the small town way and are very happy about it. We are a community of communities. We plant trees. We are passionate about hockey. We recycle bikes and give them away free. We say hello to strangers on the street. We buy local art. We write letters to our editor. We take walks in our countryside. We love our libraries. We pick pumpkins. We win awards for innovation. We shop local. We are real and lively and friendly.

'Small town living at its best'

Town Council signalled the importance of cultural development on Halton Hills with approval of a Cultural Master Plan, a 10-year approach to connecting the Town's cultural resources to the decision-making process.

The approval shows Town Council's willingness to "sign on and say 'this is important,'" according to Regional Ward Two Councillor Jane Fogal following presentation of the final Plan at last Monday's council meeting.

Project lead Beatrice Sharkey, a Cultural Round Table member, and consultant Alison Harrington of *r. j. smith & company, inc.* presented the executive summary of the Plan,

which took nine months of wide community input to develop. In it, culture is defined to include arts, culture, heritage and volunteerism.

"Recognizing that we are stewards of something special means that we are also called to protect and enhance this unique combination of character, community and countryside," the summary, penned by Sharkey, said, adding the Plan is designed to do just that with the definition of culture, an explanation of the importance of culture in daily life, an in-depth needs assessment – which identified 684 cultural resources – a community assessment summary, and a visioning framework.

Harrington said the Cultural Master Plan they found people really do appreciate culture in Halton Hills. "They love the physical elements here, they love the volunteerism, the sense of neighbourly environment, the cultural assets like the library and community centres," she said, adding those things are part of the Town's identity.

"We have the potential here to develop culture in Halton Hills," Harrington said, adding they found the potential is "even greater" than first thought, and with partnerships and co-ordination, they can build using untapped resources. She said the lack of co-ordination among

various groups with a cultural impact is an issue.

Harrington said their research included sector management, goal specific recommendations and physical design potential, which looked at culture as not just a series of individual events to go to, but as how communities are designed and built. She said the Plan integrates cultural into the planning process.

Supportive of the Plan's goals and recommendation, Ward Two Councillor Joan Robson wanted to know about staffing to make the Plan a reality, asking if they were to hire staff, develop a partnership with the general public or hire

a consultant. Harrington said all of those staffing options would probably be used over the next ten years, and there was the potential to integrate a staff position within the Town in the future.

From development of cultural industries to cultural tourism, the economic benefits of cultural development – the creative cluster is valued at \$12-billion in Ontario – impressed Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette who asked for details about the estimated \$38-million economic output of the creative sectors in Halton Hills.

Harrington said because culture encompasses so many things, it is quite difficult to put a number to it, location quotients allow them to estimate that arts, entertainment and recreation bring in \$12.7-million

in Halton Hills while information and cultural industries – and dining, Bonnette suggested – generate \$25.2-million, for a total of \$48-million.

Pragmatically, Georgetown Councillor Ann Lawlor asked, "how do we do this" and also if there a mechanism in place to move ahead year-by-year to fund and implement the Plan.

Sharkey said action plan to be developed next will lay out years one through five, and will include be some capital pieces and some operational pieces and resources from partners. "A quarter of the recommendations do not have additional resources attached to them," Sharkey said, adding initially the Recreation and Parks department will co-ordinate cultural opportunities.

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