



Vibrant, welcoming spaces and art for all

Durham Region's Public Art and Creative
Placemaking Program 2024-2028





Letter from the Regional Chair and Chief Administrative Officer

In Durham Region, we strive to create welcoming communities that promote a strong sense of belonging for residents and visitors alike; to create public spaces that invite connection and reflect the vibrant and distinct cultural identities of our neighbourhoods and diverse residents.

Inclusive and welcoming spaces are a cornerstone of what makes Durham Region an attractive place to live, work and play.

Public art and creative placemaking are powerful tools used to demonstrate the community as a collective—reflecting local culture, environments and heritage—whether past, present or future. When woven into the fabric of our community, art has the unique ability to cultivate a sense of place for residents to engage and see their shared experiences visually represented, fostering local pride.

There is endless value to public art and placemaking in our communities. Through the Region's newly developed Public Art and Creative Placemaking Program, we will introduce unique, accessible art to the community; create joyful spaces for people to gather and connect; champion local talent; and celebrate diverse voices and perspectives.

Transformational, vibrant and meaningful public art pieces will undoubtedly be introduced to our region through this program. We are thrilled to have a front-row seat.

John Henry
Regional Chair and Chief Executive Officer

Elaine Baxter-Trahair
Chief Administrative Officer

Acknowledgement

Durham Region exists on the lands that are the territories of Anishinaabe Michi Saagiig and Chippewa Nations including the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville First Nation, Hiawatha First Nation, Curve Lake First Nation, and the Chippewa Nations of Georgina Island, Beausoleil and Rama. In 1923, these Nations signed separate treaties with the governments of Ontario and Canada known today as the “Williams Treaties.” We honour, recognize, and respect these Nations as rights holders and stewards of the lands and waters on which we have the privilege to operate.

Durham is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Public art and placemaking projects can serve to advance Reconciliation—helping to restore visibility; nurture the identity, heritage, and cultural significance of a particular area; and spark dialogue about the ongoing impacts of colonialism. With continued action, public art and placemaking can create opportunities for meaningful collaboration and partnership with creators and communities.



Artwork by Jon Colwell. Durham Region Headquarters, Whitby.

Introduction

Durham Region is one of the fastest-growing municipalities in Ontario. As our cities, towns and spaces evolve, public art and placemaking invites the community, visitors and investors to connect in new and unexpected ways. Inclusive and accessible public art and placemaking can reflect the unique and diverse population, enhance the vibrancy of our communities, support local artists, and strengthen local pride. Recognizing this value, Durham Region's Public Art and Creative Placemaking Policy aims to enable and promote public art and placemaking projects on Regional property.



Artwork by James Gains. Ben's Pharmacy, Beaverton.

Our vision:

Vibrant, welcoming spaces and art for all

Public art and creative placemaking align with the Region's strategic priorities and economic development and tourism goals. Together with the community and other partners, we plan to energize spaces and contribute to the Region's distinct identity for arts, cultural and creative industries. Durham Region's vision for public art and creative placemaking reflects our commitment to community vitality, economic prosperity, and social investment.



Developing this plan

The Region moved quickly to develop this program in 2023 following [direction](#) from Durham Regional Council. A working group, including staff from Strategic Initiatives, Communications and Engagement, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Economic Development, Legal, Finance, Social Services, Works and Durham Region Transit, conducted research on best practices from Ontario municipalities, reviewed existing Regional policies related to public art and led the development of this program. The working group identified the need for community direction on guiding principles, priority locations, and strategic actions early on. Community engagement reached 866 community members. An Engagement Summary Report is available on [Your Durham](#). Local Indigenous communities and area municipalities were invited to provide input on the draft policy and program to confirm alignment with municipal public art and culture plans and begin discussions on co-ordinated action. Staff from The Robert McLaughlin Gallery also provided strategic input on the program and policy. In 2024, the Region piloted the public art selection process through a variety of small-scale public art and placemaking projects and integrated lessons learned.

Public Art

Public art is work in any medium that has been produced by an artist, or in collaboration with artists, and installed in a public space. It is created to reflect and engage the community and has undergone a formal selection process. Public Art may have functional and aesthetic qualities; it may be integrated into its site, or it may be a discrete piece; it can be participatory, and permanent or temporary. At its core, public art is free and accessible, encouraging community members of different abilities, backgrounds, and identities to engage.

The following are not considered public art for the purposes of the plan:

- Plaques, memorials and interpretative signs.
- Art objects which are mass-produced or of standard design.
- Easily movable artworks such as paintings, drawings, models and books.
- Artwork inside Regional facilities unless they are publicly accessible and available at all times.



Artwork by Melissa Archer. Uxbridge.

Placemaking

Placemaking focuses on creating vibrant, engaging, and inclusive public spaces. It involves transforming ordinary or underused areas into lively and people-centred environments that promote social interaction, cultural expression and community identity. Placemaking involves local residents, businesses, artists and other collaborators in the design and activation of public spaces to reflect their needs and aspirations. This process consists of a series of projects and/or activities that rejuvenate structures and streetscapes, engage and empower people, and improve the quality of a place over time. It can improve local business viability and public safety, and bring diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.

Placekeeping

Placekeeping is a concept closely related to placemaking but with a different focus. Placekeeping is an approach to design based on land stewardship that is centred around recognizing the rights of the landscape as a living being first and considering our responsibilities now and into the future. It involves thinking about the context and history of the place including Indigenous histories and futures and preserving and maintaining the unique qualities and character of a place over time. It involves ongoing efforts to protect, sustain, and nurture the identity, heritage, and cultural significance of a particular area. Placekeeping can include activities such as advocating for the preservation of historic landmarks, promoting local traditions and customs, ensuring equitable access to public spaces and safeguarding the natural environment. It recognizes the importance of continuity and long-term stewardship in sustaining thriving and meaningful places.

Guiding principles

Durham Region recognizes the value of public art and placemaking in our communities. Building on our creative strengths, five guiding principles will be used to steer planning, decisions and practices related to the Public Art and Creative Placemaking Program:

Be bold

- We will seek to enliven public spaces and infrastructure to add character, promote discovery and create spaces for connection.
- We will be open to new forms of creative expression and embrace unique, challenging and thought-provoking pieces as art is constantly evolving.
- We will strive to ensure that art is accessible to all.

Leverage local voices and knowledge

- We will partner and engage with residents, businesses and Indigenous communities early into projects to understand local priorities and integrate diverse voices and perspectives.
- We will respect artists as contributors and value the significant role of artists in our society. We will pursue opportunities to bring artists into the decision-making process and ensure their work and contributions are compensated.
- We will showcase local artists as much as possible to reflect the talent that exists within the region.

Prioritize Reconciliation

- We will respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action by seeking out opportunities for action and collaboration through art and placemaking.
- We will prioritize placekeeping by learning from Indigenous communities and respecting ecological and cultural relationships with the lands and waters of the region.

Be agile

- We will prioritize smaller-scale projects and those which produce tangible outcomes in a shorter turnaround time.
- We will be flexible and innovative so that we can act when opportunities arise.

Share stewardship of public art and creative placemaking

- We will leverage our strengths and knowledge to empower Regional departments and divisions to identify opportunities and advance public art and placemaking initiatives.
- We will support local municipalities' public art and culture plans and initiatives, and look for opportunities to collaborate.

Priority locations for public art and placemaking

Through engagement with the community, the Region has identified priority locations for future projects:

1. Durham's 14 Downtowns
2. Major Transit Station Areas (MTSAs) and transit stations, terminals and hubs
3. Along the Waterfront Trail
4. Priority health neighbourhoods
5. Along regional roads

Strategic Actions

Through this program, Durham Region will champion local creative talent, foster the next generation of public artists, take action toward Reconciliation and create new opportunities for partnership and community connection.



Artwork by Lesley Kelz and Chrrie. Brooklin.

Establish program funding

The Public Art and Creative Placemaking Program will have a consistent and co-ordinated approach to funding and provision of public art and placemaking comparable with the level of other municipal programs in Ontario. Funding for the program will be established by:

- Incorporating a Public Art and Creative Placemaking Allocation as a regular line item annually as part of the budget commencing in 2025, subject to Council approval during the business planning and budget process.
- Exploring the development of a “Per cent for Public Art” policy for capital projects to fund integrated art projects at community-facing buildings and on other infrastructure projects, as appropriate.
- Exploring the establishment of a fund that supports the Region’s diverse arts and cultural industries including creative and culinary businesses, events, festivals and placemaking as identified in [Ready, Set, Future: A PLACE Blueprint for Durham](#), Action 4.2.1.

The Region will seek grant opportunities to support public art and placemaking projects where appropriate and eligible.

Engage with Indigenous Peoples to identify sites of significance for public art and placemaking projects and to ensure placekeeping is integrated into all projects

To plan for future projects, the Region will invite and support local Indigenous communities in identifying locations for public art commissions on Regionally owned property across Durham and prioritize these projects for future investment. Recognizing the responsibilities that come with shaping public spaces now and into the future, we will seek advice on how to best integrate placekeeping into the Region’s projects.



Artwork by Geordie Lishman.
Durham Region Headquarters, Whitby.

Complete at least one temporary art installation annually

Temporary art, lasting up to ten years, generates interest in public spaces and brings them to life. Because it is understood to be of limited duration, there is no maintenance program. Canvasses can include walls, underpasses, traffic signal boxes and more. Temporary art projects will provide the Region with the opportunity to grow its expertise in the public art and placemaking realm, train emerging artists or those unfamiliar with the public art commissioning process to undertake projects with smaller, more manageable budgets, and offer artists more options in terms of materials. Temporary art projects can engage community members to become involved alongside artists in public artmaking, as they are often more suitable for collaborations than larger permanent works.

Issue open calls for project ideas

Use open calls for project ideas to invite artists to envision Regional property and infrastructure as their canvas, and craft concepts for projects in any scale, scope or medium. In an open call, artists can experiment and consider all options for placemaking. Artists will be provided with guidelines related to the location and will confirm the feasibility of the site in consultation with Regional staff before developing a detailed concept. Open call projects are selected through a competitive process, with one or more winning ideas being chosen for commission, with all shortlisted artists receiving a fee for concepts developed as part of the competition process.

Establish an artist-in-residence summer student program

Working closely with the Region and other partners, student artist(s) will engage with the public and showcase their creative practices while creating a work that enlivens a public space. An honorarium and studio space may be included as part of the compensation.

Partnership on public art and placemaking projects

Durham Region is committed to partnering with area municipalities, local communities and external organizations. Scenarios for partnership may include but are not limited to:

- Use of Regional property to install public art where the artwork is owned by the Region or other organizations or for placemaking (e.g., sanctioned art, flex exhibit and performance spaces);
- Installation, maintenance and conservation agreements;
- Artist-in-residence programs (i.e., non-student artists); and
- Cost-sharing programs (e.g., sponsorship with private sector).

A unique agreement will be issued between the partner(s) and the Region on a project-by-project basis that outlines parameters for the partnership including but not limited to the nature and duration of the partnership, intellectual property rights, insurance, responsibilities of the parties, marketing and promotion, and maintenance considerations.



Artwork by Sarah Shaw. Durham Region Headquarters, Whitby.



If you require this information in an accessible format, please contact the Accessibility Coordinator at accessibility@durham.ca

Or 905-668-4113 extension 2009.