

## COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTIONS

### 4. Amping up the Arts Event License Policy to Support Arts & Culture in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung and Councillor Meiszner

#### WHEREAS

1. Vancouver prides itself on being a city alive with creativity, with amazing music, dance, new media, theatre, festivals, film, design, exhibitions, galleries, museums, and special events. On its website, the City literally invites people to “Go out and explore arts and culture in Vancouver”;
2. *Culture|Shift* is Vancouver’s Culture Plan for 2020-2029. It provides a framework with strategic directions and actions to align and to increase – among other things – the City’s support for arts and culture, championing creators, building on commitments to reconciliation and equity, introducing bold moves to advance community-led cultural infrastructure, and positioning Vancouver as a thriving hub for music; <sup>i</sup>
3. Cultural spaces are essential. For any healthy, vibrant city to sustain and develop cultural vitality, artists and culture makers need access to affordable, diverse and safe venues to showcase their work and engage audiences. Enabling cultural spaces enables arts and cultural activities to thrive;
4. Concurrently with the *Culture|Shift* plan, the *Making Space for Arts and Culture* report was approved by Council in September 2019, and laid out a long term vision to optimize City policies and tools to secure, enhance, and develop vibrant, affordable, and accessible arts and cultural spaces. *Making Space for Arts and Culture* is an integral part of the *Culture|Shift* plan that helps to guide the City’s work in partnership with the community to secure, enhance, and develop affordable and accessible spaces where artists and cultural workers can live, work, and share their work;
5. As detailed in the *Making Space for Arts and Culture* report, one of the most critical challenges facing arts and culture is the availability of affordable spaces and displacement of existing spaces due to accelerated development, rapidly rising industrial and commercial land values, and competition with higher land uses. Vancouver is effectively losing affordable places for artists to live, work, and share their work despite growth in the cultural non-profit sectors’ capacity to collaborate and develop co-located spaces and repurpose old buildings with new uses. The city’s arts and culture sector remains overwhelmingly vulnerable to displacement;
6. In March 2013, Council approved a small-scale two-year Arts and Culture Indoor Event Licence Program (“Arts Event Licence”) pilot to explore permitting arts and culture events in a range of industrial and retail spaces on an occasional basis. The pilot program simplified application processes by combining five City and VPD reviews into one approval, making it easier for small scale, occasional events to be both legal and much safer; <sup>ii</sup>

7. The Arts Event Licence pilot program came about due to a growing demand for alternative venues for the presentation of innovative works that could allow audiences to engage in new ways outside of conventional venues such as theatres or halls which are not always suitable for smaller performances or audiences, to support limited budgets, and/or where the artistic intent involves site-specific works;
8. Between April 2013 and March 2015, over a hundred diverse events took place under the Arts Event Licence pilot program including a variety of music performances (often involving album releases), new works at exhibition/book launches in a pop-up gallery, and a shared rehearsal studio event that hosted over a hundred arts presenters, artists, and producers to see and share excerpts of tour-ready works and projects in development. By all accounts, the pilot was well received;
9. In September, 2015, Council formally adopted the Arts and Culture Indoor Event Licence (“Arts Event Licence”) as a permanent program based on the positive outcomes of the two-year pilot and direction was given to amend the Zoning and Development By-law to change the definition of “Arts and Culture Indoor Event” to increase the allowed frequency of events from two to three days per month;
10. Through the Arts Event Licence, the City has been able to provide support to arts and culture events in the city by bringing flexibility to occasional venues, whether it is a studio, warehouse, factory or other alternative performance space and make it easier to host pop-up performances and events in unconventional spaces including studios, warehouses, factories, offices, shops and wholesale space; and
11. In alignment with the City’s goals to better support arts and culture and champion creators, there is opportunity to expand the number of events allowed monthly through the Arts Event License.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to undertake a short-term review of the Arts Event License Policy and relevant by-laws as it applies to indoor events (as well as consideration of any related or relevant policies and strategies) and bring recommendations forward for Council’s consideration by June 2023 on the potential to increase and/or double the frequency of events allowed each month under the By-law toward creating greater flexibility for the arts and culture sector and contributing to a more culturally vibrant city for everyone.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

<sup>i</sup> *Culture|Shift* illuminated the cultural sector’s pivotal role in Vancouver’s economic vibrancy, tourism and prosperity, and reasserted the fact that creative industries and cultural sector have a critical impact on growth, and attracting and retaining talent across sectors (<https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/2022-12-12-culture-shift-update.pdf>).

The *Culture|Shift* cultural plan was preceded by the Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008-2018, the City’s first comprehensive cultural strategy which established a vision and actions for strengthening and growing the arts and culture sector. The Culture Plan for Vancouver 2008-2018 was instrumental in shifting paradigms for cultural support towards fostering cultural

leadership, enabling partnerships, increasing community engagement, modernizing systems, and providing adaptable support programs.

Economic impact studies conducted in 2019 to inform *Culture|Shift* directions and actions revealed that cultural economic production outperforms many traditional industries: the economic impact of the creative industries and cultural sector included a 2.7% makeup of British Columbia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 4% of total employment. During 2018, culture's gross product came in at \$7.9B, exceeding Agriculture (\$5.8B) and Utilities (\$6.3B), and rivaled Accommodation and Food (\$8B), as well as Mining, Oil, and Gas (\$8.2B). Music alone had \$690 million in direct economic impact, with approx. 8,000 in direct music jobs and 6,500 in indirect jobs.

<sup>ii</sup> The majority of events took place in neighbourhoods where artists are concentrated: the Downtown Eastside, Mount Pleasant and Grandview-Woodlands.