



## OTTAWA'S QUALITY-OF-PLACE CHALLENGE

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### Purpose of the White Papers

*The City of Ottawa's Economic Strategy Update Steering Committee is seeking input from stakeholders and the public to formulate a common economic vision for the City over the next five years. It is also seeking to determine the mission or role of the municipality in leading, encouraging or contributing to the realization of that shared vision.*

*This is one of a series of White Papers to present discussion topics in a format that will include "Overview," "Current Situation," "Challenges," "Options and Suggestions for Action," and "Questions to Consider" categories. It is hoped that the reader will offer feedback to guide the formation of the shared vision – what "good" would look like in the context of the white paper topic – and creative thoughts and innovative ideas about how to respond to each white paper challenge.*

*White paper feedback will be considered by the Economic Strategy Refresh team and incorporated into the collective Vision and Guiding Principles/Policies for Ottawa's Economic Development Strategy (2010 to 2015). Reader input will also guide decisions about which economic strategies and initiatives should be undertaken to realize the City's vision.*

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**Overview** The depth of Ottawa's job pool is an essential feature when trying to attract and retain talent. However, highly educated people are increasingly mobile and research shows that the amenities of a place play a major role in where they decide to live and work.

Creative cities contain clusters of innovative people and businesses and are thus competitive in the knowledge-based economy. "Quality of Place" factors are paramount to building a creative city. Ottawa must fully leverage its "place" strengths to differentiate itself and succeed in this global competition for talent and businesses.

Ottawa appears to exhibit a high quality of place. Approximately 40% of the population is part of the "Creative Class," which, according to author Richard Florida, are the intellectual capital that drive the knowledge economy. Ottawa's mix of cultural assets, outdoor recreation opportunities and four-season events answer the "What's there?" and "What's going on?" questions.

Most cities in Ontario can claim a high quality of place, often with similar or better amenities than Ottawa. What "place" factors in Ottawa differentiate the city from its competitors? In what attributes of "place" is Ottawa falling behind the competition on? How can the City encourage quality-of-place improvements?

**Current Situation** Ottawa's strong quality of place is led not only by the presence of federal facilities and amenities, but also by smaller enterprises and individuals throughout the region. The presence of large, national institutions gives the city a competitive edge, but may be limiting the community's support for and development of, more local amenities. Not only is there a lack of understanding of the importance of arts and culture to the economy, but also the relevance of local arts and culture to the economy and place-building.

Fourteen arts and culture institutions in the city are wholly funded by the federal

## OTTAWA'S QUALITY-OF-PLACE CHALLENGE

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government. These institutions are relatively less susceptible to the funding uncertainties that plague those relying on admission fees or private donors. In addition, two of the largest events on the city's calendar - Canada Day and Winterlude - are funded by the National Capital Commission.

The city also has a wealth of public recreation opportunities. Some of the most significant natural or built recreation assets are managed and/or protected by the federal government. These include the 20,000 hectares of natural areas and open spaces within the Greenbelt, the Rideau Canal/Skateway and the extensive National Capital Commission pathways network, though the City has an influence on the maintenance of the latter asset.

Ottawa's local arts and cultural sector is comparatively under-funded. Ottawa rates consistently lower than many cities in Canada with regard to arts and cultural support per capita (see Figure 1). Some sectors, like film and television production, also suffer from intense competition with other areas of Canada. Notwithstanding this, the City maintains a vibrant arts and culture and recreational community, with more than 3.7 million people participating in or attending more than 22,000 City-operated or City-funded cultural programs, events, or facilities. The cultural sector in Ottawa generates and spends approximately \$43 million in the local economy annually.

**Figure 1 Per-capita Arts and Festival Grants**

City	2005	2006
Vancouver	\$11.89	\$12.07
Montreal	\$7.03	\$8.34
Winnipeg	\$6.14	\$6.24
Toronto	\$5.77	\$6.24
Edmonton	\$4.87	\$5.50
Calgary	\$4.30	\$4.26
Ottawa	\$3.64	\$4.24
Average	\$6.23	\$6.70

Source: City of Ottawa, 2008

Entertainment amenities are anchored by federal level institutions and events, but additional internationally recognized city and privately funded events and a vibrant nightlife in areas of the City assist in rounding out the "what's going on" factor. Events like the Ottawa Bluesfest, which routinely draws notable musicians from around the country and the world, represent a major asset to the city's entertainment calendar. As well, the vibrant Byward Market District offers an eclectic mix of local food, cafes, museums, galleries, nightclubs, and bars to appeal to a wide range of demands and interests. However, much of Ottawa's vibrant nightlife amenities are concentrated in this area, rather than dispersed throughout the city.

## OTTAWA'S QUALITY-OF-PLACE CHALLENGE

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Ottawa also has an interesting juxtaposition of urban and rural environments. There is an extensive amount of rural area in Ottawa, due to the former municipalities that were amalgamated within the current City of Ottawa. Residents have opportunities ranging from the high-density living arrangements characteristic of large cities, down to small-town and rural community environments on the outer periphery of the City. As well, the extensive farmland in and in close proximity to the City provides opportunities to connect consumers with local farmers, through farmers' markets around Ottawa.

### **Challenges**

Creativity in Ottawa has traditionally been centred in technological innovation, based on the well-educated local talent base, existing high-technology business and research clusters, a strong institutional presence and an entrepreneurial culture. In itself, this has been enough to create a competitive environment for business and talent attraction. However, with the decline, and in some cases failure, of businesses in key economic clusters, there has been a decline in many of Ottawa's competitive advantages with regard to innovation. This new reality forces the city to find additional infrastructure for building and supporting creativity and innovation, and expanding and retaining its "creative class." This requires fully leveraging Ottawa's "place" strengths.

Similar to tourism product development, consultations in the arts, culture, and recreation sector revealed that the primary problems for the sector were a lack of vision, support and funding. Part of this problem is rooted in the lack of an overall plan. The Ottawa 20/20 Arts and Heritage plan established strategic direction for the sector in 2003, but much of the action plan was developed with a 2008 horizon. Though the broader strategic goals were for a 20-year timeframe, a gap has developed in actions to realize them. Associated problems were attributed to relative underfunding, as noted above.

Consultations throughout a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted by MillierDickinsonBlais in 2009 indicated that this reflected a lack of understanding of the importance of arts, culture and recreation to the local economy and building an appealing "place." The federal institutions, events, and amenities create a largely unparalleled and diverse arts, culture and recreation product offering but often overshadow the local assets. This is further exacerbated by the lack of integration between local and federal assets, such as the packaging of federal and local level assets to create a more diverse experience for residents and tourists, offering further support to the local sector.

As Canada's fourth largest city, Ottawa must be able to compete with other large cities in talent and business attraction/retention, creativity and destination development/marketing. Though Ottawa comes from a position of strength with regard to quality-of-place assets, there is a definite concern among some local sectors that it is under-supported and thus under-performing.

## OTTAWA'S QUALITY-OF-PLACE CHALLENGE

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### Options and Suggestions for Action

How can Ottawa further support this diverse and interrelated collection of assets that contribute to the quality of place, and more fully integrate it to become a better driver for economic development in the City?

Single artists or small enterprises in an area are often intimately connected with their surrounding communities and thus have profound perspectives on actual quality of place. For example, Bill Strickland was able to use his knowledge of the arts and intimate knowledge of his Pittsburgh neighbourhood to develop the Manchester Craftsman's Guild (MCG), an after-school arts program to support disadvantaged youth. The MCG has since evolved and become a model for the power of arts and culture in social change and support for entrepreneurial culture development. These activities have also improved the "place" of the neighbourhood and have contributed to Pittsburgh's overall urban renewal.

A regular dialogue allows the City to stay connected with similar local champions. The Region of Durham provides a potential example of this with the "Art of Transition" initiative aimed at building a creative community. It has included a symposium at the launch of the project, but also uses followup events to keep stakeholders connected. Organizations like Arts Court could play an integral role in this, where the City could disseminate information about initiatives (which the MillierDickinsonBlais SWOT analysis suggests might be lacking) and to collect information for further strategic planning with regard to place-building.

It is imperative that efforts be connected with the tourism marketing industry, and those that are shaping the "brand" of the City. This relationship does exist, as Ottawa Tourism currently markets arts, culture, and recreation opportunities in the City as entertainment. However, most of the packages are focused on federal-level amenities, with little integration of the local assets. Increased marketing of local assets could create more of a "buzz" for tourists and residents in Ottawa.

An important aspect of the Ottawa 20/20 Arts and Heritage Plan was to improve access to venues and spaces for the local arts and cultural industry. One such way could be to offer financial incentives through a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to assist strategic neighbourhoods where local arts and culture exist – for example a CIP to support the remediation or adaptive reuse of older buildings to create new and more accessible spaces.

Another option is to further utilize the Public-Private Partnerships (P3) experience at the City to develop publicly accessible venues, similar to what was done with the Shenkman Arts Centre. Ottawa has a strong track record in P3 projects, perhaps even a competitive advantage, which could be used to further assist in community place-building. Either activity encourages the development of the local arts and culture environment and offers support to entrepreneurs and small enterprises that contribute significantly to quality of place in a community.



## OTTAWA'S QUALITY-OF-PLACE CHALLENGE

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### **Questions to Consider**

- How will we know when economic development priorities are better supporting quality of place?
- What gaps are there in Ottawa's arts, culture, entertainment, and recreation infrastructure in the City? What policies, initiatives or strategies will assist in filling those gaps?
- What role should the City of Ottawa assume in expanding quality of place through support for arts, culture, entertainment, and recreation?