



Port Hope Votes

October 26, 2026



2026 Candidate Arts & Culture Survey — Port Hope

Critical Mass is asking every Mayoral and Council candidate in Port Hope's October 26, 2026 municipal election the same questions about how art and culture fit in your platform. All responses will be published in full and unedited so residents can compare them. Critical Mass does not endorse any candidate. Thank you for sharing your thoughts with Port Hope's creative community.

Candidate name: _Caleb Carisse_____

Running for: ☐ Mayor ☒ Councillor

Ward: 1

Context & Background:

The arts are a major economic driver of the economy, with a \$131 billion dollar impact nationally. The 2025 *Artworks* report from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's Business Data Lab found a \$29 return in economic activity for every federal arts dollar invested. The study also identified that the arts and culture sector growth rate (8%) was double the rate of growth (4%) for the entire economy. Arts and culture creates about 13 jobs per \$1 million of output, more than traditional sectors like oil and gas, manufacturing or agriculture.

Critical Mass recently completed a community survey, where 195 residents rated the arts as essential to a thriving community, scoring them 9.8 out of 10. Funded by a Work-In-Culture grant, we also led more than 82 hours of consultation, with regional and local arts organizations, artists, community partners, elected officials and municipal staff – where the need for stable funding, year-round space, coordinated advocacy and more paid opportunities for working artists were raised. Artists named making a living, exhibition opportunities, and recognition as their biggest challenges, and most also identified the need for an arts council or umbrella arts organization in Port Hope that could offer support.

The Municipality of Port Hope is increasingly incorporating arts and culture into its strategic pillars, including its new Tourism Strategy and the review of its Public Art Policy, with recommendations forthcoming from Critical Mass. Updating its decade-old Cultural Plan and preparing for potential growth from Wesleyville will also require a strong, well-supported arts community. The next Council will play a key role in turning these priorities into funded, actionable commitments.



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Please take a few minutes to complete the 2026 all candidates arts & culture survey.

Part 1: Please rate the following statements:

Please mark one box per statement.

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Arts and culture are essential to Port Hope's quality of life and identity.	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Investing in arts and culture helps Port Hope attract and keep workers, families and businesses.	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
Arts and culture contributes to residents' health and well-being.	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
The Municipality currently invests enough in arts and culture.	☐	☐	☒	☐	☐
Port Hope would benefit from an arts council or umbrella arts organization that supports and amplifies the work of local artists and arts organizations.	☐	☒	☐	☐	☐
The Municipality should prioritize hiring artists, rather than using generative AI tools as a substitute for human designs which undermine and exploit the local creative economy.	☒	☐	☐	☐	☐
The arts are enjoyed by some people, but they don't need public support.	☐	☐	☐	☒	☐



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Part 2: Open questions

Please keep each answer to 100 words or fewer.

1. **Role of the arts.** Do you think art and culture add value to Port Hope? If so, how?
Where do arts and culture fit in your platform?

Yes. Arts and culture are proven sources of economic development which is a cornerstone of my platform. Our heritage downtown, the Capitol Theatre and the Arts Festival bring people to Walton Street, and film crews come because the town offers unique streetscapes. Arts and culture can still go through a value-for-money discussion, and impacts, although more challenging, can be quantified. I don't believe arts and culture are a discretionary expense. They are investments that have a return in the forms of tourism, revenue, and jobs. And they are what help shape the identity and character of our town.

2. **Health and well-being.** How do you see arts and culture supporting residents' health, especially seniors, youth and/or people facing isolation? How would you support that role?

Connection matters as much as services. Through Green Wood Coalition, I've personally seen the benefits of weekly art programming and collaborative art therapy projects. They give people an avenue to express themselves and connect with others through their art. This is particularly important for seniors, youth, and isolated residents. I'd encourage keeping arts and culture's older-adult programs and the library connected with local artists, and by making sure programs are free or low-cost and actually reach people who don't already know about them.



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3. **Economic growth.** As Port Hope prepares for future growth (especially with the potential Wesleyville project), how will arts and culture feature in your plan to attract and keep workers, families and businesses? How would you support arts and culture as an integral part of Port Hope's local economy?

Arts and culture are part of what attract people to Port Hope and it's a reason to stay and grow here. Wesleyville would bring more workers and families, I'd ask that the community-benefit funds with OPG should include culture and public space, the way the Capitol Theatre shows what good corporate investment can do. I think preserving Wesleyville village and creating a unique historical and cultural centre around agri-tourism could be interesting. I think it's also important that existing arts and cultural groups are involved in all phases of how we bring more to our local economy.

4. **Access.** How would you improve access to arts and culture across rural and urban wards, including addressing cost, transportation and disability-related barriers?

Port Hope has historically significant corridors and buildings in our rural area. I believe with more public consultation to understand what excites or blocks our rural community is a critical first step to planning for arts and culture. For instance, we just had a large pay-what-you-can Cultivate festival in the urban area, I'd be curious how many rural residents attended. Transportation is challenging and having more point-to-point options for Port Hope residents reduces barriers for residents and represents more revenue-generating options for the Municipality. Funded venues and programs should meet accessibility standards.

5. **Affordability.** What municipal tools and support would you implement to make accessible, year-round arts spaces more affordable?

Space is a large cost, so I'd start with space the municipality already owns. I want every municipal asset to deliver real value and a new purchase of 39 Pine Street represents an opportunity to include affordable studio space, rehearsal or exhibition space for artists on predictable terms. I'd also work with the HBIA on short-term use of vacant storefronts, and review facility rental fees so arts groups aren't priced out. First, an inventory of what space we have.



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6. **Stable arts funding:** Do you support predictable, multi-year municipal funding for local arts and cultural organizations? If so, would you maintain, increase, or reduce that investment, and why?

Yes, in principle. Council is moving to service agreements with its three foundational recipients, \$100,000 in total for 2026. I support multi-year agreements tied to clear outcomes reported publicly, because that protects both artists and taxpayers. I'd want to see what the investment delivers before promising a number, and I'd pursue outside funding and sponsorships to stretch it rather than have organizations rely on it. I also believe in prioritizing new start-up ideas and encouraging a more sustainable model for multi-year opportunities.

7. **Advocacy.** Would you support the creation of a local arts council to help artists and cultural organizations access funding, share resources, and pay artists professional (CARFAC) fees? What Municipal support would you advocate for?

I'd support it, as long as it is led by artists and cultural groups. One door for funding application, shared resources, and a united voice would also give council a single partner. If desired, I'd support a formal council committee to tap formally into municipality supports and structure. Services could include in-kind support, meeting space, and administrative help, then start-up funds tied to a clear plan, and a seat for the arts community at the tourism strategy table.

8. **Commitment to the arts.** If elected, can the arts community count on you to advocate for it at Council? Name one concrete action you would take in your first year.

Yes, I'm an advocate for arts and culture. My first-year action: ask staff for a public record on what Port Hope spends on arts and culture. I would ask them to engage with local arts and culture groups to better understand how we can build a proper plan to maximize economic development and what barriers currently exist that we can help resolve.

Please return by Friday, October 16, 2026 to info@criticalmassart.com.

Responses will be posted on the Critical Mass website and social media sites before election day.

Thank you kindly for taking part!

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criticalmassart.com