

Critical Mass candidate survey for the 2026 municipal election

Arts and Culture Survey Responses

From: Candidate for Mayor of Port Hope Olena

Part 1 Statement ratings

Statement	Response
Arts and culture are essential to Port Hope's quality of life and identity.	Strongly agree
Investing in arts and culture helps Port Hope attract and keep workers, families and businesses.	Strongly agree
Arts and culture contributes to residents' health and well-being.	Strongly agree
The Municipality currently invests enough in arts and culture.	Disagree
Port Hope would benefit from an arts council or umbrella arts organization that supports and amplifies the work of local artists and arts organizations.	Agree
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.	Agree
The arts are enjoyed by some people, but they don't need public support.	Strongly disagree

Part 2 Open responses

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 central to Port Hope's character, quality of life and local economy. The Capitol, Critical Mass, our arts, jazz and film festivals, the Music Hall and local artists bring people together, celebrate our heritage and support local businesses. The Music Hall can become an even stronger cultural asset, while Council's support for the Capitol and the Tourism Strategy provide a strong foundation. Over the next four years, I would include arts, heritage and cultural landscapes in municipal planning, improve access to affordable space and create more paid opportunities for artists. Residents and cultural organizations should help shape these decisions through the Citizens' Assembly project.

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?

Arts and culture support health by reducing isolation, building confidence and helping people feel they belong. For seniors, I would support affordable daytime programs at accessible locations such as the Town Park Recreation Centre, along with mobile programs, transportation and partnerships with the library, care homes and Community Care Northumberland. Intergenerational projects could connect seniors and youth through music, art and local stories. For young people, I would strengthen SONG, help revive the high school music program and expand creative learning through the Futures Learning Hub. Sensory-friendly, low-cost and rural programming would help neurodiverse residents, families and people facing financial or mobility barriers take part.

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 should be part of growth planning from the start. A strong cultural life helps Port Hope attract and keep workers, families and businesses while supporting tourism, local shops and creative jobs. I would connect the Tourism Strategy with economic development, strengthen film opportunities, promote local artists and festivals, and create paid work through public art, performances and municipal projects. Moving the former Walton Hotel and Opera Building forward could support downtown heritage and business growth. At Wesleyville, artists, Indigenous partners and residents should help shape public spaces, storytelling and cultural landscapes. Outside funding would help this growth strengthen, rather than replace, what residents value.

4. Access

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

Access must work across rural and urban Port Hope. I would support programs in established venues and travelling programs in rural halls, libraries, schools, parks and neighbourhood spaces. Event shuttles, community transportation, volunteer drivers and better evening and weekend options could reduce transportation barriers. Free and low-cost activities, youth and family pricing, subsidies and community passes would improve affordability while ensuring artists are paid fairly. Facilities and programs should offer accessible entrances, seating, washrooms, drop-offs, captioning, assistive listening and support-person admission. Milly's Market helps support sensory-friendly Capitol performances for neurodiverse residents and families. People facing barriers should help set priorities and measure success by who can take part.

5. Affordability

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

I would inventory municipal and community-owned buildings to identify underused space for rehearsals, exhibitions, workshops, performances, studios and storage. Artists should help assess accessibility, operating costs and year-round needs. The Municipality could offer nonprofit rental rates, predictable fees, reduced deposits, shared booking and longer-term leases or licenses. Targeted grants or fee relief could support accessibility upgrades, permits and renovations. We could also connect arts groups with vacant private or nonprofit properties and use community-benefit agreements to protect public access. Provincial, federal, foundation and private funding—including support from partners such as Cameco should help reduce pressure on property taxpayers while keeping spaces accessible and artists fairly paid.

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. I would maintain current arts funding and support targeted, affordable increases where organizations show clear community value. Predictable multi-year agreements help groups plan, retain staff and volunteers, book artists, keep programs affordable and pay professional fees. Municipal support should also help organizations find grants, prepare applications and build partnerships with provincial, federal, foundation and corporate funders. Cameco already make important contributions, but private support should complement—not replace—a stable municipal foundation. Funding should improve access, strengthen year-round spaces and support the local economy. Smaller groups should have a fair chance to apply, with reasonable public reporting on finances, participation, accessibility, artist pay and results.

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?

Yes. I would support a community-led arts council or umbrella group that helps artists find grants, share space and equipment, coordinate promotion and build partnerships. A Mayor's Creative Coalition could be a first step while the arts community chooses the best long-term model. Municipal support could include short-term start-up funding, meeting space, a staff contact, grant help and a role in cultural, tourism and economic planning. Port Hope should consider joining the Creative City Network of Canada. Municipal projects should hire qualified human artists and pay current CARFAC-RAAV or other professional fees. The group should represent established and emerging artists, youth, rural and urban residents, Indigenous voices and artists with disabilities.

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. In my first year, I would bring forward a Council motion to update Port Hope's Arts & Culture Plan. Artists, cultural organizations, Youth Councillors, rural and urban residents, Indigenous partners, businesses, funders and people facing barriers should help shape it, including through the Citizens' Assembly project. The plan would address multi-year funding, accessible year-round space, professional artist fees, an arts council or Creative Coalition, youth and seniors' programs, film, downtown heritage and Wesleyville growth. It would also identify outside funding from partners such as Cameco and Milly's Market. I would require a public staff report within one year, with clear actions, costs, funding sources and responsibility for delivery.