

**Post Fire
Recovery
in the Arts
Strategic Plan**

prepared by
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for

**Arts Recovery
Working Group**



Executive Summary

Arts and Culture are essential components of a healthy, thriving, vibrant community. In the current post fire environment of uncertainty, the role the Arts play in creating that sense of belonging and community has never been more important. The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo (RMWB) has historically been a strong advocate for building a culture of Community where you want to live, raise a family, work, and play. A place that both embraces tradition and innovates. We are desperately in need of the community spirit promoted by the Arts and the citizens that work and volunteer as Artists, however, the Arts community is fractured and struggling to survive in the aftermath of the fire.

Unfortunately, we do not have access to the infrastructure that will support the activity in the arts that is so essential to its healing. This puts the Arts, Artists, Arts Organizations, and the work they do to make this town a community, at risk.

Post fire recovery in the Arts sector has two steps:

1. Support healing of the artists and arts sector through building community around the Arts.
2. Provide the Arts with a Center from which they can grow, organize and work.

In the **Post Fire Strategic Plan for Recovery in the Arts** we outline a plan that will achieve both those goals.

What we know

We are at risk of losing Artists, both professional and emerging, as they have no place to collaborate, create, or showcase their work. Every time an Artist leaves this community we lose not just that community member but the volunteer work they do as well.

There are several studies and reports specific to disaster recovery, the wildfire in our community, as well as Arts Specific information from Statistics Canada, that very directly address the value of the arts in a thriving community and *specifically* on the value of the Arts in the RMWB.

Creative Resilience in Wood Buffalo; Vital Signs, Arts and Belonging; and, Statistics Canada Provincial and Territorial Culture Indicators (Value in our Lives Value in our Economy), all speak to the value of Art in both the financial and social well-being of a community.

“Arts and culture initiatives are some of the primary ways in which citizens are able to participate in the creation of a new local identity. As such, arts and culture initiatives should be included in official post-disaster recovery processes.”¹

¹ Creative Resilience in Wood Buffalo How the arts and culture can be a major contributor to local recovery and rebuilding.

Studies completed by Fuse Social on the Impact of the Wildfire on the Social Profit Sector show that there is an increased wait list for services related to the arts. This is due to services not being fully operational and open to the public, despite an increase in demand.²

In preparation of the Post Fire Strategic Plan for Recovery in the Arts, several avenues of new research were pursued in addition to consultation with the already completed studies. The Arts Recovery Working Group's (ARWG) **One on One** interviews, conducted with Artists from all disciplines, highlighted a common theme: a lack of a Creative Centre for Artists and the community at large to interact with the Arts. One of the statements heard repeatedly was a sense of disconnect and fracture in the Arts community as there is not a principal place to collaborate and share the creative energy. There is a loss of connectedness in the arts community.

Here for You sessions, conducted in partnership with the RMWB, reinforced the message of a fractured community desperate to reconnect. Many artists were unable to return after the wildfire, and many of those that have, are experiencing barriers to practising their craft: loss of residence; loss of work studio; loss of performance venues and opportunities; loss of revenue; and, emotional distress. The ARWG **One on One** interviews identified specific members of the Arts community who have not returned and others struggling to create after returning. Artist feedback stated that there is no consistent place for them to interact with other artists, or to receive information on artistic practice development, best practices, or local arts funding. Also, there was a clear message that there is no effective, affordable way to showcase their artistic expressions. Information gathered from the **Here for You** sessions, hosted by the RMWB, and the **Focus Group** session, hosted by the Arts Recovery Working Group, reinforced the healing power of collaboration and the lack of opportunity to make that happen.

Our **Focus Group** engagement was the most dynamic. Members of the community at large, artists from all disciplines, and arts administrators, all contributed to an evening of shared thoughts, concerns and hopes for a more vibrant arts community in the future. Repeatedly, we heard how great it was to be together with other artists. The connection was exciting as artists shared ideas before they added them to the focus group boards. Artists made it clear they are open to creative options that involve them as part of the solution for example: partnerships, co-ops, and working collaborations. The need for a collaborative creative space, with arts studios, common areas, and access to a professional gallery was also expressed as a common theme.

The conclusion pointed out to us repeatedly, was that there is an obvious place to start. Keyano College has underutilized space that used to be a vital part of the Arts Community. In 2012 changes in focus at the college saw the elimination of and cuts to Arts programs. In 2014 a Strategic Business Plan for the expansion of the Existing Center for the Performing Arts was developed complete with financial plans and community consultation. Revisiting all, or part of that plan, in a creative collaboration with the Arts community would bring much of the

² Impact of the Wildfire on the Social Profit Sector Fuse Social 3month post fire survey.

essential infrastructure needed for a vibrant, healthy Arts community. The facility already has many of the basic components required to begin building a complete Arts Centre. We have a place to start!

The Key Supporters and their roles:

Edmonton Community Foundation

Provided Funding for research and Development of this Strategic Plan

The Art Recovery Working Group consists of:

Arts Council Wood Buffalo

Keyano Theatre and Arts Centre

Suncor Energy Centre for the Performing Arts

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, providing overarching guidance and administrative support

Sharon Heading

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Mission Statement

Develop a Creative Centre for the Arts that will provide a venue for the healing process and support all facets of the Arts in the RMWB.

Vision Statement

The Arts Centre will be a centre for healing and growth in the Arts. It will be a hub for continued growth, innovation and unique collaboration. Artists from every discipline will gather to work, train, educate and showcase their work in the community. This will include collaboration with the rural and Indigenous communities with a focus on their healing centers.

We are not looking to others for Benchmarks, we are looking to set the standard for leadership in the Arts!

Values Statement

We will always respect and honour that we are on Treaty 8 and the Cree, Dene and Metis traditional territory. Indigenous Traditions, Arts and Culture will be celebrated and nurtured in the centre.

The Centre for the Arts will operate in an inclusive environment that is respectful of the diverse cultures that make this community so amazing.

We will work in a respectful, professional manner that is nurturing and supportive to those who may be struggling to gain the knowledge and skills required to further their craft.

Research Summary:

Here for You Sessions ³

In this session community members were asked to answer three questions.

- How was the Arts community affected by the 2016 Horse River Fire?
- What does the Arts Community need to recover from the Wildfire?
- How do the Arts play a role in the general recovery of the community?

*Please note that we have not yet completed our consultation with rural communities. Artists in these communities are overwhelmed with rebuild issues and it is challenging to make contact.

One on One ⁴

These sessions were more personal. We targeted key people from each discipline and built our base from there. Some disciplines are struggling more than others. It is good to note that there were a small number of artists whose work had flourished after the fire. As well several artists who have not returned and several who would like to return but have no means to support themselves.

We asked all artists the same questions as in the **Here For You** sessions but noted their specific discipline. Other questions asked were:

- Is art your fulltime job?
- Was your practise affected by the fire?
- did you lose supplies, work space, time, and/or venue for your work?
- Was your ability to continue with your work affected by the economic downturn before the fire?
- Was your ability to work affected by the change in circumstance of a family member?
- Do you feel emotionally touched by the fire?
- Has it inspired your practise?
- Has it hindered your practise?
- If you started with your art again, how is your practise different?
- What, if any, barriers do you have to returning to being a productive artist?
- Physical, financial, emotional?
- Do you feel a part of the Arts Community?
- What do you think would help artists build successful practises as the community finds its "new normal"?

Summary of Key findings from Here for You and One on One

³ Here for You Public Information secession#50

⁴ One on One notes

The arts community is feeling fractured and there is a sense of frustration. The consistent message from post fire studies and surveys states that: The Arts community is essential to successful growth and healing of a post disaster community. Heal the Arts and they will be an integral part of a healthy community and contribute significantly to its growth. The healing has not yet begun.

People in the business of the arts are struggling. Many have experienced loss of inventory. There are fewer funds available for their services as the community struggles with unemployment or underemployment. This has affected their day to day business. Loss of venues was a repeated message. Band members, dancers, actors and any number of artists have not returned, or are unable to participate, because they are using the time they once had for their craft to survive difficult financial times.

Visual artists, both emerging and professional, do not have a venue to showcase their work. Many lost supplies and there is limited to no studio spaces available. This affects both the artists and any emerging artists they could be mentoring.

Performing artists have lost venues for rehearsal and performance as several establishments supporting the arts have not reopened post fire. Many performing artists and volunteers involved in community theatre were not active as they struggled to rebuild their lives post fire.

Several artists who were working contracts privately or in the schools, had programs cancelled.

Film and video artists require technical, rehearsal and storage facilities. There are no such affordable spaces available.

There are opportunities for cross discipline collaboration that are being missed as everyone struggles to create makeshift work spaces.

Many artists (in multiple disciplines) have been unable to return to their craft because they are suffering a creative block.

Literary artists were affected by the fire in unexpected ways. Many were inspired and have been very prolific writers since their return. Many blogged through the fire and found it to be a helpful healing process. Others had projects that were interrupted by the fire and did not have access to the work or equipment essential to completing their contracts. This held to be true for digital and film makers as well.

There was a strong feeling of frustration from the artists. A sense that they are low on the priority list for the municipality. The most magnificent sports facility in the country and no art gallery. Skating rinks and dog parks but no arts center. Inconsistent funding between, sports, recreation and Arts. There was a strong sentiment that the Arts are an afterthought. Continuing

along this path will lead to a loss of artists as they find support in other communities. This exodus has already begun.

Summary from the Focus Group

Having identified a Creative Center as the first point of healing and growth, we asked Artists (by discipline) to state their vision for what was needed. We also asked community members what they would like to see. Summaries follow with individual notes in the appendix.

The community was looking for lessons in music and art for adults and children. A place to view work by local and visiting artists and a “gig” space for musicians. One stop shopping for Arts programming and events happening in the community. Festivals were a popular suggestion, Jazz, Folk, 2 day summer music festival all with a component for local talent as well as a street festival for the Arts as a whole. Space for exhibitions, meetings and performance under one roof. A place to hear guest lecturers from all disciplines. There were several suggestions on models including “CAVA” in Lethbridge and The Redpoll Center as well as creative governance models. A place to take students on Field trips was a repeated suggestion.

Arts Administrators had lots to say about funding. Most importantly the need for it and the suggestion that it be multi-year to relieve some of the stress of uncertainty and the inability to plan meaningfully. Some folks suggested there be more funding from RMWB and others suggested that ACWB be able to fund local artists. Administrators wanted less time chasing funds so there is more time to deliver programming. Workshops specific to administration, programming spread over multiple locations, more collaboration between disciplines, and festivals were all on their wish list. Hosting creative nights or tours was suggested to introduce new members to the Arts community. Someone suggested we “Make art a habit!”

Musicians were looking for affordable classes and rehearsal space and the opportunity for affordable lessons. A showcase for our diversity that included recognized artists from the community who have gone on to success. Mentorship programs for young bands and musicians was suggested. Festivals were a popular topic including Jazz, Folk and showcases for local musicians. A place to play!

Photographers would like to see editing and studio space as well as a darkroom. A collaborative space that allowed them to connect with artists, models, and make-up artists would be helpful. There was a suggestion of an online bulletin board as a potential resource connection point. Peer to peer support, and a place to display their work, was considered key to their growth and success.

Literary Arts are looking for more publishing opportunities locally and paid work. Training was requested at all levels from children on up to Master classes. Opportunities are limited here so a suggestion was for a more meaningful connection between publishers here and in Edmonton.

Indigenous, First Nations, Metis and Inuit community comments were very consistent. There is a strong request for inclusion that is meaningful and respectful. Transportation for rural artists and or Arts Centers in rural communities is an issue that needs to be addressed and would help with the issue of inclusiveness. Culturally appropriate workshops were requested along with mentorship programs in both traditional and modern art. Access to tools, Computers and reliable internet connection were also needed.

Performance Artists are looking for more venues, affordable shared space for rehearsals, performances and script reading. The suggestion of “cross pollination across disciplines” as a way to better understand and possibly collaborate with other disciplines was interesting. Community based performances outside of Keyano was another suggestion. Funding for artistic development, workshops and courses for theatre and dance was listed. The suggestion of a talent exchange with a sister city was intriguing. The opportunity to mentor and be mentored was important. And last, but not least, the suggestion of a Street Festival.

Visual Artists had the most to say! There is desperate need for a real gallery for local and visiting exhibitions. Studio space is a must have along with juried shows to showcase artists at various skill levels. A large, properly equipped space for workshops, and a place well stocked to buy both professional and student grade supplies, is in high demand. Further education is needed for event organizers around all artists being paid for their work. Education on forming artists co-operatives that will allow for the purchase and management of expensive equipment needed for things like print making and screen printing. Unique events that get artists together for networking on a regular basis. The opportunity to network and benefit from creativity breeding more creativity!

The Plan:

As we begin to explore the possibility of Keyano revitalizing its role in the Arts community, there are many questions that need to be answered.

1. What can we do to begin the healing process as we work toward the finished Centre?
2. What can we put in place right away for minimum cost and maximum benefit?
3. What services/facilities will be in the Centre?
4. How will we best serve the rural and Indigenous community?
5. What will the governance of this new center look like?
6. Who will pay for the necessary changes?
7. How will we fund the ongoing operations of the centre?
8. Who will determine what those changes will be?
9. How do we incorporate missing services, best take advantage of existing services without duplication?
10. Who delivers those services and how?

These questions will be answered as we work our through the strategic plan. Please note that there is a built-in review process that will allow us to review and redirect as we proceed.

MONTH 1

Establish workplace; possible partnership with Keyano Theatre & Arts Centre / Keyano College.

Identify and contact Stakeholders.

Reach out to the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to offer administrative support.

Set first meeting of stakeholders and current ARWG to review the Post Fire Art Recovery Strategic Plan and define committee members and their roles.

MONTH 2 & 3

Execute the first series of mindfulness sessions with artists.

Meet with key stakeholders from each arts discipline to identify immediate needs and develop plan to address those needs.

MONTH 4 TO 7

Continue outreach and relationship building with rural and Indigenous communities.

Determine need and interest of those communities to participate in mindfulness sessions.

Project Manager to receive training on Partnership Brokering.

MONTH 8 TO 12

Evaluate existing facilities and develop best practices for community partnerships.

Create schedule, and leverage partnerships with existing facilities, to provide engagement and collaboration opportunities for artists.

YEAR 2

MONTH 1 TO 3

Conduct Here For You and Focus Group sessions to measure impact of Year 1 initiatives

Review of year one – successes, opportunities, determine remaining gaps in arts community healing.

Create timeline of next steps: determine the need for more mindfulness sessions; determine need for more community outreach; create schedule of collaboration and engagement opportunities to continue building sustainability of the arts community.

MONTH 3 TO 6

Partner with RMWB Artist In Residency program to create collaboration and learning opportunities for artists.

Identify potential spaces to create an arts hub in our urban and rural centre.

Evaluate stakeholders in the Arts Recovery Working Group – who needs to be brought to the table to further the goal of creating an arts hub?

MONTH 6 TO 12

Update Arts Recovery Strategic Plan to include steps for supporting the creation of an arts hub, in a new or existing facility. This could include but is not limited to:

- Funding proposals
- Governance models
- Artist collective models
- Business plan creation
- Policy and procedure
- Partnership brokering plan