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CITY CLERK'S DEPARTMENT

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Community & Protective Services, agenda item 7.1

Hello, my name is Su Ying Strang, and I'm an artist and cultural worker based here on Treaty 7 territory. I am the executive director of The New Gallery, a charitable centre for contemporary art in Calgary Chinatown, and the Chair for the Alberta Association of Artist-run Centres. Today I am here representing the citizens and arts community that make up Creative Calgary. I want to tell you about my introduction to Calgary via the arts, and then speak more broadly about the opportunity that the City has this fall to invest in a vibrant, sustainable arts sector that will help build a prosperous city.

I emigrated to Canada in September 2006. I had never heard of Calgary or Alberta prior to learning about the Alberta College of Art + Design, which took place in 2004 at a National Portfolio Day event for art schools across North America. The recruiter, artist Tim Zuck, did their job well, and I decided to attend ACAD over my other top choices of art schools in Vancouver and Toronto.

I have to admit that during my first two years here, I felt that the city was missing something. I've lived all over the US, and have been fortunate to travel internationally throughout my life. At the time, it was difficult to imagine Calgary ever becoming my home.

However, as I got closer to graduating in 2010, I felt a slow but discernible shift in the culture of the city. My friends were starting pop-up galleries in their apartments and garages, the quality and diversity of restaurants was picking up, and finally, major music acts started booking shows here on their way across the country. All of the sudden, it didn't feel like leaving Calgary was my best option, instead, I graduated with a community of peers who were asking, what if we stay?

Since then, I have been committed to working in the charitable arts sector, hoping and doing my best to contribute to the dynamic and exciting arts and culture happening in Calgary. Throughout the last 8 years of my involvement in this sector, it has become evident that Calgarians' appetite for arts and culture is only growing. I could never have imagined Calgary being selected as one of the most liveable cities in the world when I first arrived here, but Calgary is now ranked #4 by The Economist. What spurred this? The magazine cited "improved cultural availability" and "quite a large art and music scene" as key factors moving Calgary up the ranking. This further underscores the importance of arts and culture for Calgarians of today and of the future, and I believe with the proper investment and support, this hugely important aspect of Calgary will thrive, drawing people to our prosperous city from across the world to live, visit, work, and play.

Calgary's arts and culture has been growing without the resources necessary to match its development, and this is unsustainable over the long term. A significant increase to Calgary Arts Development is key to stabilizing the sector so that we don't lose valuable activities and organizations such as the Children's Festival in the future. Furthermore,

our city, and country as a whole are working towards being more accessible, inclusive, and equitable. Recent statistics rank Calgary as the third most diverse city in the country. Our artists and arts organizations are striving to make the work we all do accessible for all Calgarians, but significant and ongoing increases in arts funding is necessary for this important work to continue. This year we've seen organizations like Asian Heritage Foundation utilize the arts to make new connections and strengthen existing ones between Pan-asian Calgarians and Calgarians from all walks. The New Gallery has implemented translated exhibition tours and texts to better welcome our Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking audiences. Other organizations like Stride Gallery are working directly with T'suu T'ina Nation to develop relevant arts programming in an indigenous paradigm, and newer arts organizations like Chromatic Theatre are creating and supporting programming that is a diverse cross section of voices.

This budget cycle is a rare opportunity for Calgary to take a major step forward towards the vision of being a prosperous city - existing organizations and artists have continued making do with stagnating resources, but the burn-out is real, and many new organizations and artists that have popped up in Calgary have had few opportunities to access funding, meaning that some people leave, and some projects have to end. We've recently seen the development of an innovative new masters program at the Alberta College of Art + Design, and they've just received their university status. This will bring some of the most artistically excellent talent from across North America to this city. The Province will announce its Status of the Artist legislation this fall, commemorating the importance of art and the contributions of artists in Alberta. Furthermore, at Canada Council's recent town hall, Alberta had the highest amount of new artists enter the grant stream in last year's funding competition, demonstrating that our artists are competitive nationally, and the need for these resources. An investment in the arts today will create generations of strong institutions that present the highest caliber of programming to Calgarians, as well as support and cultivate the next generations of artists who will share their work here at home, and abroad, acting as an ambassador for Calgary. Creative Calgary has shared numerous economic benefits that arise from a strong arts sector, and why investing in Calgary arts makes business sense, so now I ask you to think about some of the qualitative benefits of the arts - how the arts can build or strengthen relationships, how the arts can communicate disparate ideas and encourage critical discourse, how the arts can celebrate culture and share it with our family, friends, and Calgarians at large, and how the arts can help build a prosperous city. The time for a transformational investment in the arts is now. Thank you for your time.

About Creative Calgary

Creative Calgary is a non-partisan group of citizens that care deeply about the role the arts play in connecting our communities and building a healthy, thriving city.

Calgary's artists are world-class and we aspire to be a creative hub, accessible to people of every age, ability and background. The arts and cultural sector currently employs more than 50,000 Calgarians and is a critical component of the economic diversification of the city, yet we could be contributing even more. Unfortunately, the sector is under threat due to persistent underfunding from the municipal government, presenting a substantial risk to our city's educational, financial and community vitality.

We have a considerable opportunity to enhance Calgary's future through sustainable arts funding.

The time is ripe for the City to make a transformational and significant investment in the arts.

- A significant investment will have a game-changing result and will establish Calgary as a leader among Canadian municipalities. We need to act to ensure our creative sector not only weathers the downturn, but drives the growth and diversification of our economy over the years ahead.
- Calgary's corporate sector continues to be under strain and can no longer be expected to make up for the municipal arts organization funding gap. Arts organizations have seen a 30% drop in overall contributions from the corporate sector since the start of the most recent downturn (1).

Arts means business. Arts organizations drive local business and fuel Calgary's creative sector.

- Calgary Economic Development has identified growth of creative industries as part of a focus on making Calgary a magnet for business fostering pathways to purposeful economic diversification and growth (2).
- Arts organizations deliver returns. \$1 invested in the arts returns \$1.9 directly and \$2.6 when you consider tourism benefits (3).
- In North America, the fastest growing industries are creative and technology (4). In Calgary, creative industries employ over 50,000 of our citizens and is integral to economic diversification of the city (5).
- Over 4,000 students graduate from the city's four major schools each year with creative industries-related degrees and diplomas (6).

Arts Transforms Lives. The arts make cities more livable, interesting and inspirational for all citizens.

- Children grow and achieve their full potential through lessons, classes, performances and creative interactions. 397,087 children and youth participated in arts education events in 2016 (7).
- "With 61% of our population being of a visible minority group and 48% of residents born outside of Canada, often the only way to bridge cultures and groups is through the arts." *Brad Anderson, Executive Director, The Genesis Centre*

Calgary's municipal support for arts organizations is the lowest among comparable cities in Canada.

- Calgary art grants per capita are behind Edmonton, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver (8), meaning fewer arts sector jobs for Calgarians.

References

(1) 2017 data from organizations receiving investment from Calgary Arts Development