

# Priority 1. Celebrate Our Roots While Fostering Innovation

## Outcomes of Achieving Priority 1

- Wilmot's unique characteristics and history are preserved and celebrated with events and cultural opportunities showcasing Wilmot's unique roots.
- The Township of Wilmot's heritage is well-known and appreciated by residents and visitors alike.
- As the Township of Wilmot grows and evolves, new cultural opportunities reflecting the changing character of the township and serving all residents are supported.

## The Challenge (What We Heard)

### Celebrate and Preserve Wilmot's Unique Culture

In addition to traditional artistic disciplines, such as visual arts, music, and theatre, interviewed community members repeatedly mentioned specific characteristics they saw as constitutive to Wilmot's unique culture. Wilmot's architectural heritage, rural and agricultural roots, small-town feel, and rich cultural traditions were especially seen as central to the township's identity and praised for the impact on the local quality of life and community wellbeing.

Engagement participants especially appreciated key heritage assets such as the New Hamburg Heritage Conservation District, Castle Kilbride, the New Hamburg Water Wheel, and Puddicombe House, as well as the parks and trails system and large-scale community events. Wilmot's intangible heritage—including Mennonite traditions, agricultural practices, music, and communal stories—was also seen as vital to the Township's cultural fabric and worthy of continued celebration. Participants expressed a strong desire, as Wilmot continues to grow and evolve, to see the Township's unique character and agricultural roots preserved and more prominently celebrated.

### A Desire for Increased and Expanded Support for Heritage and Culture

Participants in the community and stakeholder engagement processes overwhelmingly mentioned Castle Kilbride as the main local cultural institution. While praising the role this institution plays in Wilmot's cultural life, many participants wished to see an expansion of investments and activities beyond the focus on this flagship institution. Interviewees hoped to see municipal support expand beyond this institution to showcase and develop other local assets.

## A Need for an Increased Promotion of Cultural Resources

Despite existing efforts on the Township of Wilmot's website and social media, community members overwhelmingly cited a lack of awareness of existing offerings as a significant barrier to cultural participation. Throughout the engagement process, we heard that community members and event organizers wished for the creation of an improved centralized platform showcasing available activities, and for an increased support from the Township in promoting cultural resources.

## Balancing the Celebration of the Past with a Forward-looking Approach

While participants celebrated Wilmot's heritage and wished to see it preserved and showcased, many community members also hoped for an increased inclusion of new voices in cultural offerings, and called for support in developing new activities that can bring the community together as Wilmot continues to grow.

## What Work Has Already Been Accomplished?

### Preservation and Promotion of Castle Kilbride

Castle Kilbride, in Baden, is the primary cultural landmark in Wilmot. This Victorian home, built in 1877 for flax industrialist and politician James Livingston, features Italianate architectural design and intricate trompe l'oeil murals and ceilings, created by German artist Henry Scharstein, and a belvedere for scenic views. The building was purchased by the township in 1993, with funding from the federal, provincial and municipal levels, as well as local fundraising efforts by the Friends of Castle Kilbride, and has been open to the public as a museum since 1994. It was designated a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monument Board of Canada in 1995. As a flagship tourist attraction, Castle Kilbride is a member of Explore Waterloo Region and Destination Stratford.



*Castle Kilbride and the Administration Complex*

In recent years, Castle Kilbride has successfully grown special programming that grows touristic interest. This includes Ghost Walk tours, plays, crafts workshops on weekends, a tea and tour experience, concerts at the castle, Christmas events, and themed pet parades and a partnership with Guess Where Trips. Additionally, Castle Kilbride presents programs that showcase local creatives and bring the community together around art appreciation, such as art shows and a summer concert series. However, while highlighting the successful efforts undertaken by the Castle to provide varied programming through these well-loved events such as the summer concert series, interviewees warned that staff resources currently allocated to the operation of Castle Kilbride were insufficient to address broader cultural needs in the community.

## Community Grants

The Township of Wilmot supports local community groups through the Community Grants Program, with a total yearly funding of approximately \$50,000. In 2023, cultural community organizations supported included the New Hamburg Art Tour, the New Hamburg Concert Band, and the Dundee Artisan Festival.

## What We Need to Get Us There

- Goal 1. Increase awareness and appreciation of Wilmot's unique cultural identity, its agricultural roots and history
- Goal 2. Honour, preserve and showcase Wilmot's heritage
- Goal 3. Encourage the creation of new cultural offerings
- Goal 4. Foster the growth of initiatives that showcase Wilmot's local identity, such as agro-touristic ventures

## Goal 1. Increase awareness and appreciation of Wilmot's unique cultural identity, its agricultural roots and history

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Raise awareness of the Arts and Culture Master Plan

Action Steps	Timeframe
Distribute a media release to announce the Council's approval of the Municipal Cultural Plan.	Short-term (S)
Publish the Plan on the Township's official	Short-term (S)

website.	
Organize a community forum to formally launch the Plan, with a focus on leveraging the event to develop relationships with potential community partners.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #2:** Promote and further cultural mapping

Action Steps	Timeframe
Publish the inventory of cultural resources on the Township's website, and consider developing an interactive map of identified cultural assets.	Short-term (S)
Celebrate the unique characteristics of Wilmot's culture, promoting attractions and focuses that have been mentioned as central to the local culture in the community engagement, beyond more traditional art forms: e.g., car shows, agricultural presentations, storytelling, Mennonite and German heritage.	Short-term (S)
Create a channel (designated person and/or webform) for community members to suggest assets to add to the inventory.	Short-term (S)
Explore collaborating with neighbouring townships to develop an area-wide cultural mapping.	Medium-term (M)
Continue expanding the cultural mapping. In particular, collaborate with the Heritage Committee to maintain an up-to-date inventory of significant historic sites, heritage buildings, and historic plaques.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #3:** Enhance online and print communication on cultural assets and events

Action Steps	Timeframe
Refine the design of communication materials (including webpages and walking tour information) to enhance their user interface, modernity and visual appeal.	Short-term (S)
Create a central platform housing information on local cultural assets and events, which can be hosted on the Township of Wilmot website or a separate platform.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #4:** Continue supporting community groups that promote Wilmot's unique history

Action Steps	Timeframe
Continue supporting organizations through the community grants program.	Short-term (S)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Successful publication and sharing of the Arts and Culture Master Plan
- Number of enhanced communication materials
- Successful creation of a platform presenting the cultural inventory and of a method for community members to suggest assets to add

## Goal 2. Honour, preserve and showcase Wilmot's heritage

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Continue to support Castle Kilbride's activities while exploring opportunities to expand its impact

Action Steps	Timeframe
Explore the potential of increasing the presentation of ticketed special programming, such as ghost tours, concerts, or holiday events.	Short-term (S)

Assess the staffing capacity for the presentation of increased programming, and determine how to better support this programming, whether through adapting Castle Kilbride's opening times to allow for an increased focus on special programming, through hiring dedicated part-time staff, or through increasing partnerships with external stakeholders who can deliver activities on Castle grounds.	Short-term (S)
Ensure the maintenance of Castle Kilbride by regularly assessing the building and assets' states and incorporating needed repairs into capital planning.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Continue supporting community groups that promote Wilmot's unique history

Action Steps	Timeframe
Maintain the Community Grants Program, and ensure a dedicated percentage of these grants is targeted towards cultural activities, with a focus on activities that celebrate Wilmot's unique strengths.	Short-term (S)
Ensure the support of Township staff representatives organized by third-party community organizations that promote Wilmot's unique culture.	Short-term (S)
Increase collaborations with external private and community stakeholders that invest in heritage preservation and renovation and explore ways to support their work. <i>Examples of recent and ongoing initiatives include the transformation of the B&amp;W Feed Mill in Downtown New Hamburg into a community hub by Love Your Neighbour Communities and investments in the renovation and upkeep of The Imperial and</i>	Medium-term (M)

<i>Puddicombe House.</i>	
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**Recommended Action #3:** Increase Township’s staff direct involvement in flagship events that promote the Township’s culture and foster community building

Action Steps	Timeframe
Assess required staff and resources for Township staff to sustainably deliver Canada Day programming.	Short-term (S)

## Potential Performance Metrics

- Percentage of culture-focused initiatives among Community Grants Program recipients
- Number of new relationships developed with external partners supporting heritage preservation

## Case Studies and Examples to Explore

### Focus – Examples of special programming presented at historic houses

#### Immersive Theatre

- **White Mills Theatre Co.:** This company specializes in classical vocal performance and new play development in collaboration with Canadian historic sites. To date, the company has only collaborated with Toronto-based institutions, but a partnership with White Mills Theatre Co. or another theatre company could be explored.
- **The Three Ships Collective – A Christmas Carol:** Set in the historic Campbell House Museum in downtown Toronto, this theatrical experience gives audience members a chance to immerse themselves in Victorian England as they follow the journey of Ebenezer Scrooge towards redemption.

#### Holiday Programming

- **Eerie Tales & Spine-Tingling Tours:** Presented around Halloween in Toronto History Museums, this series of after dark tours invited visitors to discover historic houses with a focus on Victorian death practices, paranormal beliefs and ghost stories.
- **Steampunk Halloween at Gibson House in Toronto:** Throughout October 2024, visitors were invited to learn about the retro-futurist origins of the Steampunk aesthetic through a special display and a costuming and selfie opportunity. This event focused on a genre beloved by young adults to invite visitors to look at the house’s assets through a new lens.

## Group Activities, Arts and Crafts Workshops

- **Birthday Parties:** Hamilton museums and historic houses offer themed birthday parties, designed based on each venue's unique assets.<sup>1</sup> This can include providing historic costumes to children and inviting them to play with reproductions of historic games.
- **Garden parties:** Castle Kilbride's lawn offers a beautiful setting, used for events such as the concert series and for wedding photography. Historic houses also use similar settings as venues for themed events such as garden parties. Spadina House, in Toronto, has for instance organized costume parties, such as the annual Gatsby Garden Party, which includes attractions such as a costume contest, swing dance instruction, live music, croquet and a photography station. In Aurora, Ontario, the Aurora Historical Society organizes different special events to encourage visits to heritage sites, such as a Victorian Garden Party held at Hillary House National Historic Site, with live music, activity stations (ballroom dance, playing Victorian games, outdoor croquet, learning a heritage craft). Costume props are provided to guests, helping enhance the experience. While Castle Kilbride's lawn does not offer as much space as the gardens of these houses, smaller-scale events could be considered.
- **Historic-themed workshops:** Historic houses present workshops that invite participants to experience the lives of past inhabitants of the sites, through activities such as cooking historic recipes, learning a heritage craft (e.g., crochet, embroidery, carpet weaving), or playing games. Such activities are part of Castle Kilbride's special programming, and could be enhanced with focuses on the unique characteristics of the house: e.g., exploration of trompe l'oeil painting, in collaboration with local artists; flax fiber workshop.

## Goal 3. Encourage the creation of new cultural offerings

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Promote the use of local event spaces to event organizers

Action Steps	Timeframe
Initiate discussions with local event organizers to explore expanding their activities with integrated revenue generation strategies, drawing inspiration from events like Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest.	Short-term (S)
Prioritize collaborations with events that address community desires, as identified	Short-term (S)

<sup>1</sup> City of Hamilton website, Birthday Parties, <https://www.hamilton.ca/things-do/venues-facilities-bookings/venue-rentals-packages/birthday-parties>



through the community engagement process, and are aligned with Wilmot's cultural identity, while also integrating economic development opportunities.	
Regularly communicate with large event organizers presenting events in Wilmot to identify pain points and areas for improvement.	Short-term (S)
Organize post-event debriefs with large event organizers to collect feedback.	Short-term (S)
Develop a proactive approach to encourage local event organizers to present activities at Township facilities through a structured case-by-case fee-for service model.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Support grassroots cultural initiatives

Action Steps	Timeframe
Offer small grants or recognition awards for individuals or groups who propose creative, low-cost cultural events. This can encourage grassroots cultural initiatives while ensuring that the events align with community interests.	Short-term (S)
Encourage local artists and performers to organize smaller cultural events or workshops by offering promotional support through the Township's website, social media, or newsletters.	Short-term (S)
Support temporary, pop-up cultural experiences that are easy to organize and execute, such as outdoor concerts and film screenings, street performances, art installations, or pop-up art workshops. These events can create excitement in the community while requiring minimal financial	Short-term (S)

investment.	
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## Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of post-event debriefs with event organizers
- Number of meetings/conversations with new potential partners
- Percentage of the Community Grants Program focused on heritage preservation

## Goal 4. Foster the growth of initiatives that showcase Wilmot's local identity, such as agro-touristic venture

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Celebrate and promote existing agro-touristic experiences

Action Steps	Timeframe
Pursue partnerships and funding opportunities to promote existing local farm experiences via Wilmot's cultural channels	Medium-term (M)
Honour presenters of agro-tourism experiences through sponsored recognition awards.	Medium-term (M)
Maintain and expand collaborations with presentation opportunities such as the "Farm to Fork" series <sup>2</sup> while embedding economic development opportunities to ensure sustainability.  <i>Examples of existing experiences include the Sip &amp; Graze and Goat Social series at Perth Farmhouse, cheese plant tours at Mountainoak Cheese, Pick Your Own strawberry picking at Pinehill Farms, tours at</i>	Long-term (L)

<sup>2</sup> Explore Waterloo Region website, "Farm to Fork in Waterloo Region", <https://explorewaterloo.ca/2023/05/farm-to-fork-in-waterloo-region/>

<i>Fall Harvest Farm, and more.</i>	
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**Recommended Action #2:** Encourage the development of agro-touristic experiences that highlight Wilmot's agricultural heritage while offering opportunities for economic development to sustain themselves.

Action Steps	Timeframe
<p>Partner with local farms, wineries, and food producers to create agro-tourism experiences - including farm tours, harvest festivals, and "meet the farmer" events - that are economically sustainable and benefit the community.</p> <p><i>Perth County's agricultural tours are a potential source for inspiration. The county promotes a wide range of signature experiences, all promoted on their website<sup>3</sup>.</i></p>	Short-term (S)
Create an "Agro-Tourism Trail" that connects local farms, markets, and agro-tourism businesses, allowing visitors to explore Wilmot's agricultural offerings while enjoying the area's natural beauty.	Long-term (L)
Promote local food, craft, and agri-businesses through special events, such as seasonal farmers' markets, farm-to-table dinners, and food and beverage festivals, celebrating Wilmot's agricultural identity.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #3:** Engage the Local Community in Agro-Tourism Development, with embedded economic opportunities to ensure long-term sustainability of initiatives

Action Steps	Timeframe
Conduct community consultations and workshops to gather input from local farmers,	Medium-term (M)

<sup>3</sup> Perth County, Discover More Adventures,  
<https://www.perthcounty.ca/en/discover/discover-more-adventures.aspx>

residents, and cultural groups on their vision for agro-tourism development and what they feel best represents Wilmot's agricultural identity.	
Establish a community-driven agro-tourism advisory group made up of local farmers, businesses, artists, and cultural leaders to guide the planning and growth of agro-tourism initiatives.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #4:** Encourage local stakeholders to support the transmission of the agricultural heritage

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with local farms to offer workshops, tours, and training sessions on sustainable farming, heritage farming practices, and local food systems for tourists and residents alike, fostering greater appreciation for Wilmot's agricultural heritage.	Long-term (L)
Work with local schools to create opportunities for students to engage with agricultural practices and rural tourism.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #5:** Encourage initiatives promoting Wilmot's history

Action Steps	Timeframe
Engage with community organizations and key stakeholders in Wilmot and neighboring areas, including Heritage Wilmot, Castle Kilbride, Wilmot Heritage Fire Brigades, the New Dundee Women's Institute, local historian Marie Voisin, and the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, to collaborate on creating monthly articles that highlight and celebrate various aspects of Wilmot's history.	Short-term (S)
Share these stories via online and social	Short-term (S)

media platforms, as well as through high-quality printed materials.	
Facilitate approval processes for community organizations developing events promoting Wilmot's history.	Medium-term (M)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of new stories created
- Number of agricultural-related activities created

## Priority 2. Sustainably Grow Cultural Resources

### Outcomes of Achieving Priority 2

- The Township of Wilmot is successfully promoted as a touristic destination.
- New revenue streams are developed, which leverage existing cultural assets. Revenue generated through these activities helps fund cultural investment.
- Existing venues and spaces adapted to the presentation of artistic creations are used to their fullest potential.
- Local cultural resources grow progressively, balancing the need for an increased investment in culture and current financial constraints.
- Needs identified for the full expression of Wilmot's residents' creativity, such as the creation of appropriate venues, are addressed through long-term planning.

### The Challenge (What We Heard)

#### Develop Wilmot's Potential as a Tourism Destination

While Wilmot boasts notable heritage, natural resources, and agricultural assets, there has not, to date, been a coordinated effort to coordinate and promote these resources to establish Wilmot as a tourist destination, and most of the existing promotion focuses on Castle Kilbride. Stakeholders consulted hoped for dedicated investment that would leverage Wilmot's unique strength and its proximity to both large urban centres and touristic destinations such as Stratford to establish the Township as a new destination.

#### Creating a Dedicated Venue for the Arts

While Wilmot is home to a vibrant and growing arts community, many stakeholders spoke to the need for a dedicated cultural venue—a welcoming, accessible space where creativity, connection, and community can thrive. Current facilities, such as schools and community centres, are not designed with the needs of cultural programming in mind, often posing challenges around acoustics, accessibility, and availability. A promising step forward came in 2022, when the Township received \$4.18 million in provincial funding to redevelop the former New Hamburg Arena, with plans to create a shared space for recreation and cultural activities. The proposal included a dedicated stage for The Community Players (TCP), a beloved local theatre company that has played a central role in Wilmot's cultural life for decades. While this project is currently on hold pending further consultation and cost assessment, many community members expressed hope that it might still come to life. They emphasized that a cultural venue would not only meet the growing needs of local artists and residents, but also strengthen Wilmot's identity as a welcoming, creative, and culturally rich community. Such a space could help position the Township as a destination for visitors and neighbours alike, while celebrating and elevating the work of groups like The Community Players and other local creatives.

## Financial Constraints

Interviewees frequently identified financial constraints as a major barrier to investing in culture within Wilmot. Many acknowledged the Township's limited budget and small tax base, noting that this often results in cultural initiatives being deprioritized in favour of more immediate infrastructure or service needs. Several stakeholders felt that while there is interest in supporting arts and culture, funding remains inconsistent and often project-based, making long-term planning and sustainability difficult for both the Township and local cultural organizations. There was also concern about the capacity to secure operational funding—not just for building or launching cultural initiatives, but for maintaining them over time. Some participants highlighted the need for external partnerships, grants, and creative funding models to support cultural development without overburdening municipal resources. Overall, financial limitations were seen as a persistent challenge that hinders Wilmot's ability to fully realize its cultural potential.

## What Work Has Already Been Accomplished?

### Film Production

Interviewees expressed enthusiasm about Wilmot's growing potential and appeal as a filming location. They noted that the Township's heritage architecture, rural landscapes, and distinctive small-town charm make it an attractive backdrop for film and television productions. Some participants referenced recent filming activity in the area (including "Ghosting", a CBC Gem production, filmed at Castle Kilbride, and "Anne with an E"), highlighting the economic and promotional benefits it brought to local businesses and the broader community.

Stakeholders viewed film activity as a valuable opportunity to increase visibility for Wilmot, attract visitors, and support the local economy. However, they also emphasized the need for clear municipal processes and guidelines to support future productions—such as streamlined permitting, communication with residents, and logistical coordination. Overall, there was strong support for encouraging film production in Wilmot as part of a broader cultural and economic development strategy.

### Investment in Natural Resources

In recent years, significant investments have been made to enhance Wilmot's natural areas and promenades, which stakeholders overwhelmingly praised during the engagement process. Notably, the Mike Schout Wetlands Preserve was established in 2019 following a partnership between the Township of Wilmot and Mike Schout. This 55-acre natural preserve, home to a vibrant ecosystem, features a 1.6 km boardwalk that spans multiple wetland ponds and includes several educational components. Similarly, the Nith River Promenade and Trail underwent major improvements, with construction completed in early 2024. The enhanced promenade now provides scenic access to three key architectural landmarks of New Hamburg: the New Hamburg Reservoir Dam, the New Hamburg Waterwheel, and the Hartman Bridge.

Interviewees emphasized that these enhancements reflect a growing recognition of the vital role natural spaces play in community life. These spaces offer welcoming and inclusive environments for families, seniors, and newcomers, while fostering a strong sense of community pride and environmental stewardship.

Stakeholders also highlighted the potential of Wilmot's natural resources to promote tourism. Structural improvements—such as boardwalks, trail connections, accessible facilities, and interpretive signage—not only elevate the visitor experience but also help position Wilmot as a destination that blends rural charm with cultural and ecological richness. There was a strong desire to see continued investment in trails, parks, and natural heritage features, as part of a broader effort to enhance quality of life and support sustainable tourism.



*The boardwalk and wetlands along the Mike Schout Wetlands Preserve*

## What We Need to Get Us There

- Goal 1. Develop and support initiatives that contribute to local businesses, create job opportunities, and boost the township's economic vitality
- Goal 2. Maximize the use of underutilized assets
- Goal 3. Continue to enhance, preserve and promote natural resources
- Goal 4. Explore new partnerships and funding models to grow cultural assets in an economically sustainable fashion



## Goal 1. Develop and support initiatives that contribute to local businesses, create job opportunities, and boost the township's economic vitality

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Encourage the use of Wilmot's heritage sites as filming locations, while initiating new revenue generation initiatives

Action Steps	Timeframe
Develop a targeted strategy that builds on past successful collaborations (e.g., "Ghosting" and "Anne with An E" filming at Castle Kilbride), transitioning from one-off projects to a more consistent and revenue-generating activity.	Medium-term (M)
Build a photo library of potential, high-interest filming locations. Highlight sites that are one-of-a-kind in the region, with unique characteristics or that evoke different historical periods. Include historic buildings, industrial zones, residences, streets, scenic routes, schools, distinctive structures, and expansive vistas.	Medium-term (M)
Create and publish clear communication on these locations, outlining their unique characteristics. The Town of St. Marys filming locations webpage provides an example of the type of materials that could be developed. The webpage lists potential locations and contains information on past successful filming in St. Marys. <sup>4</sup>	Medium-term (M)
Clearly define processes and fees for filming in Wilmot.	Medium-term (M)
Create a list of local support services	Medium-term (M)

<sup>4</sup> St. Marys website, "Filming Locations", <https://www.townofstmarys.com/en/recreation-and-culture/filming-locations.aspx>

available for production (hotels and other accommodations, restaurants, catering).	
Organize familiarization trips for Ontario location managers and scouts.	Long-term (L)
Designate a Township staff contact for interested audiovisual companies, who will be the first entry point and be in charge of connecting film companies with relevant internal departments (e.g., for permits and traffic control).	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #2:** Enhance the Township staff capacity to support the promotion of Wilmot's cultural assets

Action Steps	Timeframe
Create a dedicated position (e.g., Economic Development and Tourism Officer)	Long-term (L)
Define objectives for this new position. The Economic Development and Tourism Officer should be in charge of relaying information on existing assets and marketing Wilmot's cultural opportunities beyond its borders.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #3:** Work with the Economic Development and Tourism Officer and partner stakeholders to develop a Wilmot Tourism Strategy

Action Steps	Timeframe
Identify financial resources to realize Tourism Strategy	Medium-term (M)
Identify key messaging/types of assets that Wilmot can develop and promote: e.g., downtown New Hamburg (including small-town feel, architectural heritage, culinary experiences); natural resources; agro-tourism.	Long-term (L)

The strategy should address both cultural tourism and community development (such as neighbourhood or district level marketing), enhance partnerships with local and regional agencies, and identify opportunities to promote Wilmot's cultural offerings to new Wilmot residents, local, regional, national and international visitors year-round in alignment with the Region's Tourism priorities.	Long-term (L)
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**Recommended Action #4:** Create guides and itineraries to promote Wilmot's cultural resources

Action Steps	Timeframe
Create a cultural tourism guide/itinerary that highlights the Castle Kilbride and highly attended annual festivals as the main attractions, while also showcasing and expanding upon other cultural resources and activities in Wilmot, including built heritage, natural resources, agricultural experiences, performance arts, and culinary experiences. Include information on accommodations, restaurants, and local shops.	Long-term (L)
Market this package to tour operators.	Long-term (L)
<p>Create a "Cultural Guide" (available in both print and online formats) that highlights a variety of notable cultural resources.</p> <p><i>The following websites can offer inspiration for the format of such a guide:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St. Jacob's Village – <a href="https://www.stjacobsvillage.com">https://www.stjacobsvillage.com</a></li> <li>• Discover St. Marys – <a href="https://www.discoverstmarys.ca">https://www.discoverstmarys.ca</a></li> </ul>	Long-term (L)
Distribute the guide locally, especially in cultural venues, hotels, and restaurants.	Long-term (L)

Collaborate with large event organizers (e.g., Moparfest, Fall Fair, Mennonite Relief Sale) and with stakeholders hosting large private events (e.g., weddings and corporate events at Puddicombe House) to promote the cultural guide to their audiences.	Long-term (L)
Create incentives to encourage participants in large events to explore other local assets (e.g., discounts at local stores and restaurants).	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #5:** Collaborate with The Community Players and other cultural organizations to secure a permanent venue for cultural presentations

Action Steps	Timeframe
Explore the two options outlined in the Township of Wilmot Community Services Master Plan (New Hamburg Community Centre – Recommissioning or New Hamburg Arena – Dry Floor Space) and engage with The Community Players to discuss the associated partnership models.	Short-term (S)
Determine the chosen action plan.	Short-term (S)
By the end of the Arts and Culture Master Plan’s implementation, ensure an adapted space is provided for theatre presentations.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #6:** Collaborate with local tourism destination marketing agencies to enhance the promotion of Wilmot’s assets

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with Explore Waterloo Region, Ontario Yours to Discover, and other stakeholders to enhance the promotion of Wilmot’s assets.	Medium-term (M)

Review current marketing to identify gaps. In particular, using the cultural resources inventory, ensure local assets are mentioned on the Explore Waterloo website and events are included in the website's event calendar.	Medium-term (M)
Review current processes for collaborations with the Explore Waterloo team and identify potential needed adjustments (e.g., clarifying points of contact, establishing regular check-ins).	Medium-term (M)
Collaborate with Explore Waterloo to create new content promoting the Township's assets. In particular, develop promotion on central assets identified in the Tourism Strategy. This can include adding information on New Hamburg to the <a href="https://explorewaterloo.ca/waterloo-region-neighbourhoods">Our Neighborhoods webpage</a> ( <a href="https://explorewaterloo.ca/waterloo-region-neighbourhoods">https://explorewaterloo.ca/waterloo-region-neighbourhoods</a> )	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #7:** Explore collaborations with nearby tourism destinations to develop tours

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with Destination Stratford to encourage local visitors to participate in itineraries, including stops in Wilmot.	Long-term (L)
Collaborate with St. Jacob's to develop tours.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #8:** Collaborate with key stakeholder community representatives

Action Steps	Timeframe
Find key advocates within key groups who are interested in collaborating with the Township on joint tourism initiatives, including stakeholders in the culinary industry,	Long-term (L)

accommodation and agro-tourism industries and the Mennonite community.	
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## Goal 2. Maximize the use of underutilized assets

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Identify potential spaces for the presentation of visual arts in the community

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with local stakeholders to identify spaces suitable for visual arts presentation, e.g., local library branches of the Region of Waterloo Library, select restaurants and hotels, community and recreation centres, Castle Kilbride, etc.	Medium-term (M)
Create and publish an inventory of these spaces.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Facilitate the use of Township venues for events aligned with the Arts and Culture Master Plan's objectives.

Action Steps	Timeframe
Encourage the use of community centres and public spaces for events that can support the plan's objectives, especially prioritizing activities that promote community development, serve equity-deserving groups, contribute to a strong local cultural identity, and/or help generate economic benefits through streamlining rental processes and offering discounts for high-impact events.	Short-term (S)
Promote the use of high-potential venues, such as the New Dundee Bandshell, Scott Park, and the Fairgrounds, through developing communication materials highlighting these spaces' unique	Medium-term (M)

characteristics, ensuring the rental process is streamlined, and approaching potential community event organizers.	
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**Recommended Action #3:** Explore ways to expand the use of Castle Kilbride through partnerships

Action Steps	Timeframe
Consider expanding the use of the Castle Kilbride lawn by hosting events such as concerts, movie nights, and performances organized by third-party stakeholders in addition to the concert series and events presented by Castle Kilbride.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #4:** Collaborate with the local Region of Waterloo Library branches to present events and activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with the New Hamburg Region of Waterloo Library branch and community groups focused on historical preservation to present a permanent display and regular activities, such as architectural tours, showcasing the history of the Carnegie library.	Medium-term (M)
Collaborate to present activities in library branches, such as temporary displays, arts and crafts workshops, and presentations.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #5:** Transform underutilized spaces into vibrant community hubs through the inclusion of public art

Action Steps	Timeframe
Develop an inventory of underutilized spaces that present a high potential for the inclusion	Long-term (L)

of public art, based on their location, visibility, accessibility, and available canvases.	
Create landmark artworks.	Long-term (L)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Success in creating an inventory of spaces for visual art displays
- Number of visual art displays presented by third-party organizers in the Township following the publication of the inventory
- Number of events organized in high-potential Township venues
- Attendance at events

## Goal 3. Continue to enhance, preserve and promote natural resources

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Continue enhancing the trails and increasing access to natural resources

Action Steps	Timeframe
Install creative furnishings (e.g., painted chairs, benches) and public art activations on the trails, to enhance streetscaping and celebrate local creativity.	Medium-term (M)
Develop hiking trails connecting key sites, such as a hiking trail going from the Mike Schout Wetlands Preserve to the downtown area.	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #2:** Encourage the use of natural resources through dedicated activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Ensure clear information is available online and on-site on potential activities authorized	Short-term (S)



in different natural sites, such as boating, kayaking, and fishing.	
Develop walking and cycling tours focused on Wilmot's natural beauty, including the Mike Schout wetlands, river trails, and local parks, integrating local culture and history into the experience.	Medium-term (M)
Install signage with information on natural resources in key sites such as on the Mike Schout Wetlands Preserve boardwalks.	Medium-term (M)
Designate key natural sites, like the river and wetlands, as venues for outdoor cultural programming, such as environmental art exhibitions, educational programs, and nature-based performances.	Long-term (L)

## Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of structural improvements to trails and other natural areas
- Number of visitors
- Number of activities presented in natural spaces
- Qualitative feedback received from residents

## Goal 4. Explore new partnerships and funding models to grow cultural assets in an economically sustainable fashion

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Expand partnerships with private sector stakeholders

Action Steps	Timeframe
Identify resources needed to increase private sector partnerships and consider developing a position dedicated to attracting private	Medium-term (M)

sector investments and developing partnerships for key projects.	
Develop partnerships with private organizations, philanthropists, and cultural foundations to fund new projects, such as the renovation of the old arena or the creation of new cultural trails.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Expand fundraising activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Explore opportunities for funding through government grants for arts, culture, and heritage preservation, with a focus on building sustainable partnerships to support ongoing initiatives.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #3:** Dedicate a percentage of the cost of capital projects and structural repairs to public art presentation

Action Steps	Timeframe
Integrate public art in publicly funded projects (e.g., mural artwork in community centres, banners in new or refurbished playgrounds).	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #4:** Encourage the development of new revenue streams for Castle Kilbride

Action Steps	Timeframe
Consider the benefit of identifying a part-time staff dedicated to fundraising and supporting the development of revenue-generating activities through special programming and partnerships (including maintenance and growth of partnerships with companies such as Guess Where Trips and Ghost Walks, establishment of partnerships with local	Medium-term (M)

businesses such as restaurants, and identification of new potential partners).	
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## Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of meetings with potential private sector partners
- Revenue generated from grants, donations, and private sponsorships
- Number of new public-private partnerships

# Priority 3. Collaborative Community Building

## Outcomes of Achieving Priority 3

- Through direct support from the Township, acting as a leader, network builder, and promoter, cultural enterprises and community organizations can thrive.
- The value of cultural investment and the needs of cultural stakeholders are understood across the different Township departments.
- Township processes minimize permitting barriers, allowing community-led events to flourish.
- Cultural presenters, event organizers, and creatives collaborate directly with the Township, sharing insights and communicating opportunities and needs to assist in decision-making.
- Collaborations between cultural sector stakeholders and private enterprises are fostered.
- Public, private and not-for-profit stakeholders collaborate to develop projects that benefit the Township of Wilmot communities.

## The Challenge (What We Heard)

### A Desire for Increased Coordination

Interviewees frequently expressed a desire for more collaboration and coordination between cultural organizations in Wilmot. Many felt that groups were currently working in silos—despite shared goals and interests—and that this limited the overall impact and visibility of cultural initiatives across the Township. They emphasized the potential for greater collaboration to share resources, cross-promote events, and strengthen community-wide programming.

Stakeholders saw the Township as playing a critical role in facilitating this collaboration. Suggestions included hosting regular networking events or roundtables to bring together cultural organizations, artists, and community groups; creating a centralized communications hub—such as a shared events calendar or newsletter—to increase awareness of what different groups are doing and reduce scheduling conflicts; and providing staff support or a designated liaison to act as a connector between the Township and cultural groups, offering guidance, information, and advocacy.

There was also strong interest in developing more consistent and accessible channels of communication with Township staff. Some interviewees felt that while staff were supportive, it was sometimes unclear who to contact or how to navigate municipal processes. They hoped for a clearer point of contact—ideally someone with a cultural mandate—who could help organizations with permitting, promotion, and accessing municipal resources. This role was seen as key to building trust, improving transparency, and ensuring that community-led cultural efforts receive the support they need to thrive. Ultimately, increased collaboration was viewed

as essential to strengthening Wilmot's cultural ecosystem—enabling more ambitious and inclusive initiatives, fostering a greater sense of shared identity, and positioning the Township as a more vibrant and connected place to live and visit.

## A Need for More Streamlined Permitting Processes

Interviewees recognized the importance of permitting processes in ensuring safety and compliance, but many described them as challenging to navigate, particularly for smaller or volunteer-run cultural groups. Some noted that it can be unclear who to contact, and that requirements for items like food trucks, tents, or road closures are not always communicated consistently. Insurance obligations were also raised as a barrier—especially for low-budget or grassroots events—making it harder for some groups to contribute to the cultural landscape..

While stakeholders understood that recent changes to the permitting system were made to align with insurance and safety regulations, they felt these updates have, on the whole, added complexity without sufficient support. Participants have a strong interest in seeing more clarity and coordination in how permits are administered. Suggestions included introducing a central point of contact within the Township to assist with navigating requirements and ensuring smoother communication across departments.

Ultimately, interviewees hoped for a permitting process that continues to meet regulatory standards but is also more user-friendly, transparent, and responsive to the realities of community-based cultural programming.

## Establishing Dedicated Cultural Leadership

Participants consistently emphasized the need for dedicated staffing at the Township level to support arts and culture. Many noted that, while existing staff are passionate and committed—particularly those connected to Castle Kilbride—there is currently no one with a clear mandate to lead or coordinate cultural initiatives across the Township. This gap was seen as a barrier to strategic planning, partnership development, and consistent support for community-led cultural activities.

Stakeholders expressed that a staff person focused on culture could play a vital role in strengthening communication between the Township and cultural groups, guiding permitting and event logistics, promoting local initiatives, and helping to secure external funding. This role was also seen as key to fostering collaboration between organizations, advancing equity and inclusion, and ensuring that culture is more meaningfully integrated into municipal decision-making.

Overall, there was strong agreement that without dedicated capacity, cultural development in Wilmot will continue to rely heavily on volunteer labour and remain fragmented—limiting its potential to grow and thrive.

## Building Awareness of Culture's Value

Interviewees noted a perceived lack of appreciation for arts and culture within the broader community and among some decision-makers. Several participants shared the view that culture

is often seen as non-essential or secondary compared to other municipal priorities, making it harder to build support for cultural investment. This was especially apparent when advocating for funding, infrastructure, or staff capacity related to cultural initiatives.

Many felt that the value of culture—particularly its role in building community, supporting mental health, attracting tourism, and enhancing quality of life—is not always well understood or communicated. There was a sense that while Wilmot has many cultural assets and passionate individuals, these contributions are sometimes overlooked or under-celebrated.

Stakeholders expressed a desire for stronger advocacy and education around the benefits that arts and culture can bring, not only for artists and cultural groups, but for residents of all ages and backgrounds. They hoped the Township would play a more active role in demonstrating the broader impact of culture and integrating it more visibly into community planning and identity.

## What Work Has Already Been Accomplished?

### Planning Process

The Township's willingness to engage in the Arts and Culture Master Plan process was frequently cited by interviewees as a meaningful and encouraging step. Many viewed the process as a clear signal that the Township is interested in listening to the cultural community, understanding its challenges, and co-developing a shared vision for the future. Participants appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives, and expressed hope that this dialogue would lay the foundation for stronger, ongoing relationships between Township staff and cultural stakeholders. The inclusive nature of the process was interpreted as a shift toward a more collaborative and community-centred approach to cultural development, one that values local knowledge and creativity.

### Existing Collaborations

In addition to the planning process, some interviewees pointed to existing collaborations between the Township and local artists or cultural organizations as early examples of cultural partnership in action. These included Township-supported initiatives at Castle Kilbride, such as exhibitions, performances, or artist-led programming, as well as community events and festivals involving local schools, historical groups, or arts organizations. While modest in scale, these collaborations were seen as important stepping stones that demonstrate the Township's openness to engaging with the creative sector. Participants felt that these initiatives could serve as models for future partnerships, helping to build trust and momentum for broader cultural investment and coordination.

## What We Need to Get Us There

- Goal 1. Streamline the processes and offer support to allow for people to implement cultural initiatives in their own communities

- Goal 2. Facilitate collaborations between cultural stakeholders, providing opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support within cultural spaces and initiatives
- Goal 3. Enhance municipal capacity and processes for the support of culture

## Goal 1. Streamline the processes and offer support to allow for people to implement cultural initiatives in their own communities

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Streamline permitting and approval processes for cultural initiatives and events to encourage more community-led activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collect feedback from event organizers on difficulties encountered when applying for permits.	Short-term (S)
Monitor timelines for processing applications and explore ways to provide quick responses.	Short-term (S)
Explore ways to assist non-profit organizations or community groups in obtaining requested documentation, particularly for events that fulfill the objectives of the Arts and Culture Master Plan.	Medium-term (M)
Create and publish easy-to-read guidelines to help organizations navigate permit applications.	Medium-term (M)
Designate one staff resource with in-depth knowledge of required processes (e.g., special event applications, related permits, road closures, filming, etc.) for the management of special event requests. This staff resource will be available to guide applicants.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Develop informational resources for event organizers

Action Steps	Timeframe
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Develop a cultural toolkit for local artists and event organizers that outlines key steps, resources, and contact information for launching cultural initiatives.	Medium-term (M)
Collect and publish information on available regional, provincial and national grants that might be of interest to event organizers.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #3:** Formalize and deepen collaborations with key event organizers

Action Steps	Timeframe
As recommended in the Community Services Master Plan, meet twice annually with large-event organizers.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #4:** Encourage volunteerism

Action Steps	Timeframe
Encourage volunteerism as a means for new residents to connect and establish a sense of belonging in their community.	Short-term (S)
Create a program designed to attract, train, supervise, evaluate, and recognize volunteers.	Medium-term (M)
Host a volunteer appreciation event.	Medium-term (M)
Create a platform centralizing information on volunteering opportunities in the community.	Medium-term (M)

## Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of resources created
- Qualitative feedback from local community groups
- Speed of application processes review



## Goal 2. Facilitate collaborations between cultural stakeholders, providing opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue, collaboration, and mutual support within cultural spaces and initiatives

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Foster collaborations and local partnerships between cultural sector and tourism stakeholders

Action Steps	Timeframe
Create a dedicated committee with representatives from diverse community sectors (heritage, theatre, visual arts, agricultural tourism, accommodation, restaurants, etc.). The committee will provide insights to guide decision-making.	Medium-term (M)
Work with interested community stakeholders to create a collaborative arts and culture forum or working group, bringing together local artists, community groups, and organizations to brainstorm and coordinate new initiatives.	Medium-term (M)
Convene regular networking events, which could be presented twice annually offering an opportunity for cultural stakeholders to share learnings and discuss potential collaborations.	Medium-term (M)
Invite organizations to deliver presentations on their current initiatives, learnings and challenges to encourage partnerships.	Medium-term (M)
Invite local community organizations and, on occasion, external experts, to deliver presentations on topics of interest (e.g., marketing for cultural events, creative placemaking, special programming, winter programming, etc.) to promote capacity building.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Facilitate collaboration between private, public, and non-profit sectors to strengthen cultural initiatives and resource sharing

Action Steps	Timeframe
Organize gatherings of private sector representatives and local cultural enterprises and organizations to discuss potential partnerships.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #3:** Promote local artists and creatives

Action Steps	Timeframe
Develop a public inventory of local artists (visual artists, musicians, designers, etc.) and artisans.	Medium-term (M)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of meetings
- Number of partnerships formalized as a result of the network building
- Number of presentations

## Goal 3. Enhance municipal capacity and processes for the support of culture

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Establish a governance model to guide the implementation of the Cultural Plan and determine the most effective structure for delivering cultural support within the Township.

Action Steps	Timeframe
Assess the feasibility of utilizing internal Township resources, creating an arm's-length entity, or engaging external partners to serve as designated cultural plan leaders. These leaders would work in collaboration with the Township to coordinate implementation	Short-term (S)

efforts, identify strategic partnerships, monitor progress, and provide sustained support to the cultural sector.	
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**Recommended Action #2:** Build the internal capacity for the delivery of the Arts and Culture Master Plan

Action Steps	Timeframe
Confirm staffing needs for the delivery of the plan.	Medium-term (M)
<p>Create positions required to deliver the Arts and Culture Master Plan or reorganize current staffing.</p> <p>Based on the context analysis, we recommend the creation of positions with the following focuses:</p> <p>Economic Development and Tourism Officer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading the development and delivery of a tourism strategy</li> <li>• Supervising the marketing and promotion of cultural resources</li> <li>• Furthering cultural mapping</li> <li>• Fostering private-public sector partnerships</li> </ul> <p>Arts and Culture Liaison:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operational point of contact for cultural enterprises and organizations</li> <li>• Central resource and liaison for special events management, who helps streamline event approvals, guides applicants, and acts as a liaison across departments</li> <li>• In charge of coordinating networking between local cultural stakeholders</li> </ul>	Medium-term (M)

These positions could be created as part-time roles, which can be expanded to full-time roles as activities increase.	
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**Recommended Action #3:** Align internal stakeholders to ensure support for the delivery of the Arts and Culture Master Plan

Action Steps	Timeframe
Promote the Arts and Culture Master Plan across internal Township departments, raising awareness of the potential social and economic benefits of culture.	Short-term (S)
Improve internal communication between departments to facilitate the smooth planning and execution of cultural events and initiatives.	Short-term (S)
Designate one lead person per department who will be the key contact for the Arts and Culture Liaison.	Short-term (S)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Key roles and responsibilities identified by end of year one
- Reported internal knowledge of the Arts and Culture Master Plan objectives
- Creation of required resources

# Priority 4. Foster Inclusion

## Outcomes of Achieving Priority 2

- Community members feel welcome and free to participate in cultural activities.
- Cultural offerings reflect the unique experiences of diverse groups.
- Diverse perspectives and identities are welcomed and celebrated.
- Activities are physically, socially, and economically accessible.
- Offerings address the needs of residents of various backgrounds, ages, and places of residence.
- Community members can access programming that corresponds to their creative desires.

## The Challenge (What We Heard)

### Expanding Representation in Cultural Programming

Interviewees expressed concern that current cultural offerings in Wilmot do not fully reflect the diversity of the Township's population. Several participants noted that programming tends to centre on Eurocentric or settler heritage, with a strong emphasis on local history and long-standing traditions. While these aspects are valued, stakeholders felt they can sometimes overshadow or exclude the voices, stories, and creative contributions of newcomers, Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, and other underrepresented groups.

Some interviewees pointed out that while the community is becoming increasingly diverse, this shift has not yet been fully reflected in cultural programming, public art, or community events. As a result, members of equity-deserving communities may feel less visible or welcome in local cultural spaces. Others observed that barriers such as cost, language, accessibility, and limited outreach can prevent broader participation and representation.

There was strong interest in seeing cultural initiatives that are more inclusive, reflective of multiple identities and lived experiences, and intentionally co-created with diverse community members. Participants emphasized that for culture in Wilmot to truly thrive, it must be rooted in values of equity, representation, and belonging.

### Decentralizing Cultural Access Across the Township

Interviewees also noted that many cultural offerings in Wilmot are geographically concentrated, with a particular focus on New Hamburg and, to a lesser extent, Baden. While New Hamburg serves as a cultural hub with established venues and events, participants expressed concern that this concentration can lead to uneven access to cultural opportunities across the Township.

Residents in smaller or more rural communities may have fewer opportunities to engage with arts and cultural programming close to home.

This imbalance was seen as a barrier to broader participation and as reinforcing the perception that culture is centralized rather than community-wide. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of distributing programming more equitably, including hosting events in a variety of locations, supporting grassroots initiatives in rural areas, and investing in infrastructure or spaces outside the urban core. Doing so, they suggested, would not only increase access, but also affirm the cultural identities and contributions of all Wilmot communities.

## Broadening the Role of Community Centres in Cultural Life

Interviewees expressed concern that community centres in Wilmot are primarily oriented toward sports and recreation, with limited space, programming, or resources dedicated to arts and culture. While they acknowledged the importance of sports in community life, many felt that this focus leaves little room for cultural activities such as theatre, visual arts, dance or music. As a result, residents seeking cultural experiences—whether as participants or audience members—often have to travel outside the Township to access them.

This lack of locally available cultural programming was seen as a missed opportunity to build stronger community connections, support creative development, and retain local talent. Stakeholders emphasized that community centres could play a more dynamic role by incorporating flexible, multi-use spaces that serve both cultural and recreational needs. Doing so would not only improve access to the arts, but also help integrate culture more deeply into daily life across Wilmot's neighbourhoods.

## What Work Has Already Been Accomplished?

### Increasing Support for Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ Community

In recent years, the Township of Wilmot has taken important steps to support the 2SLGBTQ+ community, demonstrating a commitment to fostering a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all residents. Notably, Township staff participate in **Rainbow Diversity Training** through Spectrum, an organization dedicated to helping workplaces become more open, equitable, and accessible to individuals of all sexual and gender identities. This training equips staff with the knowledge and tools needed to better serve and engage with 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, both within the organization and in the broader community. In addition, in a symbolic effort to support the community, Wilmot flies the progress flag at the Township Administration Complex community flagpole for the duration of the month of June, to celebrate Pride Month. Rainbow Pride stickers are also displayed on all Township facility doors.

### Black History Month Acknowledgement

In 2024, the Township of Wilmot encouraged community members to take part in Black History Month events and learn more about Black History. A list of resources and events was shared through the Township website.

## What We Need to Get Us There

- Goal 1. Support initiatives that amplify equity-deserving voices
- Goal 2. Enable all residents to have access to cultural offerings
- Goal 3. Encourage the development of cultural offerings that reflect diverse communities' desires and needs

### Goal 1. Support initiatives that amplify equity-deserving voices

#### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Community members from equity-deserving groups are consulted and can influence decision-making

Action Steps	Timeframe
Continually consult with equity-deserving communities to identify needs and develop solutions that ensure wider access to culture.	Medium-term (M)
Ensure the representation of diverse perspectives in groups such as the Heritage Committee that provide guidance on arts, culture, and heritage initiatives.	Medium-term (M)
Develop advisory committees or working groups representing diverse needs.	Medium-term (M)
Ensure diverse communities are consulted when commissioning or acquiring public art.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Showcase the work of organizations supporting equity-deserving groups

Action Steps	Timeframe
Share information through the Township of Wilmot on available resources for equity-deserving groups, and community organizations based in the Region of Waterloo that serve equity-deserving groups. These include, for instance, Wilmot Family Resource Centre, LGBTQIA+-focused	Short-term (S)

<p>organizations (e.g., Spectrum<sup>5</sup>, Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition<sup>6</sup>, OK2BME<sup>7</sup>, Gender Variant Working Group<sup>8</sup>, PFLAG: Waterloo Wellington Perth, tri-Pride<sup>9</sup>, Rainbow Reels Queer and Trans Film Festival), Indigenous Resources (e.g., Indigenous Community Resources White Owl<sup>10</sup>, Healing of Seven Generations<sup>11</sup>), and organizations supporting racialized and multicultural groups (e.g., Kitchener-Waterloo Multi-Cultural Centre<sup>12</sup>, Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region<sup>13</sup>, The African Canadian Association of Waterloo Region<sup>14</sup>, Bring on the Sunshine<sup>15</sup>).</p>	
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## Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of engagement opportunities
- Representation of diverse perspectives on advisory committees
- Successful creation of a resource list
- Qualitative feedback received from community members

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<sup>5</sup> Spectrum, <https://ourspectrum.com/>

<sup>6</sup> Waterloo Region Rainbow Coalition, <https://yourwrrc.ca/>

<sup>7</sup> OK2BME, <https://ok2bme.ca/>

<sup>8</sup> Gender Variant Working Group, <https://wwgendervariant.wixsite.com/gvwg/about>

<sup>9</sup> tri-Pride, <https://tri-pride.ca/>

<sup>10</sup> Indigenous Community Resources White Owl, <https://wonaa.ca>

<sup>11</sup> Healing of Seven Generations, <https://healingofthesevengenerations.ca>

<sup>12</sup> Kitchener-Waterloo Multi-Cultural Centre, <https://kwmulticultural.ca/>

<sup>13</sup> Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region, <https://www.ccawr.ca/>

<sup>14</sup> The African Canadian Association of Waterloo Region, <https://africancanadianassociation.com/>

<sup>15</sup> Bring On the Sunshine, [www.bringonthesunshine.ca](http://www.bringonthesunshine.ca)



## Goal 2. Enable all residents to have access to cultural offerings

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Collect feedback from diverse stakeholders to assist in decision-making

Action Steps	Timeframe
Engage representatives from diverse communities—including older adults, youth, equity-deserving groups, and newcomers—to better understand barriers to accessing cultural spaces and participating in programming. Use these insights to identify potential improvements and collaborate with external partners to implement and share solutions.	Medium-term (M)
Develop a process to collect data on community participation in cultural activities, barriers to participation, and desires	Medium-term (M)
Collect information yearly to assist in decision-making, ensuring the participation of groups of diverse ages, origins, residence areas, etc.  <i>This process can be developed in conjunction with the collection of data recommended in the Community Services Master Plan.</i>	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Decentralize cultural activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Expand the presentation of cultural activities beyond Castle Kilbride.	Medium-term (M)
Support the development of activities beyond New Hamburg and Baden.	Medium-term (M)
Work with community groups to develop	Long-term (L)

community plans for their settlements	
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**Recommended Action #3:** Encourage the development of year-round programming

Action Steps	Timeframe
Present winter activities in community centres and at Castle Kilbride.	Medium-term (M)
Support community groups in the development of winter programming.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #4:** Encourage the development of accessible and inclusive events and venues

Action Steps	Timeframe
Encourage presentations on accessibility and inclusion best practices as part of the regular cultural sector networking events.	Short-term (S)
Share resources on accessibility and inclusion best practices through the Township's website.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #5:** Explore opportunities to enhance public transportation and alternative modes of transportation

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with the Region of Waterloo to enhance public transportation.	Long-term (L)

## Potential Performance Metrics

- Successful creation of a data collection process
- Number of community members polled
- Number of community feedback collected from each targeted group
- Number of new activities presented in the off-season
- Number of activities presented per settlement

### Goal 3. Encourage the development of cultural offerings that reflect diverse communities' desires and needs

#### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Increase the presentation of diverse cultures and communities in Township-led activities

Action Steps	Timeframe
Acknowledge and celebrate a variety of religious and cultural holidays.	Short-term (S)
Ensure diverse experiences are represented as part of Canada Day celebrations.	Short-term (S)
Develop cultural programs for Pride and other events showcasing equity-deserving groups.	Medium-term (M)
Explore the opportunity of developing events for various festivals and holidays at Castle Kilbride.	Medium-term (M)
Collaborate with community groups to develop festivals celebrating varied cultures (e.g., Diwali events).	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #2:** Increase opportunities for children and youth to engage with culture

Action Steps	Timeframe
Increase the number of arts and crafts activities offered in community centres.	Short-term (S)
Collaborate with Region of Waterloo library branches and local community organizers to present more arts and crafts activities.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #3:** Support events developed by diverse community groups

Action Steps	Timeframe
Continue supporting community organizations through the Community Grants Program	Short-term (S)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Inclusion of diverse perspectives in Township-led events
- Number of arts and crafts activities presented in community centres
- Community members' qualitative feedback

# Priority 5. Indigenous Recognition and Reconciliation

## Outcomes of Achieving Priority 5

- Indigenous culture, traditions, and heritage are widely recognized, honoured, and visibly reflected.
- Relationships between the Township and Indigenous communities are deepened and strengthened.
- Non-Indigenous residents possess a strong awareness of the harmful effects of colonialism and take meaningful, informed steps toward reconciliation.
- Engagement with Indigenous peoples is carried out in ways that honour and reflect their traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

## The Challenge (What We Heard)

### Advancing Indigenous Representation and Inclusion

Interviewees emphasized a strong need for increased Indigenous representation in Wilmot's cultural landscape, programming, and decision-making processes. Many felt that Indigenous voices, histories, and perspectives are largely absent or underrepresented in the Township's public spaces, events, and cultural narratives. This was seen as a significant gap, especially given the broader calls for reconciliation across Canada.

Participants expressed a desire to see more visible and meaningful inclusion of Indigenous culture, such as through public art, land acknowledgements with deeper educational context, and the celebration of Indigenous-led events and ceremonies. They also advocated for the Township to build stronger, ongoing relationships with local First Nations and Indigenous communities, not just through consultation, but through collaborative partnerships that support Indigenous leadership and co-creation.

There was also recognition that Indigenous representation should not be limited to symbolic gestures, but must be rooted in respectful engagement, education, and a commitment to decolonizing practices. Interviewees saw this as essential not only to cultural inclusion, but also to building a more honest, reflective, and forward-thinking community.

# What Work Has Already Been Accomplished?

## Reconciliation Action Partnership

Along with the Region and other area municipalities, the Township of Wilmot participates in the Reconciliation Action Partnership (RAP), which works closely with Indigenous communities to advance reconciliation. Five subcommittees have been formed to lead work in five specific areas of focus:

- Learning and Development – Current Focus: Prioritize area municipal coordination to establish consistent knowledge and skills and streamlined program administration.
- Honorariums – Current Focus: Best practice scan of other public sector organizations related to practices around honoraria and compensation for Indigenous Peoples.
- Placekeeping and Land Opportunities – Current Focus: Exploring opportunities related to land as integral to ceremony, learning, healing and placemaking.
- Communications and Events – Current Focus: Develop a coordinated communications strategy and list of Indigenous Days of Significance to support.
- Heritage and Cultural Landscapes – Current Focus: To determine a process for renaming of public spaces including roads and facilities.

## Steps Towards Healing and Reconciliation

The Township of Wilmot website highlights the following recent steps taken towards healing and reconciliation:

- In 2021, Wilmot Council passed a motion to fly the "Every Child Matters" flag at the Wilmot Administration Complex for the month of September.
- All Wilmot staff are encouraged to participate in educational opportunities to learn and better understand the impacts of the Residential School System on members of the Indigenous Community and Survivors.
- The Township is working with area municipalities to remove barriers to access of public spaces for Indigenous communities.
- Resources were made available to Township staff to provide education on the legacy impacts of the Residential School System, and the overall history of Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- In August 2022, Wilmot Council endorsed a staff recommendation authorizing a funding allocation of \$2,000 towards an event honouring the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Township of Wilmot website, "Equity, Inclusion, Diversity and Belonging", [https://www.wilmot.ca/en/living-here/eidb.aspx?\\_mid\\_=128909#Awareness-and-Education](https://www.wilmot.ca/en/living-here/eidb.aspx?_mid_=128909#Awareness-and-Education)

The Walk to Honour the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, now in its second year, was especially mentioned by participants in the engagement process as a meaningful initiative that has received positive community feedback.

## Public Engagement Regarding the Prime Ministers Path

Additionally, some interviewees referenced the engagement on the Prime Minister's Path project, noting that its reconsideration—particularly through consultation with Indigenous advisory groups—was a necessary and important response to past concerns raised about its colonial framing. These consultations were perceived as a step toward accountability and dialogue, even though the issue remains complex and polarizing.

## What We Need to Get Us There

- Goal 1. Build long-term, trust-based relationships with Indigenous leaders, organizations, and community members to ensure their perspectives are represented in cultural planning and development
- Goal 2. Collaborate with local Indigenous groups to showcase cultural programs, initiatives, and events that reflect Indigenous values and traditions, ensuring that they have agency in how their culture is presented
- Goal 3. Incorporate Indigenous art, music, dance, and storytelling into public events, festivals, and cultural programming throughout Wilmot, ensuring that Indigenous culture is celebrated alongside other community traditions

**Goal 1. Build long-term, trust-based relationships with Indigenous leaders, organizations, and community members to ensure their perspectives are represented in cultural planning and development**

### Recommended Actions

Recommended Action #1	Timeframe
Continue to engage local communities through the Reconciliation Action Partnership (RAP) to understand barriers to cultural development and identify areas for improvement	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #2:** Ensure large-scale cultural development initiatives include engagement with Indigenous stakeholders

Action Steps	Timeframe
Integrate Indigenous stakeholder engagement from the planning processes for capital projects with a cultural focus and for the installation of large-scale public art projects.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #3:** Establish best practices for engaging with Indigenous stakeholders

Action Steps	Timeframe
Organize training for Township staff on Indigenous protocols and best practices for engagement	Short-term (S)
Honour Indigenous protocols when engaging with Indigenous individuals or communities, recognizing that each community has its own distinct traditions, perspectives, and worldviews.	Short-term (S)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of staff completing training
- Number of consultation sessions

**Goal 2.** Collaborate with local Indigenous groups to showcase cultural programs, initiatives, and events that reflect Indigenous values and traditions, ensuring that they have agency in how their culture is presented

### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Amplify the visibility of Indigenous creatives, organizations, and businesses

Action Plan	Timeframe
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Actively promote Indigenous-led events, programs, initiatives, and organizations to highlight their contributions and foster broader community engagement.	Short-term (S)
Create and maintain a directory of Indigenous organizations, businesses, and creatives to increase awareness and support collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.	Medium-term (M)

**Recommended Action #2:** Deepen public education on Indigenous culture and history

Action Steps	Timeframe
In collaboration with the Region of Waterloo library branches, provide accessible resources that share Indigenous history, culture, and contributions with the public.	Short-term (S)
Incorporate and share Indigenous history and cultural knowledge at all public meetings, events, and programs.	Short-term (S)
Organize presentations and workshops centered on Indigenous culture, history and traditions in community centres and public events.	Medium-term (M)
Offer training sessions and workshops on Indigenous protocols, traditions, and historical context, especially as part of the cultural stakeholder networking events.	Long-term (L)

**Potential Performance Metrics**

- Number of resources created
- Number of events presented

Goal 3. Incorporate Indigenous art, music, dance, and storytelling into public events, festivals, and cultural programming throughout Wilmot, ensuring that Indigenous culture is celebrated alongside other community traditions

#### Recommended Actions

**Recommended Action #1:** Acknowledge and observe key Indigenous dates of recognition

Action Steps	Timeframe
Collaborate with Indigenous community partners to present events and share resources on occasions such as National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and Two-Spirit People (MMIWG2S+), National Indigenous History Month, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, and Louis Riel Day.	Short-term (S)

**Recommended Action #2:** Support the identification, recognition, and celebration of Indigenous places, histories, and stories.

Action Steps	Timeframe
Work with Indigenous partners to research local Indigenous histories and identify key sites of importance	Medium-term (M)
Create resources, such as self-directed walking tours, presenting local Indigenous histories.	Medium-term (M)
Include information on the local Indigenous history in public spaces, through the inclusion of Indigenous place names and heritage plaques	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #3:** Showcase Indigenous perspectives in public spaces

Action Steps	Timeframe
Showcase Indigenous perspectives in public spaces through public artwork	Long-term (L)

**Recommended Action #4:** Partner with Indigenous stakeholders to foster land stewardship and conservation

Action Steps	Timeframe
Organize events, such as medicinal walks presenting Indigenous teachings, to deepen resident and visitor relationships to Wilmot's natural assets and their understanding of their responsibilities as Treaty People	Medium-term (M)
Integrate educational content in natural sites, such as the Mike Schout Wetlands Preserve, through dedicated signage	Long-term (L)

### Potential Performance Metrics

- Number of resources created
- Number of events presented