



STAFF REPORT
Economic Development

Title: Lease Agreement for St. Columba Arts Space
Report Number: CAO2025-020
Author: Lakyn Barton and Astero Kalogeropoulos
Council Date: June 16, 2025
File: 250031
Attachments: N/A
Ward No.: Ward 5

Recommendations:

- 1) That Council approve report CAO2025-020.
- 2) That Council approve the lease agreement with ArtsBuild Ontario for the operation of the St. Columba arts space (250 Lincoln Road) for a term up to 3 years.
- 3) That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to sign the Lease Agreement between the Corporation of the City of Waterloo and ArtsBuild Ontario and any other necessary documents, subject to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor.

A. Executive Summary

In February 2025, Council approved via report CAO2025-008 the acquisition of the land and facility at 250 Lincoln Road as part of a broader redevelopment project. Council also authorized the temporary use of the existing facility (St. Columba) as a City programming space, specifically supporting arts organizations for a period of up to three years.

The short-term plan (1-3 years) is for the existing facility to be used as a programming space for community arts organizations. Mid to longer term (3+ years) the site is envisioned for redevelopment including affordable housing. The current building is expected to be demolished and replaced with up to 25 stacked townhouse units. As part of future planning, Council may also consider a mixed-use development option that would retain space for public programming on site.

Staff recommend that a lease agreement be entered into with ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO) to activate the St. Columba site as an arts hub for a term of up to 3 years. The City

currently has a lease with ABO for the operation of Wing 404 as part of the Meanwhile Space Pilot Program. Adopting a similar operating approach for St. Columba will facilitate a significant expansion of arts space in Waterloo. The space will be leased to ABO for no charge, under the same terms as the Wing 404 lease.

B. Financial Implications

On February 24, 2025, Council approved report CAO2025-008, which provide \$2,900,000 in funding for the 250 Lincoln Road project. This project funding covers property acquisition, required capital improvements, legal and closing cost, future demolition and annual ongoing operating funding required to operate the facility.

Under the terms of the lease agreement with ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO), ABO would be responsible for the day-to-day management of the space at no cost to the City. The City would retain responsibility for general facility maintenance, to be funded from the annual facility maintenance budget allocation.

C. Technology Implications

N/A

D. Link to Strategic Plan

(Strategic Priorities: Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity and Inclusion; Environmental Sustainability and Climate Action; Complete Community; Infrastructure and Transportation Systems; Innovation and Future-Ready)

(Guiding Principles: Equity and Inclusion; Sustainability; Integrity; Workplace Wellbeing; Community-centred; Operational Excellence)

Strengthening the resilience of arts sector organizations and encouraging business innovation and the development of new initiatives supports the Strategic Plan priorities of supporting a diversified economy and innovation ecosystem.

E. Previous Reports on this Topic

- CAO2025-008 Property Acquisition – 250 Lincoln Road



**Lease Agreement for St. Columba Arts Space
CAO2025-020**

BACKGROUND:

The City continues to experience significant pressure from the local arts community for space that supports creation, presentation, rehearsal, and collaboration. Earlier this year, the City collaborated with Canadian Heritage – Canada Cultural Spaces Fund (CCSF) and ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO) to deliver a new pilot project called Meanwhile Spaces. The program, launched to temporarily activate underutilized properties, has been well received by the arts sector and has demonstrated the scale of demand for affordable arts space. In the first intake, completed in February 2025, the program received 71 applications with 31 of these being specifically for the Wing 404 space provided by the City.

This high demand for space, particularly from artists and arts organizations who have experienced systemic barriers to accessing space—including those from equity-denied and marginalized communities—aligns with findings from recent sector studies. The "Uncovering Barriers: Identifying Gaps in Opportunities and Resources Causing Barriers for Visual Artists in Waterloo Region" report identified a shortage of affordable and appropriate spaces as a key barrier to participation and sustainability in the arts sector. Similarly, the Environics Culture Research Study cited "access to physical spaces (or lack thereof) where artists and audiences could produce or enjoy arts and culture activities" as one of the primary barriers across the Region.

These findings reinforce the need for longer-term, purpose-built spaces that can meet the evolving and diverse needs of our growing arts community — needs that cannot be fully addressed through short-term or makeshift models alone. While the St. Columba site is not a purpose-built arts facility and would serve as a temporary solution, it represents a crucial interim step in addressing the sector's immediate space shortages over the next few years.

Until a more permanent, purpose-designed cultural infrastructure can be realized, the newly acquired St. Columba site offers a rare and timely opportunity to stabilize and support local artists and organizations, enabling creation, collaboration, and public engagement. Its activation would help mitigate current pressures while laying the groundwork for a more robust, long-term strategy for creative space development in the City. As a result, staff recommend entering a limited-term lease (up to 3 years) agreement with ArtsBuild Ontario, to operate the St. Columba site as a temporary arts hub.

PROPOSED TERMS OF LEASE:

As operator of the St. Columba site at 250 Lincoln Road, ABO would maximize existing infrastructure to support for multipurpose arts use, including:

- Studio and rehearsal space
- Shared amenities for small arts organizations
- Performance, exhibition, or community gathering areas
- Longer-term (up to 3 years) tenancies to address instability for arts groups

Like the Wing 404 model, ABO would be responsible for the day-to-day management of the space at no cost to the City. The City would retain responsibility for general facility maintenance, to be funded from the annual budget allocation approved for facility maintenance. Staff recommend supporting and enabling this potential partnership, including assisting with due diligence, convening community input, and facilitating interdepartmental collaboration where required.

ABOUT ARTSBUILD ONTARIO:

ArtsBuild Ontario (ABO) is a provincial arts service organization that has been supporting the sector for over 20 years. Based out of Waterloo Region, it provides small and medium-sized organizations with tools, training, and advice to successfully manage physical and digital creative spaces.

ABO has extensive experience in the development and management of arts facilities, including their work with the Gaukel Arts Block and other shared-use cultural hubs. They bring proven expertise in building partnerships, accessing capital funding, and developing sustainable, community-oriented models for arts space management.

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