

Deputation to Norfolk County Budget Meeting

Tuesday, January 13, 2026

MAYOR MARTIN, MEMBERS OF COUNCIL, AND STAFF

Subject

Establishing a Path Forward for Lynnwood Arts Center

Summary

On January 6, 2021, the Lynnwood Arts Board entered into a five-year lease agreement to re-establish Lynnwood Arts at its historical location. Since its reopening in 2022, Lynnwood Arts has grown into a vibrant cultural hub in Norfolk County. We have implemented responsible financial management, secured consistent corporate sponsorship and grant funding, and established successful community partnerships, including the Indigenous Arts program with the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, the Creative Expressions program with the Alzheimer's Society, and the Norfolk Studio Tour. With increasing attendance, 7,500 visitors annually, and numerous exhibitions, Lynnwood Arts exemplifies a strong partnership between Norfolk County and a non-profit organization. However, the county has identified significant capital improvements to be completed by 2027, totalling approximately \$1.26 million. This poses a significant financial challenge for Lynnwood, given our responsibility for 60% of these costs. We are skeptical regarding our ability to raise these funds by 2027 in today's competitive fundraising environment. In addition, discussions regarding the extension of our current lease have made it clear that the current assistance provided by Norfolk County to Lynnwood (Utilities - \$9,100, Maintenance - \$37,400, Operating Grant - \$30,000, declining by \$10,000 annually) will expire by December 31, 2028, greatly increasing our annual operating expenses.

Given the challenges we face with immediate capital fundraising needs and pending increases in operating expenses, the Lynnwood Arts Board has been exploring two options to ensure the long-term viability of Lynnwood Arts Center. Fundamentally, we believe that a thriving Arts center provides great value to the community and to tourism and serves as a component of Simcoe's downtown revitalization. We are seeking support and input from Norfolk County Council on each option to ensure we have all the required information to make an informed decision.

Option 1 – Relocation of Lynnwood Arts Center to the Eva Brook Donly Building

Representatives from the Lynnwood Arts Board have collaborated with Norfolk County staff to evaluate a potential relocation of Lynnwood Arts into the former Eva Brook Donly home, sharing exhibit, storage, and common spaces with the Norfolk County Archives under a subsidized lease agreement.

The plan offers benefits to Norfolk County, including full utilization of Eva Brook Donly building in line with its original purpose, cost-sharing, potential new uses or sale of Lynnwood's current property, enhanced cultural collaboration, and increased visitor traffic. For Lynnwood Arts, the move would likely reduce operating and capital costs, improve visibility and accessibility, and support expanded programming and exhibitions across Norfolk County.

Norfolk County staff are supportive of this option but have asked us to present it to Norfolk County Council before proceeding with the specifics of leasing, rental rates, finalization of how common areas will be shared, and the final commitment to required capital improvements.

Option 2 – Lynnwood Arts Purchasing 21 Lynnwood Avenue and Self-Managing

Lynnwood Arts has been at its current location since 1974. The building is one of just two National Historic sites in Norfolk County and has special significance to our operations and to the community at large. The concept of this option is that Lynnwood would purchase the building at a nominal price, and that Norfolk County would consider providing some ongoing operational support in recognition of the access we could provide from downtown to the river parkland through the property, and as a supporter of the Arts in our community.

This option offers benefits to Norfolk County by removing a costly building from its portfolio without the political risks of a historic building sitting empty or falling into an unacceptable use. It removes all future obligations to the property for necessary capital improvements and operating expenses beyond what we might agree to, and it maintains goodwill with the community while ensuring an appropriate usage of a beautiful national historic building.

The benefits for Lynnwood Arts Center start with allowing us to stay in our current location, which is a larger, more impressive space than the Archive building. It guarantees that we can continue to operate all our current programming and exhibitions and provides the space to continue to grow. Many of our donors associate the art center with the Lynnwood building, so remaining there would not impact our existing fundraising. Our preliminary capital plan suggests opportunities to spread out the required improvements and reduce costs, making the capital requirements less onerous for Lynnwood.

Our current lease agreement provides Lynnwood with a first right of refusal to acquire the building for \$288,000, but we believe there are sufficient advantages to the County that you could consider selling the building for \$1. In addition, we hope you recognize the value of providing annual operating support in recognition of our contributions to the Norfolk community, our ongoing provision of river parkland access, and the elimination of a building from the County portfolio.

We believe either of these options presents opportunities for Lynnwood and the county, and we request your approval to engage County staff to complete our analysis and determine the best path forward for our partnership.

Thank you for your support.