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CAPITALIZING ON CULTURE

How can public policy support arts and culture for the public good?

by Jeremy Morgan, Greg Baeker, Peter Stoicheff, Peter MacKinnon, Randy Burton and Brenda Baker

* Remarks in this Briefing Note were presented as part of a public forum in Saskatoon, SK, on September 14, 2006.

Introduction

*by Jeremy Morgan, Executive Director
Saskatchewan Arts Board*

Randy Burton asks us to consider the “last time you heard a corporate recruiter or a university president promote Saskatoon as a good place to live because there is plenty of trade show space”. A great point, but it is also fair to ask when was the last time we presented Saskatoon as a good place to live and work because of its vibrant culture and its rich sense of place.

“Capitalizing on Culture”, organized by SIPP’s Associate Director Professor Rose Olfert as part of a broader agenda regarding culture and public policy, brought together two powerful issues: the development of our cities and the nature of culture as a public good. Featuring interesting perspectives and ideas from both the presenters and a large and diverse audience, the Forum pointed to innovative challenges for Saskatchewan cities.

The session was artfully and playfully named, referring both to the City of Saskatoon’s 2006 Cultural Capitals designation and to opportunities for wealth creation in Saskatoon through cultural engagement and development. The basis for these discussions is the idea of the creative city, an evolving concept arising from the work of such thinkers as economist Richard

Florida and former Winnipeg mayor and urban strategist Glenn Murray.

The participants’ remarks highlight and sometimes conflate a number of ideas and activities in an exploration which is new, interesting and overdue. We encounter the ideas of: urban planning with a cultural lens; the centrality of culture in urban wealth creation; and, basic questions of authentic urban identity. Participants prompt us to consider the role of the university, the arts and public investment and the role of the artist and, by implication, other creative workers. Who owns our culture and our community’s creative identities? What makes the city flourish and how can creative workers make their contributions to this debate while still focusing on their own work? What artist wants to be fixed forever in one phase or another of Brenda Baker’s fearful artists’ taxonomy?

In the creative age, it is argued, the future of our cities is the future of the country. This issue had been taking its place on the national agenda; witness the Harcourt Committee and the prominence given to the four pillars of sustainability idea: economics, environment, social services and culture. At present, however, the federal government’s interest is unclear, and perhaps we should assume that the challenge of developing competitive, sustainable cities will fall to the cities themselves, supported by

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provincial governments and energized by the initiatives of citizens' groups and associations. The election of Stéphane Dion as leader of the federal Liberal Party and the showing of Green Party leader Elizabeth May in the recent by-election suggest that the issue of sustainable development is still a hot item, but it is not clear what substance or leverage it has at the moment.

So how do we go about this? President MacKinnon asks who is responsible for developing an agenda to maximize the creative potential of our communities, in part by maximizing wealth creation. In his emphasis on the importance of cultural planning he implies that city government has a very direct role but that all citizens must be engaged in the project. His stress on the 'transformational' impact of cultural resources in a community points to the holistic approach we must take. Is it desirable or possible to develop a provincial consensus that infuses all sectors of our society such as Aboriginal affairs, health, economic development, science, education and culture, for example? We have much to build on, but from a competitive perspective, e.g. addressing opportunities posed by our demographics, attracting new faculty at our universities, do we need to be more focused?

In Saskatchewan we will want to consider how to apply this to smaller cities outside of Saskatoon and Regina as well. Given that every community has creative potential, cultural tourism as an economic tool for example, what cultural initiatives are needed to make a difference in its quality of life? Where are the three Ts - technology, talent and tolerance - which accompany the traditional urban preoccupations of "police, pipes and potholes"?

As Dr. Peter Stoicheff emphasizes in his article, since its inception the University of Saskatchewan has been a pioneer in the knowledge economy. In addressing the global shift to a creative economy, what place is better positioned than the University to develop ideas and research partnerships through strategies such as the Saskatoon Round Table and the work in cultural planning and wealth creation embodied in the Creative Communities (formerly named Building Cultural Bridges)? It has the flexibility, expertise, authority and, perhaps most importantly, a revitalized intention to work with the broad community to help shape the transformation already within our reach.

This is new ground requiring new ideas, new language and new strategies. It will require new ways of getting things done, what Dr. Greg Baeker calls new shared governance

systems or models which cannot remain static in conception or ownership. None of these are alien to Saskatchewan's way of thinking, of carrying out public policy and developing our society. As a community which rightly prides itself on adaptability, collaboration and inventiveness, Saskatchewan could lead the country in accepting the complex challenges of the creative economy. 

BIO

Jeremy Morgan is the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Arts Board which is a founding partner of the Saskatoon Round Table for Culture and Creativity, a partner in the Forum. The Round Table is guiding the Creative Connections project, a major element in the Cultural Capitals program. Mr. Morgan is a former Executive Director of Wanuskewin Heritage Park and has served in elected capacities at the municipal government level.

Keynote Presentation

*by Dr. Greg Baeker, Senior Consultant
AuthentiCity,*

Recent years have seen a heightened profile for 'culture' in planning and public policy and a growing appreciation of its role in building prosperous and sustainable communities. What is driving this development and what can we do to capitalize on the opportunity it presents?

1. Why Culture, Why Now?

Culture and creativity have moved from the margins to the centre of thinking about the future of Canadian cities and communities. While many factors can be cited, a major driver is economic restructuring and the need for new strategies to drive local wealth creation and economic development.

The economic revolution now underway is as transformational as the agricultural and industrial revolutions that preceded it. The first wave of the new economy was the information revolution that saw the introduction of personal computing, mass communication and the Internet. The second phase is the emergence of creative economies rooted in culture and design.

Wealth creation is now driven less by the exploitation of resources of the land or the efficiency of manufacturing processes and more from the exploitation of our imagination and intellect. Innovation is the driver of the new economy. Success in attracting and retaining a global and mobile class of creative workers and entrepreneurs is now a critical factor in determining which cities flourish while others languish. One of the central paradoxes of our global age is that place matters - it has become more, not less, important. And culture is a key determinant of place.

Authentic urban environments bubbling with lively cultural and entertainment options are magnets that attract and retain creative people. This creative workforce in turn generates wealth in an expanding knowledge economy.

These conclusions flip traditional thinking about developing local economies on its head. The old orthodoxy was that attracting new business and investment was the magnet that attracted and retained people in a community. In fact the reverse is true. If we build communities where people want to live and work, business and investment follow people.

2. Reframing Policy Debates

There is an old joke about someone stopping a stranger on a street and asking for directions. After several unsuccessful attempts to explain how to get there the stranger says “you know you actually can’t get there from here”. In Canada we “can’t get there from here” in bringing culture into the mainstream of public policy and planning without a fundamentally new set of ideas and assumptions.

The reconceptualizing needed in culture today is akin to the wholesale shifts in other policy fields: in health policy from treating sickness and institutionalized health care to health promotion and wellness as key policy goals; in education from a focus on formal educational systems (schools and universities) to lifelong learning; and in environmental policy from ‘end of pipe cleanup’ to promoting sustainable patterns of development.

One of the most serious barriers to the larger, more holistic policy vision needed in culture is the false equation of “the arts” and “culture”. The roots of this confusion are deep and the conceptual quagmire is not restricted to Canada. While the arts are one critically important dimension of culture they cannot and should not be confused with the larger phenomenon.

In this regard, one of the most unfortunate developments in

cultural policy in recent decades is the emergence of the phrase “the arts and culture”. To speak of “the arts and culture” is to speak of “cardiology and medicine” or “baseball and sport”. Confusing the part with the whole paradoxically ensures the marginalization of both. We need a larger vision of culture to guide us.

3. Cultural Planning as a Way Forward

Cultural planning provides an integrated set of ideas and tools or methodologies to move forward.

Cultural planning emerged first in Australia out of frustration on the part of local government with the cultural policy frameworks inherited from senior levels of government. These policies tended to focus on the needs of individual disciplines – museums, libraries, theatre, dance, film and video, etc. These policy and planning ‘silos’ were a poor fit with local needs and perspectives. They discouraged the more horizontal, collaborative and bottom-up approaches needed to build sustainable local cultural strategies.

Cultural planning begins by changing the vocabulary. In the place of “the arts and culture” or “the arts and heritage” it speaks of cultural resources. The phrase itself is significant – and deliberate. Culture is an unapologetic resource for city building in all its dimensions – social, economic, and civic. Little “arts-for-arts-sake” here.

One of the most unfortunate developments in cultural policy in recent decades is the emergence of the phrase “the arts and culture”. To speak of “the arts and culture” is to speak of “cardiology and medicine” or “baseball and sport”. Confusing the part with the whole paradoxically ensures the marginalization of both.

Cultural planning is a form of asset based community development that begins by mapping these cultural assets or resources. Cultural resources are defined in a way that broadens and democratizes the definition of local culture.

They of course include those more traditionally defined – and critically important – activities in the arts, heritage, libraries and for-profit or commercial cultural industries. But they go further to include the built environment and cultural landscapes; local traditions; dialects, festivals and local customs; the diversity and quantity of leisure opportunities; the cultural activities of youth, ethno-racial and other

communities of interest; and local products and skills in crafts, design, new media, manufacturing, etc. Broadly speaking, all of those things that together define the unique identity and sense of place of that community.

The cultural resources of a community also include the more subjective and intangible matter of community identity and sense of place. Here the process involves engaging the community in reflecting on the iconic symbols, values, qualities of place and stories that define their community for them.

Once mapping is complete, cultural planning is about building bridges between these resources and larger economic and community-building agendas.

Another defining feature of cultural planning is new shared governance systems or models. The research is clear. Those communities that are successful in innovating and driving economic and community renewal are those that establish mechanisms to support ongoing collaboration and shared planning and decision-making linking government, business, community and university interests.

The strong leadership role being played by the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon's designation as a Cultural Capital exemplifies this important role for universities in supporting community development agendas. I will return to this point below.

4. Back to the Future: Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes

The new vision required to integrate culture as a critical dimension of city building is in fact not new at all. Rather it represents a rediscovery of the ideas of late 19th and early 20th century visionaries such as Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford who are often credited with founding urban or town planning as a field of study and professional practice.

Both men understood cities as fundamentally cultural entities, places that were shaped by their natural and human heritage and were a product of the values and beliefs of their citizens. Geddes believed that planning was more a human than a physical science requiring three types of expertise: planners must be anthropologists (specialists in culture), economists (specialists in local economies), and geographers (specialists in the built and natural environment). His dictum "map before you plan" resonates with cultural mapping as a first step in cultural planning.

Sadly, the professionalization of urban planning that

occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, and its institutionalization as a function of local government, undermined these more holistic views. The primary focus was on the administration of land and the efficient delivery of municipal services. If cultural assets were acknowledged by planners, they were narrowly defined, most often in terms of facilities and spaces, such as museums, galleries, theatres, concert halls, parks and recreational facilities.

These traditions still have a strong hold on planning departments in many cities. But recent years have seen a "re-placing" of the planning profession. Jane Jacobs was a major force in this reorientation, drawing attention to the complex human ecology of cities. She advocated for more organic, place-based and context-specific planning models, and ones that integrate social and cultural dimensions of community life.

These more integrated visions are well articulated in the Final Report of the External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities (the Harcourt Committee). This committee was struck by the previous Federal government to define a vision for Canadian cities in 30 years, and to recommend steps needed to realize that vision. The Final Report calls for cities to embrace planning frameworks that acknowledge four pillars or dimensions of sustainability: social, economic, environmental *and cultural*.

5. Opportunities for Saskatoon

Saskatoon is well positioned to "capitalize on culture" in the context of some of the themes I have been discussing.

Saskatoon's designation as a Cultural Capital for 2006 is a significant achievement and the city is to be congratulated for the progressive program of activities defined for the year. A central goal is to use funds and activities to build local capacity to support cultural development in the longer term. Not all cities have taken this far-sighted an approach.

The Building Bridges component of the Cultural Capitals is central to this objective. Its focus is strengthening partnerships and collaboration and building mechanisms to support shared planning and decision-making. A Cultural Roundtable guides the Building Bridges project with members drawn from the municipality, cultural groups, the business community, the University of Saskatchewan, and other key community resources such as the police force. The Roundtable is chaired by University of Saskatchewan President Peter MacKinnon, a testament to the university's commitment to supporting community-building efforts in

general and to its recognition of the centrality of culture to the future of the city.

A key initiative being overseen by Building Bridges is a cultural mapping project with which I am pleased to be involved. The goal is to develop a more comprehensive inventory of the breadth and depth of the city's cultural resources – both tangible and intangible – and to engage the community in this process.

I see cultural mapping – and the larger cultural planning process it supports – as one of the missing pieces in actually operationalizing the notion of creative cities and the integrated community planning called for by the Harcourt Committee. Saskatoon has already taken a leadership role in integrated planning in its local area plans.

Strengthening the cultural planning dimension of other planning and community development agendas can make Saskatoon a national leader in city building through culture. ∞

BIO

Dr. Greg Baeker is a senior consultant with AuthenticCity, an urban policy practice of Navigator Ltd. led by former Winnipeg mayor Glen Murray. Greg is Canada's leading expert in integrated cultural strategies for cities. Previously he served in senior leadership positions in Canada for 25 years as a policy maker, cultural planner and academic. He has a Ph.D. in Urban Planning from the University of Waterloo.

Introduction to President Peter MacKinnon's speech

by Peter Stoicheff, Associate Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts, College of Arts and Science, University of Saskatchewan

From the time of its creation in 1907 the University of Saskatchewan has regarded itself as an institution with direct ties, of all kinds, to its many surrounding communities. The first two colleges at this new institution were Agriculture and Arts and Science. Each had a responsibility to educate the people of the province about matters and issues relevant to them. This was a vision of the University that spoke to a sense of engagement and assistance, to a prediction that the province's citizens would soon be depending upon the University to provide them with what they needed to know,

and in turn, the University would rely on its citizens to share the information they gathered in their daily lives to guide and make relevant its teaching and research - an early version of what is now known as the knowledge economy.

So far as the historical record tells us, this vision was carried out in practice. The College of Agriculture has contributed immeasurably to the welfare of Saskatchewan, and Canada, in terms of its education programs for farmers in the first half of the 20th century and its continuing leadership in agricultural research.

For its part, the College of Arts and Science has contributed immeasurably as well to the life of Saskatoon and the province. One of the first faculty members in the Music Department in the 1930s began the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra. Members of that department have played in the Orchestra, directed and conducted it, and taught musicians who have played in it. Faculty in the Drama Department began and continue to be involved in Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan. Augustus Kenderdine started what would become the Kenderdine Campus on Emma Lake in the 1930s - it became internationally renowned for its summer artist workshops and remains a model of innovative arts programming.

All universities in this country have rich histories of intellectual success and innovation. It is not easy, however, to find another one that identifies so deeply, from its inception, with the missions of public service and community engagement. The fact that the University formally began only two years after the province, and only one year after the city of Saskatoon, no doubt plays a part in this - an intense constellation of beginnings full of mutual aspiration and promise.

Another part is played by the relative scale of the University and its city and province. With 4,500 employees and 20,000 students, the University is larger than many municipalities in the province, is a most significant employer in the city, and has a huge obligation to and impact on its region. The futures of the city and the province will be determined in large part by how good the University can be at all the things it does - teaching and research to be sure, but also leading and assisting its communities, as it has in the past, in their aspirations to be sustainable, valuable, and creative.

As President MacKinnon implies, creativity is not confined to the work of artists. The Canadian Light Source or synchrotron, the largest scientific facility to be built in Canada


in a generation, is an example of creative minds having the vision to build it and recognize its importance not merely to the University's researchers but to the city and the province. It could be said to have begun when the University brought Gerhardt Herzberg to the Physics Department to escape Nazi Germany in the early 1930s. He spent his next ten years writing his two-volume Atomic Spectra that would garner him the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1970. That work influenced the creation of the University's linear accelerator in the 1950s which in turn helped the University to bid successfully for the synchrotron half a century later. A lot of creative scientific work is now going on there, and will continue to go on there, that will improve health care, drug treatments and veterinary practice. Science is a creative act, and much earlier in history people did not regard it as distinct from art or poetry - they were simply different approaches to truth and value.

The University has recently been involved with the Saskatchewan Arts Board, via President MacKinnon and Jeremy Morgan respectively, to discuss how the city of Saskatoon and the University can deeply engage in establishing the conditions for a creative city to exist. In a sense, it already does, and the University's role in this could simply be, in one sense, to help the city recognize its present identity in the rest of Canada as a nexus of creativity, a high-density location of artists, a cultural centre. In another sense, although the conditions are there, the University can play a role in bridging them or bringing them together by seeing, as it already has, opportunities to collaborate with the Saskatchewan Arts Board to bring a PEN Writer in Residence to Saskatoon. Many such examples exist, many more are possible.

As President MacKinnon discusses, a creative city doesn't simply make culture (in all senses of the term) one of its many attractions. Culture or creativity becomes its identity, the reason people want to live there, why aspirations can be met there. No business can attract employees on the basis of salaries or wages alone, but a business can more readily attract the best employees if the city offers them a richly creative environment full of creative people. The University will be hiring strenuously in the next ten years, as President MacKinnon points out. Its ability to do so, and to remain an economic driver of the city and the province, depends upon the extent to which the city is understood to be a creative site. No amount of well-surfaced roads or lowered taxes will compensate for that simple reality.

Another component of the University's engagement with the creative city of Saskatoon is what is now called experiential

learning. Simply put, this means involving students in applying what they are learning to real-life situations that surround them. This can be done by placing students in local businesses or non-profit organizations or government offices or charitable groups and using their skills and knowledge acquired in their courses to assist and to learn. Yet another component brings researchers at the University together with communities that need their knowledge. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funds many programs that encourage such collaboration. The University has become very good at identifying and carrying out this kind of activity - the opportunity is there for it to become even better.

When the University of Saskatchewan reaches its own centenary this coming year it will host Congress 2007, a large conference run by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences at a different university in Canada annually. Each Congress has a theme and ours will be "Bridging Communities: Making Public Knowledge, Making Knowledge Public". This theme is intended to give academic traction to the issues discussed in President MacKinnon's talk, to challenge scholars to make the relevance of their important research known outside the usual channels of academic discourse as well as within them, and to challenge all university faculty and students and administrators to see the capacity, the necessity, of bridging the creative lives of the post-secondary institution with the creativity in their regions and citizens. Given the origins of this university a century ago it is a fitting theme; and no less fitting now, given the potential and, under President MacKinnon, emerging role of the University as a catalyst and collaborator in the creative city concept. 

BIO

Peter Stoicheff is Associate Dean of Humanities and Fine Arts in the College of Arts and Science at the University of Saskatchewan. As a Professor of English he has written books on the modern poet Ezra Pound, literature and chaos theory, and the history and future of the book. He presently chairs the Building Cultural Bridges component of Saskatoon's Cultural Capital designation by Heritage Canada for 2006.

Forum Panellist Response

by Peter MacKinnon, President
University of Saskatchewan

I am from Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and I separate my understanding of that city's history into two eras: before 1964 and after 1964. The reason for that is the Massy Commission came to PEI. The then-premier of the province observed that he didn't know why the Commission was coming to PEI because PEI didn't need any culture. One of the interesting features of the next 10 or 12 years in PEI was the development of the Confederation Centre of the Arts, which opened in 1964. Prior to 1964, Charlottetown was a provincial community, a modest provincial town with an inward looking community of 25,000 to 30,000 people.

The Confederation Centre of the Arts, with the theatre and art gallery, museum and archives, opened in the middle of the city and Charlottetown began on a very different path. I believe, in fact, that the city was transformed to the point where those who know the city well and those who returned to it or have seen it will notice that it is one of the most interesting and sophisticated cities of its size in the country.

The present population is similar to that of Prince Albert or Moose Jaw. Its feel, its sense of itself, its vibrancy, its activities, its sophistication, its subtlety is in fact noticeable for all to see and experience. There is no doubt in my mind that it was the transformational presence of the Confederation Centre of the Arts with all of its attendant capacities, such as dramas, theatre production and other presentations, which attracted individuals to the community. By being in the centre of the city it was really, for a city of that size, a magnet; it transformed the city. It brought many different types of people into the community. It really increased the diversity of the community and it contributed to the development and redevelopment of its historic waterfront to the point where, again, the city is one of the most interesting cities of its size. That to me is very important because it illustrates the transformational impact, the fundamentally important impact, of cultural resources in a community. It is a striking example, perhaps more vivid in a community of that size, because of the proportionality of the resource to the size of the community.

I noticed this morning in the *Star Phoenix* an article on the turning of the sod event of the new Persephone Theatre and one of the individuals pictured in the background was Bill Thomlinson a Yale-educated physicist who happens to be the

Director of the Canadian Light Source (CLS) and who is also associated with fundraising for the Persephone Theatre. Why is the Director of the city's leading technology capacity in the Canadian Light Source prominently associated with fundraising of the Persephone Theatre?

Richard Florida's great contribution to the literature is the idea of the reconciliation of the three Ts: *talent*, search for talent and the drawing of talent into a community; search for *technology*, communities compete to attract technology into their midst because of the obvious economic development and employment related benefits that are seen to be associated with it; and of course the third and vitally important part of the trilogy is *tolerance* within a community. That is something in Saskatoon that we ought not to take for granted; it's so tremendously important to bring together people with great varieties of backgrounds and to demonstrate that the community is one that is open, generous, understanding and tolerant.

The challenge is to move the cultural vitality, the cultural resources discussion, into the core conversation and planning, I think, of any community.

The great risk of this cultural resources discussion is that cultural resources are seen often as extras, add-ons or even worst still as community planning frills. I would like to think that the days in which they are seen that way are receding or becoming more distant. I am not entirely sure that that is so. I think we must constantly remind ourselves that they are not to be extras, or add-ons or even frills. The challenge is to move the cultural vitality, the cultural resources discussion, into the core conversation and planning, I think, of any community. It is not something we can look to or should look to as something that would be nice to advance over many years to come.

From my perspective, at least in terms of the work that I do, this is a topic of rather immediate importance. It is urgent for all kinds of reasons. From the university perspective we are in the midst of a generational turnover of the faculty of this University that simply reflects the demographics of universities generally in this country. At the University of Saskatchewan, a large number of people who were hired in the late 60s and the early 70s are now retiring in very large numbers, and in a period of about 12 years this university will see a huge turnover of approximately 50 per cent of its faculty. It is our interest at the University to attract the very best people to come out of the graduate schools worldwide

that we can - and it is a worldwide competition for these people. The reputation, the quality, the impact of this University certainly depends on how well we do that job over the next period of time so it is urgent; it is a process that is underway now. We don't have a lot of time to think about different ways of doing this better. We have got to do it better very quickly. And it is no secret that this University has its share of major technological resources, such as the Canadian Light Source. If we are going to attract the technology, we also have to attract the tolerance and the talent, and that talent has to see this as a community that is not just a place to go to but a preferred place to be and to live. So the urgency of all of this is certainly with me at this time.

Who's responsibility is it? That is a very interesting question and one that Greg has written about extremely well. Who's responsibility is it? It is tempting for us to say based on all these charts that it is everyone's responsibility, and that is true. But the trouble with that is that that can lead to a diffusion of responsibility and of action in ways that don't really advance what may be common goals in the end. Hence, the tremendous importance of planning. And that's why we have brought together different kinds of organizations to talk about planning for cultural resources in our city; it is a planning that must be comprehensive. Planning cuts across many different organizations and in municipal government, which must be a very important player in this, but there are many other participants. The cultural organizations, the university, and the businesses must all be aligned in the pursuit of these cultural resources. ☞

BIO

Peter MacKinnon has been President of the University of Saskatchewan since July 1999. He previously served the University as Dean of Law and Acting Vice-President (Academic). His academic work included teaching, primarily in criminal law and evidence. He received the 2005 Award for Distinguished Service from the Canadian Bar Association (Saskatchewan Branch).

Forum Panellist Response

*by Randy Burton, Political and General Columnist
Saskatoon Star Phoenix*

Saskatoon's Mendel Art Gallery finds itself with a problem most businesses would love to have. It is sitting on a rapidly appreciating fortune in assets in the form of historic Canadian art works. By any normal measure, this should be a good thing. The problem is the Mendel lacks the kind of climate control capability to provide adequate storage, a situation which has added some urgency to the Mendel's oft-thwarted plans for expansion.

It's hard to imagine that even Fred Mendel could have anticipated what was going to happen to the Canadian art market when he donated 13 paintings to the gallery that was built with his seed money back in the mid 1960s. Among the works he gave to his namesake institution was Lawren Harris' untitled picture of mountains, which now carries a value of some \$3.5 million. Nor is this the only pricey canvas in the collection. Among those original paintings, there are also a number of other Group of Seven works, including an Arthur Lismer now worth \$475,000, a J.E.H MacDonald now worth \$575,000, and an Emily Carr now worth \$335,000.

A formal evaluation of all of these works puts the total value of these 13 works at \$5.68 million. As recently as 1990, they were valued at only \$1.45 million, which is an apt reflection of what's happened to the art market in the last 15 years.

Of course, these works are only the tip of the iceberg, given that the Mendel's permanent collection now numbers some 5,000 works. Meanwhile, the Mendel is still looking for the \$18 million it says it needs to expand the gallery and install the kind of modern climate control system that art storage demands. The city has pledged \$4.5 million, but to date, neither the province nor the federal government has committed anything to the project.

The gallery now faces some rather stark choices, given the skyrocketing value of Mendel's original bequest. If the gallery can't make headway on improving its storage conditions, there is an argument to be made that perhaps it should be moving these paintings to an institution that can, perhaps even somewhere out of province. Or it could potentially send them to the Mackenzie Art Gallery in Regina, an institution that has better climate control, thanks to investments made by the provincial government. Gallery director Terry Graff obviously does not want to do that, but the lack of progress

on expansion has him worried.

The story of the Mendel's woes are by now well known. Earlier this year, the federal government opted to put \$10 million earmarked for the city's centennial into almost everything except the art gallery. Prairieland Park came out as the biggest winner on that scramble, landing some \$4 million to build new trade show space. Later on, the province also turned the Mendel down saying it should go back to the city for more money.

The latest twist on this saga is that Culture and Youth Minister Glenn Hagel has now asked the Mendel for a second application for money in the next budget cycle. The city will make that request on behalf of the Mendel and will also handle future requests to the federal government. Graff says this makes sense, given that in most other jurisdictions, provincial governments act on behalf of major institutions in seeking federal monies.

The Mendel's immediate problems notwithstanding, there is a larger question at work here. There is a growing awareness across North America of the importance of culture as a magnet for the creative, entrepreneurial people that can make a city crackle.


In other jurisdictions, particularly Ontario, municipalities are studying the idea of cultural planning, that is, looking for ways to engage the public in a broad process of establishing cultural priorities and how they can boost the health of the community. This is a concept that ought to be of interest in Saskatchewan, given our challenges with population growth and retaining young people.

It's certainly on the mind of University of Saskatchewan President Peter MacKinnon. At a panel discussion on the topic on September 14, 2006 sponsored by the Saskatchewan Institute on Public Policy, he said that the University will undergo a dramatic staff turnover approaching 50 per cent of its workforce over the next 12 years.

He not only has to sell the University to academics across the country, he has to convince them that the city of Saskatoon is the place to be. Thus, the future of the University is very much tied up with what happens in the course of the city's future cultural development.

That's a far broader topic than just the future of the Mendel. It's also about people's lived experience in the city, whether it be a visit to the Farmer's Market, the Fringe Festival on Broadway or a walk at Cranberry Flats.

However, the major institutions are always going to be key components of the city's cultural life. Somehow the community has to come to grips with a more effective means of sorting out cultural priorities than by pitting one institution against another in the kind of process that so frustrated the Mendel earlier this year.

Think of it this way. When was the last time you heard a corporate recruiter or a university president promote Saskatoon as a good place to live because there is plenty of trade show space? 

BIO

Randy Burton is a political and general columnist for the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*. Since 1998, he has been writing a column, "Straight Talk", three times a week in an interactive space where readers have the opportunity to respond to Burton's opinions. Burton is also a photographer whose work is represented in a number of provincial and national collections.

Forum Panellist Response

by Brenda Baker, Artist, Family Entertainer

I'd like to thank those who organized this event for inviting me to reflect on today's topic.

I was asked to look at the cultural planning model from the perspective of an independent career artist. I'll also make a comment or two as a citizen.

Overall, I'm excited by the direction of the conversation around culture and community development. I probably have more questions than observations and I'll raise just a few of those questions here.

So, first, as an artist, I'll address two points in support of the cultural planning premise, and two not so supportive. I've summarized my points as follows:

- ◆ Artist as Puny Cog;
- ◆ Artist as Model for the Model;
- ◆ Artist's Eyeball as Pincushion;
- ◆ and Artist as Ayn Rand

When I read the provided literature, it was with an unusual sense of relief. It was fantastic to see the artist treated as a small cog in such a large wheel, hence the heading *Artist as Punny Cog*. My gut response was, Finally! A way to develop better integrated and more culturally aware communities without sucking the lifeblood out of artists and their supporters to do it.

The artist is integral to the model, but the responsibility for driving forward a cultural agenda is spread far beyond the traditional arts community. This notion of planning helped me to imagine a way in which many more people could be included in the journey to the end goal, which is to create more sustainable, more livable, more exciting communities in which artists may thrive; in which all of us may thrive.

Historically speaking, artists and arts organizations have been somewhat isolated from other, broader cultural forces and communities. In our isolation, and in our attempts to get attention for our causes, we've too often bashed our heads against the vast brick wall that is the public policy system.

In a world of ever-increasing commercialization, and increasing competition for the general public's time and money, artists and those who are passionate about the arts have taken on the burden of responsibility for the continuation of art in all its forms. Consequently, we tend to take it personally if we fail to get enough Saskatchewan books into school libraries or keep school band programs going, or if we fail to get enough Saskatchewan performers touring the province, or if we fail to persuade politicians to increase funding to the arts.

Why should artists have to be the driving force ensuring the future of the arts?

This model seems to say they shouldn't have to be, and I like that, but how does a city get to a point where the model would be adopted? Surely it requires a huge paradigm shift on the part of some of our leadership and the public, which then requires the same kind of advocacy that arts organizations have been kept busy with for decades. It's a new way to look at things, but how, exactly, would we be further ahead given the effort of persuasion that would still be needed? Will the inclusive model speed up the process towards a more arts-positive society, or bog the process down?

Point Two: *Artist as Model for the Model*, which is to say that this model feels like it has a mind and that it thinks the way many artists think.

Over time, as a career artist, if there's anything you come to understand it's that art is not just a product. It's a way of being. It's a way of drawing connections between all things, living and dead, old and new, designed and natural, spiritual and human, visual and musical, animate and inanimate, etc.

In places that have been marked by a cultural and/or artistic vision – a marking that happens by design or fortuitous happenstance – there always follows an intangible “feel” that continually draws people to that location.

Where there's an emphasis placed on the interconnectedness of all things – those connections often happening through artistic or cultural activity – there's an undeniable spiritual spin off that some might find hard to describe. This indescribability often has to do with a myriad and variety of subtle aesthetic, social, and historic connections. Any of us could come up with hundreds of examples, but I immediately think of the Fort San School of the Arts; the Marr Residence; Oaxaca, Mexico; the park behind Greystone Heights School; Barcelona; our family cabin at Blackstrap.

I've been a multidisciplinary pretty much all my life. Twenty-four years ago I was a visual artist-in-residence at Nutana Collegiate. I visited all kinds of classes and tried to show the students how there was a visual art angle to just about anything they might be studying, including math and science. At the time, I was also a student actor and closet songwriter, so I sometimes talked about the connections between artistic disciplines and class content.

And so, this planning model makes sense to me. It's already the way I, and many other artists, view the world.

I've entitled my third – more cautionary – point *The Artist's Eyeball as Pincushion*.

So, how important is it to involve artists in this?

I can promise you that a lot of them would rather stick pins in their eyes than sit through years of policy dickering.

In one of his papers Greg Baeker states that artists as a group are “more difficult to find and engage than traditional not-for-profit groups or cultural industries.”

Well, many artists don't want to be “found” or “engaged,” at least not by policy analysts. The best example I can think of would be my writer-husband who'd be at home hiding in his office if I didn't suggest his coming today would be the best thing for our relationship.

How much do artists care about these wider policy issues? How much are they needed in the process? How does becoming involved benefit them or their art? When will they see a benefit? Mightn't it be better for an artist to spend precious volunteer hours pushing for income averaging?

Setting policy is intrinsically about agreeing on a kind of conformity, which, as well-intentioned as it might be, is diametrically opposed to the artist's job, which is to break molds and show society new ways of contemplating the world. And if not that hoity-toity business, then the artist's job is at least to get the next novel written, or the painting finished, or the play up and running. It could be that most artists are just busy earning a living and don't have energy for policy planning.

Point Four: *The Artist as Ayn Rand*. (And if you don't know the name, please Google it.)

As we've learned, cultural planning is daunting in its scope. And even though I began by saying I appreciated that breadth of inclusion, I wonder if there's a risk that artists would actually be lost once the model is put into practice. In all of this talk about the public good, it's unclear to me how the personal visions of individual artists will be lifted up and celebrated.


When I hear phrases like "art for the public good" it has at least two interpretations, and a red flag waves madly as I imagine future artists receiving more opportunities to behave as social-worker-community-animators than they do as creators of their own new work. There are many agendas at play and I wonder where the agenda of individual artist fits in, exactly. And what is its value? How will cultural planning help artists to realize their own authentic visions or ensure artistic excellence?

Finally I'll finish off with a comment or two as the citizen of a city. I was born into an east side home that used to be on the outskirts of Saskatoon, butted right up against the prairie. As with most new neighbourhoods of the day, the houses and apartment buildings were modest and middle-class, as were the nearby strip malls where small, locally owned businesses thrived.

Now when I drive by the far outskirts of East Saskatoon, I'm struck by its resemblance to Calgary, a city where the suburbs go on and on and on with little to differentiate one house from the next, or one neighbourhood from the next. The areas are serviced by big box stores identical to hundreds across the country. It's a "sameness" that I find unsettling.

This past summer I had occasion to actually enter one of these new Saskatoon neighbourhoods when I was invited to someone's home. The house was the largest on a crescent of monster homes. Up close it turned out there were some minor cosmetic differences. The public spaces around were manicured – beautifully landscaped, as were the yards.

After a few hours there I was surprised by my emotional reaction. I didn't feel like I was in Saskatoon. And as I've reflected on that experience it's occurred to me that that neighbourhood represents a very different culture than what I've grown used to where I live. So I ask, when we talk about looking at a city through a cultural lens, then whose cultural lens are we talking about? What is the culture in, say, an Erindale, versus a Riversdale?

Finally, as a Saskatoon citizen I'm very much in favour of a cultural planning process that would help us continue to build a city that retains and nurtures its own soul. I worry that our current system of municipal governance leaves us with great problems when it comes to continuity of a vision and a strategy for realizing that vision. We need a mechanism that will make us more courageous and farsighted in our decision-making, a mechanism that will help our leaders to resist mediocrity at every turn. If this model is the answer to that call, then I'm all for it! 

BIO

Brenda Baker is one of the best known family entertainers in Saskatchewan. In the last 20 years she has given over a 1,000 performances at schools, libraries, and festivals. She received the 2001 Saskatoon YWCA Woman of Distinction Award for her contributions to the arts.

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