



# **DYSART ET AL CULTURAL PLAN UPDATE**

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# Dysart et al Cultural Plan Update December 2025

## Executive Summary

The 2025 Cultural Plan Update for the Municipality of Dysart et al reassesses progress made since the original 2012 Cultural Plan and identifies priorities for the next five years. Using a mixed-methods approach the update captures broad community input and reflects significant shifts in the local cultural landscape. A total of 59 survey responses, input from the Cultural Resources Committee (CRC), and insights from younger residents (ages 25–44) informed the development of recommendations that respond to evolving needs and opportunities.

Key themes include the importance of strengthening communication between the cultural sector and municipal leadership, increasing youth engagement, supporting cornerstone institutions such as the Haliburton School of Art + Design and CanoeFM, and adapting to demographic changes marked by both an aging population and the arrival of younger families. Stakeholders also emphasized the need for improved downtown vibrancy, accessible cultural spaces, evening activities, and better promotion of local cultural assets.

Five key lenses emerged for future action planning: sustaining key cultural institutions, strengthening communication channels through the CRC, elevating younger voices, coordinating heritage initiatives, and educating about the CRC's role. Building on these, the updated recommendations align with the original plan's four goals:

- **Municipal Leadership:** strengthen communication strategies, support policy development, and build relationships across hamlets.
- **Cultural Sector Strength:** enhance diversity awareness, deepen partnerships with HSAD and CanoeFM, expand youth engagement, and support downtown improvements.
- **Culture & Economic Development:** leverage GIS for cultural mapping, prioritize infrastructure maintenance, support new cultural venues, and collaborate with county economic development.
- **Heritage & Identity:** advance Indigenous history engagement, create a strategic plan for the Museum, and support local historical projects.

Overall, the Cultural Plan Update confirms that Dysart et al's cultural sector is vibrant, resilient, and well-positioned to adapt to emerging opportunities. The next five years will focus on strengthening connections, enhancing cultural infrastructure, celebrating heritage, and ensuring culture remains accessible and meaningful for all residents.

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## Introduction

The purpose of the Cultural Plan Update is to re-evaluate the progress and priorities from the original 2012 Dysart et al Cultural Plan. To accomplish this task we used a mixed methods approach, outlined below.

### *Cultural Plan Update Process*

1. Document Review & Consult with past steering committee members, CAO.  
There are a number of planning processes underway that will overlap with Cultural Planning. Some of these include a Parks and Recreation Plan, Asset Management, Way Finding, and the County Strategic Plan.
2. Targeting Survey to Cultural Groups (July 18-Aug 1, 2025).  
There were 59 surveys completed. Over 50% have lived locally for over 20 years and 44% had reviewed the cultural plan. Half the respondents work in Dysart. The survey highlighted the level of investment in culture as it was clear respondents invested time in answering open ended questions and 21 provided contact information for further involvement in the process. A copy of the survey results is included in Appendix A.
3. Focus Group with Cultural Resources Committee (CRC).  
In August the results of the survey were presented to the CRC. The group identified connecting with a younger demographic (25-44) as a priority for the second phase of the project. In addition, the CRC wanted to take the results back to the community prior to finalizing the final report.
4. Key Stakeholder Interviews Targeting Younger Voices (25-44).  
Building on the connections within the CRC, we reached out to 25 individuals in this age category. Eight interviews were conducted, including young parents, new comers, entrepreneurs, and Haliburton School of Art + Design (HSAD) graduates. Based on these conversations it is clear that there are more connections to be made. Respondents talked about time constraints and the challenges of working on boards where the majority of members are retired. They also spoke about how music brings younger people together and the entrepreneurial spirit shone through.
5. Key Stakeholders Community Event (Nov 5).  
The CRC hosted a community presentation to share initial results and invite feedback. A copy of the presentation is included in Appendix B.

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## *Considerations*

Based on this consultation process, five key considerations emerged. These can be used as a lens for action planning going forward.

- The HSAD and CanoeFM were highlighted as key cultural institutions in our community. They were sited as cornerstones of our cultural sector. How do we ensure their success?
- Creating a clear communication channel with the cultural sector and council, through the CRC is an integral part of working together.
- Continuing to find ways to evolve activities and opportunities that are listening to a younger demographic – their priorities and needs.
- How does the mosaic of cultural groups respond to all the wonderful ideas for capturing our history?
- How can the role of the CRC be clarified and highlighted in moving forward?

## **Overview of Municipal Cultural Plan (2012)**

The 2021 Cultural Plan for the Municipality of Dysart et al (millierdickinsonblais) set out 9 broad strategic directions and 4 goals, which continue to be relevant.

### *Strategic Directions*

- Grow the creative cultural economy
- Leverage quality of place to attract residents and grow tourism
- Municipal leadership
- Foster relationships
- Address issues of access
- Promote, strengthen and celebrate shared identity
- Expand youth engagement
- Strengthen sectoral capacity
- Address cultural facility needs

### *Goals*

- Municipal Leadership: Broaden the Municipality's role in strengthening collaboration among cultural groups and building partnerships with business and community interest

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- A Strong and Collaborative Cultural Sector: Ensure a vibrant and sustainable cultural sector through strengthening networks and collaboration
- Culture and Economic Development: Leverage creativity, culture and quality of place to grow the local economy
- Heritage and Identity: Conserve and promote local history and heritage

The Cultural Resources Committee completed an inventory of the accomplishments to date to gauge progress on the implementation of the 2012 plan.

### *Goals & Accomplishments to Date*

Goal #1: Municipal Leadership	Accomplishments to May 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural planning function added to Planning and Development Department</li> <li>▪ Cultural Resources Committee created</li> <li>▪ Communication strategy for original plan developed</li> <li>▪ Plan reviewed with senior staff</li> <li>▪ Policy provisions added to 2017 Official Plan</li> <li>▪ Inventory of facilities</li> <li>▪ Inventory of public art (2016)</li> <li>▪ Parks and Recreation Plan /Head Lake Plan 2021 — on-going</li> <li>▪ Sign policy of community events board</li> <li>▪ Public Art Policy</li> <li>▪ Park use agreement</li> <li>▪ Special events permit</li> </ul>
Goal 2: A strong and dynamic cultural sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Cultural manager workshops and meetings/SPARC symposium</li> <li>▪ Economic development strategy created</li> <li>▪ Tourism director hired for county</li> <li>▪ Staff and committee members have been involved in regional cultural and tourism group meetings and maintain memberships in organizations.</li> <li>▪ Marketing efforts are ongoing</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A variety of cultural and recreational maps have been created and development is ongoing.</li> </ul>
Goal 3: Cultural and Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic development strategy has been approved.</li> <li>▪ HSAD member on cultural resource committee</li> <li>▪ HCDC member on cultural resource committee</li> <li>▪ Local documentaries created and heritage features on CanoeFM.</li> <li>▪ A variety of youth programmes continue to happen in the community</li> </ul>
Goal 4: Heritage and Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Eagle Lake Historical Panels</li> </ul>

### The Changing Landscape

Over the last 12 years, our social/cultural landscape has changed. Global trends have significantly shaped cultural planning in Canada, pushing communities to rethink how culture supports resilience, inclusion, and economic vitality. Rising migration and increased cultural diversity have encouraged planners to adopt more inclusive approaches that recognize a broader range of identities, traditions, and creative practices. Digital transformation, in the form of social media, streaming platforms, and virtual engagement, has expanded access to arts and culture while also challenging traditional cultural institutions to adapt. Climate change and global sustainability movements have influenced cultural strategies to prioritize environmental stewardship, heritage preservation, and community well-being.

At a national level the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and subsequent public discussions—has pushed cultural planners to embed Indigenous leadership, knowledge, and visibility into strategies, programs, and governance structures. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped how culture is delivered and accessed, increasing digital programming while highlighting the need for resilient cultural infrastructure and support for artists and creative workers. Public conversations sparked by events related to racial equity, climate impacts, and affordability have encouraged cultural plans to address social inclusion, accessible spaces, and community well-being more directly. Lastly, the increasing pressure on housing of all types impacts recruitment and retention of workers in the cultural sector.

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Ontario's public colleges are dealing with a deep financial crisis. Many colleges have been forced to cancel or suspend programs, shut down campuses, and cut faculty and staff. Provincial funding per student remains among the lowest in Canada, and grants plus domestic tuition have not kept pace with inflation — leaving colleges financially vulnerable even before the international-enrolment collapse. This combination of lost revenue and limited public funding is threatening the long-term sustainability of many programs.

At the local level, Haliburton County has experienced significant demographic shifts that are reshaping the community profile. According to the 2021 census, the county's population reached about 20,575 — a roughly 13.8 % increase since 2016, well above provincial and national population growth rates. Alongside this growth, the county has become markedly older with more than 35 % of residents 65 or older and projected to increase to over 40% by 2030. At the same time, there are signs of younger people and families moving in. This suggests that despite its reputation as a retirement or cottage-country area, Haliburton is attracting a more diverse mix of age groups — retirees, young families, and working-age adults. The growth of remote work opportunities is another contributing factor. All of these shifts reshape the types of cultural programs and infrastructure needed to serve the community.

In Dysart et al specifically the cultural sector has seen the creation of several new initiatives in the last 12 years. Some of those include: The Youth Hub (Point in Time), Skyline Dance, Haliburton Highlands Art Centre Foundation, Pride in the Highlands, the Caboose Bike Hub, SIRCH Bistro, Thrift Warehouse, The Drop Zone, and Barnum Creek Nature Reserve. There has been growth to cultural resources like the Sculpture Forest, Head Lake Park, Haliburton Forest, CanoeFM, and Skyline Park. Castle Antiques, The LINK, the Abbey Gardens tent space, and the Head Lake Park playground have become community meeting places. Despite the negative impact of the pandemic on many local cultural events and the closure of the Ethel Currie Gallery, Dysart continues to be a vibrant, resilient cultural community.

This changing cultural landscape sets the stage for updating the 2012 Cultural Plan. It helps to identify current priorities and strategies that can serve the local community while responding to outside influences.

### **Recommendations**

Community input highlighted a culturally evolving Dysart et al/Haliburton County marked by growing ethnic diversity, increased tourism, and the potential for new arts venues, alongside challenges like housing pressures and aging demographics. They expressed strong interest in enhancing downtown vitality, evening entertainment, youth engagement,

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and better promotion of cultural assets. Notably, the cultural sector is seen as a vibrant, collaborative force advocating for community enrichment, inclusivity, and economic development. The following recommendations are focused on a 5 year timeframe and build on the strategic directions and goals set out in the 2012 plan. They take into consideration outside influences and the current capacity of the Cultural Resources Committee. (\* items are carried over from the 2012 plan).

<p>Goal #1: Municipal Leadership</p>	<p><b>Communications strategy for Council and Cultural Resources Committee</b></p> <p><b>Education about the Cultural Resources Committee</b></p> <p><b>Enhance relationship with Hamlets</b></p> <p><b>*Develop Policies to guide municipal decisions on cultural and heritage issues</b></p>
<p>Goal 2: A strong and dynamic cultural sector</p>	<p><b>Recognition of changes in diversity in our community</b></p> <p><b>Strengthen connections with &amp; support for HSAD - Fleming College</b></p> <p><b>Strengthen connections with CanoeFM</b></p> <p><b>*Strengthen Youth Engagement</b></p> <p><b>*Downtown improvements</b></p> <p><b>*Continue to convene cultural leaders</b></p>
<p>Goal 3: Cultural and Economic Development</p>	<p><b>Utilize GIS infrastructure at Dysart et al to populate an on-line cultural map</b></p> <p><b>Evaluate and prioritize maintenance of existing infrastructure</b></p> <p><b>Support new infrastructure</b></p> <p><b>*Connect with County Economic Development re: the role of culture in tourism and economic development</b></p>

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Goal 4: Heritage and Identity	<b>Support community conversation regarding indigenous history in Haliburton</b> <b>Engage in strategic planning for the Haliburton Museum</b> <b>*Leverage heritage information for tourism and economic development</b> <b>*Define strategies to address documenting heritage</b> <b>Support local historical projects</b>
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## Conclusion

The Cultural Plan Update reaffirms that Dysart et al’s cultural sector is dynamic, resilient, and central to community well-being. Through the consultation process - spanning surveys, interviews, focus groups, and community dialogue - it is clear that residents value culture as a driver of identity, inclusion, economic vitality, and quality of life. At the same time, shifting demographics, national policy changes, economic pressures, and new creative initiatives highlight the need for a dynamic approach that can respond to a rapidly changing landscape.

The recommendations presented build directly on the strengths identified in the 2012 plan while addressing challenges and opportunities such as youth engagement, cultural diversity, digital transformation, and heritage preservation. By strengthening partnerships, clarifying the role of the Cultural Resources Committee, and investing in both existing and future cultural infrastructure, Dysart et al can continue to foster a thriving, collaborative cultural ecosystem.

Moving forward, the Cultural Plan will serve as a roadmap for the next five years—guiding municipal leadership, supporting cultural organizations, and ensuring that culture remains a meaningful, accessible, and unifying force for all who call the community home.

## APPENDIX A: Survey Results

## APPENDIX B: Community Presentation (with community input)