

RESPONSE BY: JEFF LEUNG, REGIONAL COUNCILLOR CANDIDATE, MARKHAM

COMMUNITY / PROMOTION / ACCESS:

What will you do to ensure the general public has greater access to experience and enjoy the arts in your municipality?

I'm Jeff Leung running for the Markham Regional Councillor position. As a graduate from the University of Toronto School of Architecture, I grew up with a love of the arts and was fortunate my education enabled me access to some of the best artists as my teachers and know first hand how important it is for the public to enjoy the arts. We have a lot of great local artists and we have lots of great facilities in the city both private and public which I think can open the public to enjoy the arts in our respective municipalities. For example, every community has many churches which can open the door to the community even on a Sunday as exhibition spaces for local artists to display their work. We don't need to travel to an art gallery to enjoy artists works. Some of the new Churches for example the Markham People's Community Church which my architecture firm designed at Esna Park and Woodbine have an atrium that can be fantastic to host a local artist's exhibition.

What is one small concrete example of supporting the arts that you can do on a monthly basis?

Every month, we should feature the work of an artist work in a local community centre. Being a growing Region, we have some of the best new modern designed community centres and each of them can be great places to showcase art. The community centres are accessible and has a lot of traffic and thus can open the door for discovery and appreciation of artist's work

With many jobs being developed in media arts related fields, what are your plans to ensure talent stays in the region instead of moving to innovative hubs like Waterloo, Vancouver and Silicon Valley?

The city of Markham has already a great reputation as a high tech capital that is home to many of the corporation's headquarters. We should promote the message to startups and other companies looking to relocate similar to how we pitched for the new Amazon HQ, that the talent is in our region because we have the high tech capital located in York Region. We should also promote that our Region is one of the best places for raising a family and to work. Compare to places like Vancouver, our region is still affordable and we are only within 30 minutes of one of the largest cities in North America for entertainment, major league sports and arts which no other area can offer these combined qualities.

How will you contribute to growth of the arts in the future for the next generation of artists?

We should learn from other cities like Hong Kong who has always had a reputation as being a place of finance and it will be the last city anyone thinks of for culture and arts. It takes a bold move by the city of Hong Kong to allocated 40 hectares of land to create a new Cultural District. In the York Region, we don't have to take such a bold step (though it will be nice) but let's create a similar facility like the M+ Arts Pavilion where they can

feature each month an exhibition of a Markham artist. I am a partner JET, a design firm that won the International Competition to design this M+ Pavilion facility so I know about the project first hand and have a place for young artists to showcase their work in a professional setting will ensure we can contribute to the growth of the arts for the future generations.

INTRINSIC VALUE:

What municipal arts and culture events/programming do you attend and support, and have you purchased work created by local artists?

Yes I have acquired artworks by local artists and encourage local artists to get involved in various community events to showcase their work. I attend performances at the Markham Theatre as well as visit the Frederick Varley Art Gallery Museums. I also support my Chinese community's arts and culture scene by founding an Asian Culture magazine called Asianwave and for the past 15 years, Asianwave has featured various artists in the community.

PLATFORM:

In your list of the ten top priorities of your platform, where would supporting the arts place on your list? Why there?

Arts have been part of my upbringing and professional career for as long as I can remember so no matter what my platform items are, the arts will already be inherently part of focus. For example in my platform for bringing subways across Markham, naturally the architecture of the stations need to be designed to the highest artistic standards and inside these subway stations will naturally be opportunities for local artists to produce works of arts in the station walls etc.

Arts and culture are a barometer of the health of a community, town, or city. How will you profile/give a place to arts and culture in your municipal structure, strategic planning, marketing and reporting of achievements?

Unlike most of our candidates, with my architecture background, I think I bring to council a genuine sincere appreciation for arts and culture so I will definitely make a place for the arts in everything I do.

What kind of municipal policy would you propose to encourage artists to be able to work and live in your municipality?

I find young artists really need the exposure for their work and we should have policies that can make it easier for an artist to focus on their work rather than spending their time to market and promote their work. Perhaps there can be ways for corporations to sponsor artists to enable grants or financial assistance to support artists. Also instead of the unusual 1% for the arts policy, why not 2% (or more).

SPACE:

How will you ensure that artists in your municipality receive affordable space to create and showcase their work?

The only way is to create a building that can be a destination to see artists work in a professional setting and opened to the public. The studios can be a section that is part of this building where spaces can be affordable (through corporate donations support offsetting the cost of the rent) and these studios can be opened to the public to see the artists do their work perhaps on the weekends and make this a cultural destination in Markham!

What would it take for a cultural centre to be created in Markham - an affordable space for creating, collaborating and presenting visual and performing arts?

This is exactly what I am talking about, we need to create a place for artists so that there is not only a home for creating, collaborating and presenting the arts but more important it is a key cultural destination for the public to come and physically support the arts. After being in the architecture industry for 20 years since graduating, I can definitely help to bring such a project to reality. What it will take is the city or Region to provide a piece of land suitable for the complex and we can bring on corporate and private donors and get this culture centre built.

How do you envision the inclusion of local art in the public realm?

There simply needs to be a conscious effort to include local artist's works into the public. For example we have many playgrounds, which can be amazing places to display a local sculpture's artwork...why don't we see more forms of the arts in the parks and public spaces like community centres we build?!

EDUCATION:

Where do you see arts education fitting into your electoral platform - in school programming, health programs and/or community programs?

Arts education is very important to me and this definitely starts at an early age in school programmings and community programs. The reason why many are not aware of the arts is because they have simply not been exposed to the arts and culture and we need to make an effort to promote and educate the public more!

FUNDING:

Do you believe that it's vital to have municipal granting programs to fund local artists and arts organizations to create and present work in your municipality? If so, how will you advocate for this funding?

Yes, funding local artists is essential, this type of funding I will like to see the city invite various corporate sponsorships to offer assistance so we can reach as many artists as possible.

There is a noticeable gap between arts spaces (studio, exhibition, performing, etc.) for emerging and professional artists in York Region, making it challenging for artists to stay in the area while growing their professions. What do you think the municipality's role is in funding spaces for emerging to mid-career artists?

A city's role is key and needs to nurture the talent in the city and provide talented artists the space necessary to produce their best work.

Will you implement a municipal budget for arts-based funding for artists living and working in Markham? If so, how? If not, why not?

I think we have to look at the City's overall budget and make sure that we can have allocate a reasonable amount for art-based funding. If extra funding is required, I think we have get the corporate partners to help out.