

## March 19, 2018 Council Meeting

My name is Sarah Gibeault. I am a professional artist based in Peterborough and a member of the Ad Hoc Arts Committee. I am here to speak on **Item 22 - The New Property Tax Class, General Committee Report no. 7 in tonight's meeting, that City Staff report back to Council on the potential to create a new property tax class for Creative Co-Location Facilities and other methods to reduce the property tax burden for arts and cultural hubs that would currently be captured under a commercial or industrial property designation.**

The Ad Hoc Arts Committee advocates for the arts community and creates initiatives to raise the profile of the arts for the public, as well as opportunities for artists to present their work in visual arts, performance, film, music and literature.

In association with the contemporary gallery, Evans Contemporary, we created and host the First Friday Art Crawl. Every month for the last two years this successful event has drawn hundreds of people from all sectors of the community, as well as from out of town, benefitting for-profit galleries, businesses and restaurants in the Entertainment District of Hunter St.

The Art Crawl is funded entirely by artists both financially and through their unpaid labour.

This event and other art-centric initiatives would not be possible without the availability of multiple affordable, downtown spaces like those in the Commerce Building, which houses many non-profit galleries and artist studios.

It is difficult to convey the intangible benefits that the Art Crawl and the presence of a cohesive downtown arts community bring to Peterborough:

- the educational and entertainment value of free public access to art presentations from Europe, the U.S. and Canada;
- increased traffic, attraction of new markets and boosted sales to adjacent businesses (retailers Watson & Lou say their sales double on First Fridays);
- a positive image for the downtown that contradicts the narrative that it is unsafe;
- over \$5000 a year in donations to the Crossroads Womens Shelter;
- a tourist draw;
- animation of run down spaces and neighbourhoods;
- a healthy symbiotic relationship with nearby restaurants, bars and cafes;
- engagement with youth in a positive, all ages environment;
- exposure and sales of art for local artists;
- mentoring of younger artists;
- alternative, affordable venues in which to exhibit or perform

We want to shed some light on the precarious situation of the arts community in general and specifically on the arts hub tax break that Council is considering.

We have watched the unfolding situation at 401 Richmond, for which the City of Toronto has recently created a special property tax category in response to the costs of keeping an arts hub alive where real estate prices have become inflated and unsustainable.

401 Richmond itself was purchased during a real estate recession by the Zeidler family, who acted for years as benefactors to the arts by charging below market value rent and absorbing property tax hikes that eventually were about to triple.

However, Peterborough has no comparable benefactor at this time and it is unlikely any of our local artists could afford space at the rates of 401 Richmond.

As you are undoubtedly aware, Peterborough is losing affordable spaces in the downtown, as it undergoes a process similar to Toronto of gentrification and densification. Incidentally, as artists are forced out of an area through rising rents, so are those in need of affordable housing.

It would seem a no-brainer to designate the Commerce Building or other places with multiple studios and arts-related activities as arts hubs. However, while such a tax break creates a benefit for the developer or owner, it only indirectly benefits the arts community, who likely have no input into the use, layout or evolution of the building.

Without a clear definition or criteria for occupancy, tenancy could vary widely between commercial artists, designers, galleries, architecture firms, arts non-profits, etc. who could afford a market value rent, and our practicing artists who can barely afford the less than \$1 a sq. ft. per month they currently pay in the Commerce Building.

Council must consider the needs of the non-commercial artist and the importance of designating and retaining spaces that allow the arts community to survive for the long term. We urge consultation with the downtown arts community before developing a strategy to support existing and future artist hubs.