



**Saskatchewan
Arts Alliance**

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August 6th, 2026

Her Worship Mayor Cynthia Block Members of City Council
City of Saskatoon 222 3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK
S7K 0J5

Re: Percent for Public Art Policy (C10-025) – Governance and Priorities Committee, August 12, 2026

Dear Mayor Block and Members of Council,

My name is Em Ironstar, and I am the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (SAA). The SAA acts to ensure the lively existence and continued growth of the arts and cultural industries in Saskatchewan. We are a membership-based organization and a collective voice for arts organizations, arts workers, and artists across the province, representing over 60 arts organizations with a collective reach of 8,000 individuals.

We collaborate closely with arts organizations, artists, arts workers, governments, and arts funding agencies. We initiate and lead research on the economic, social, and cultural contributions of our members and the arts sector. The SAA is the only organization in Saskatchewan devoted to supporting in-depth primary research on our provincial arts community. We are a non-partisan, sector-wide advocate for public and private support for the arts, artists, and arts education, and we work to advance policies and practices that improve conditions for the arts and cultural industries.

We're writing regarding Item 7.1 on the August 12 Governance and Priorities Committee agenda: Councillor Donauer's Notice of Motion recommending that City Council remove the Civic Capital Project Public Art Funding Stream from the City's Public Art Policy.

We want to be direct about what we're asking and what we're not asking. We are not writing to defend Modern Erratics or any other single artwork or commission. Questions about cost, process, and public communication on individual projects are fair questions, and it's reasonable for Council and residents to ask them. What we're asking the Committee to protect is the funding stream itself, the mechanism that has allowed Saskatoon to integrate art into civic infrastructure for over a decade.



We also want to be precise about what this motion would actually do. The Civic Capital Project Public Art Funding Stream is not a discretionary line item that funds occasional projects. It's the requirement that any designated civic capital project with a City contribution of \$5 million or more, new libraries, recreation facilities, bridges, and major street or streetscape work, integrate a public art element. Removing this stream doesn't just respond to one contentious commission. It ends the requirement that public art be part of Saskatoon's major infrastructure going forward, for every future project this policy would otherwise apply to.

A few facts worth having in front of you as this motion is considered:

- The funding stream applies only to designated civic capital projects with a City contribution of \$5 million or more, and caps the public art contribution at one per cent of the capital budget, to a maximum of \$500,000 per project.
- Modern Erratics, the commission that has prompted this motion, came in at approximately 0.79 percent of its capital project budget, under the funding stream's own ceiling.
- This is not a uniquely Saskatoon mechanism. Percent for art policies operate in Calgary, Edmonton, Ottawa, Toronto, and cities across Canada, as a standard tool for integrating design and public space investment into large-scale civic construction, not as discretionary or unusual spending.
- The public art funded through this stream is council-approved at the capital budget stage, and individual commissions go through a juried, resident-and-artist advisory committee process, not an unchecked administrative decision.

We'd also point out that Council already holds the tool this motion assumes doesn't exist. Under the current policy, Council specifically approves, at the budget stage, which capital projects the public art contribution applies to, project by project. The \$310,000 allocated to the Material Recovery Centre's public art component, which ultimately funded Modern Erratics, was itself approved by Council as a discrete decision in 2021. If Council has concerns about how a future project's art commission is approached, those concerns can be addressed at this same approval stage without removing the funding stream for every other designated project going forward.

We also want to note, for clarity, that the public art allocation tied to Modern Erratics was approved as part of the Material Recovery Centre's capital budget in 2021, well before this year's property tax increase. It is not new or additional spending connected to the



current budget conversation, and we think residents are owed that context as this motion is debated.

We understand Council has heard real concern from residents, and we think that's worth taking seriously. However, we'd ask the Committee to consider whether the concern is actually with the funding stream itself, or with how this particular commission was communicated and implemented. Mayor Block has publicly said this policy needs review, not elimination. We'd urge the Committee to align with that more measured position rather than recommend outright removal of the mechanism to Council.

If the underlying concern is about implementation, we'd suggest the Committee direct a review toward strengthening the program rather than ending it: increasing regular, transparent public calls for artists; building a mentorship component into major commissions that pairs Saskatchewan artists with experienced practitioners, so opportunities grow the local talent pool rather than simply cycling through it; investing in adequate staffing and administrative support for the Public Art Program; ensuring consistent maintenance and stewardship of the growing public art collection; and improving communication with Council and the public about how commissions are selected and funded.

We respectfully ask that the Committee not recommend Councillor Donauer's motion to Council. Removing this funding stream would end a mechanism that has shaped public space across this city for over a decade, based on the response to a single commission, rather than an evaluation of the policy's track record as a whole.

We would be glad to provide further information, connect Council with Saskatoon artists and arts organizations directly affected by this policy, and we plan to speak to this motion at the August 12 meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Em Ironstar
Executive Director
Saskatchewan Arts Alliance