

The Arts Council of Ladysmith and District was born from a collective of artists and arts enthusiasts 19 years ago. As we gained momentum, we established ourselves in a historic building fondly referred to as the Waterfront Machine Shop, owned by the Town of Ladysmith. During the 13 years that we lived and thrived in this space, our nonprofit organization raised funds and invested more than \$300,000 to renovate the building and gave the community an accessible place to explore, share and celebrate our local arts and culture.

It was within those walls that countless exhibitions, classes, workshops, festivals, educational talks, and concerts were planned and hosted. With over 15,000 people participating annually, our space was a vibrant rainbow of diversity, and an artistic heartbeat for the community.

But one day, in September of 2019, a short while after a powerful storm blew a portion of the roof off the building, we found ourselves upended again when we were relocated to a vacant school so our no-place-like-home Waterfront Machine Shop could undergo seismic upgrades. We were told we could expect to return home within 18 months. At this point, COVID-19 also arrived.

Despite the ongoing uncertainty of our location, we've been resilient and resourceful in continuing to develop the arts in our region. We completed a research project with support from the Canada Council for the Arts. We bounced between online and in-person activities according to changing pandemic protocols. We taught teachers to engage differently in their work and helped them feel comfortable with digital technology. We were the first Island arts council to hold a virtual fine art show. We chased innovation and hired staff that are digitally savvy, and then taught over 400 artists how to leverage digital tools.

Skip to present day, two and half years later, and we have been notified that our current landlords will be wanting the school building back. Between the pandemic and the school's out-of-the-way location, the number of visitors and participants has dropped significantly. We now understand that it will be years for the Town to get new grants to finish the building restoration. This leaves us in a difficult position, especially with next-to-no commercial rental space available in the area.

The community needs an arts council that is in a physical position to offer a welcoming, inclusive, accessible space for visitors and residents alike to create, appreciate, and support the arts in our region.

Today, it all comes down to this: we need a new space for the next seven to ten years as we continue to press for the rejuvenation of the Waterfront Machine Shop.

Home is where the art is!

Because Ladysmith is our home, and we love where we live, we want to hear from you, the people, who have ardently supported us and kept us going.

Where will the arts live in our community?

Send us your ideas by email to info@ladysmitharts.ca by April 15, 2022.

Please also keep an eye on www.ladysmitharts.ca for updates and ways to get involved in this project.

With hopeful hearts,
Your friends at the
Arts Council of Ladysmith and District



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