



## **A Municipal Cultural Plan for the Township of Springwater Key Findings and Strategic Directions Report**

June, 2012



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Municipal Cultural Plan

The Township of Springwater joins leading municipalities in developing this Municipal Cultural Plan to identify, promote and leverage cultural resources to support economic and broader community development objectives. The municipality has a rich existing cultural fabric comprised of festivals, artisans, its rich history and natural heritage, the Springwater Cultural Plan must provide a targeted strategy and implementation plan to capitalize on these assets and to improve the local economy and enhance quality of life throughout the municipality.

The Township's *Economic Development Strategy*, prepared by Miller Dickinson Blais in 2010 identified tourism as one of six key economic sectors which could drive new investment in the municipality, and recommended that the Township focus on better identifying, promoting and leveraging its tourism assets. The municipality's rich natural heritage, recreational opportunities and strong cultural heritage resources are significant components of the municipality's tourism product. As such, a Municipal Cultural Plan is an ideal strategy to help implement these directives.

*Purpose:* The overall purpose of the Plan is to leverage the cultural resources of the community to inform community development decisions, initiatives and investment.

More specific objectives include:

- Identifying key partners and stakeholders involved in culture in the community;
- Identifying connections and/or gaps with respect to the Township and local organizations and groups regarding culture in the municipality;
- Identifying opportunities for groups to collaborate, support and enhance culture;
- Identifying cultural strengths in the community and outlining the importance of cultural planning within the municipality;
- Identifying a sustainable long-term vision for the Township's cultural planning;
- Developing policies and action strategies to implement the community's vision for culture;
- Preparing a short and long term list of recommended strategies with timelines for the Plan's implementation;
- Better understanding the role culture currently plays in local tourism; and
- Better understanding the impact culture has and could have on the local economy.



The Springwater Cultural Plan must increase awareness of culture's economic importance to the future of the community. The Plan must also broaden recognition of Springwater as a creative and vibrant municipality where the cultural sector is valued and fostered as a vital component of future prosperity and community well-being.

## 1.2 The Planning Process to Date

The planning process was initiated in January 2012 and will conclude in July 2012 with a presentation to Council. The complete planning process is illustrated in Figure 2.



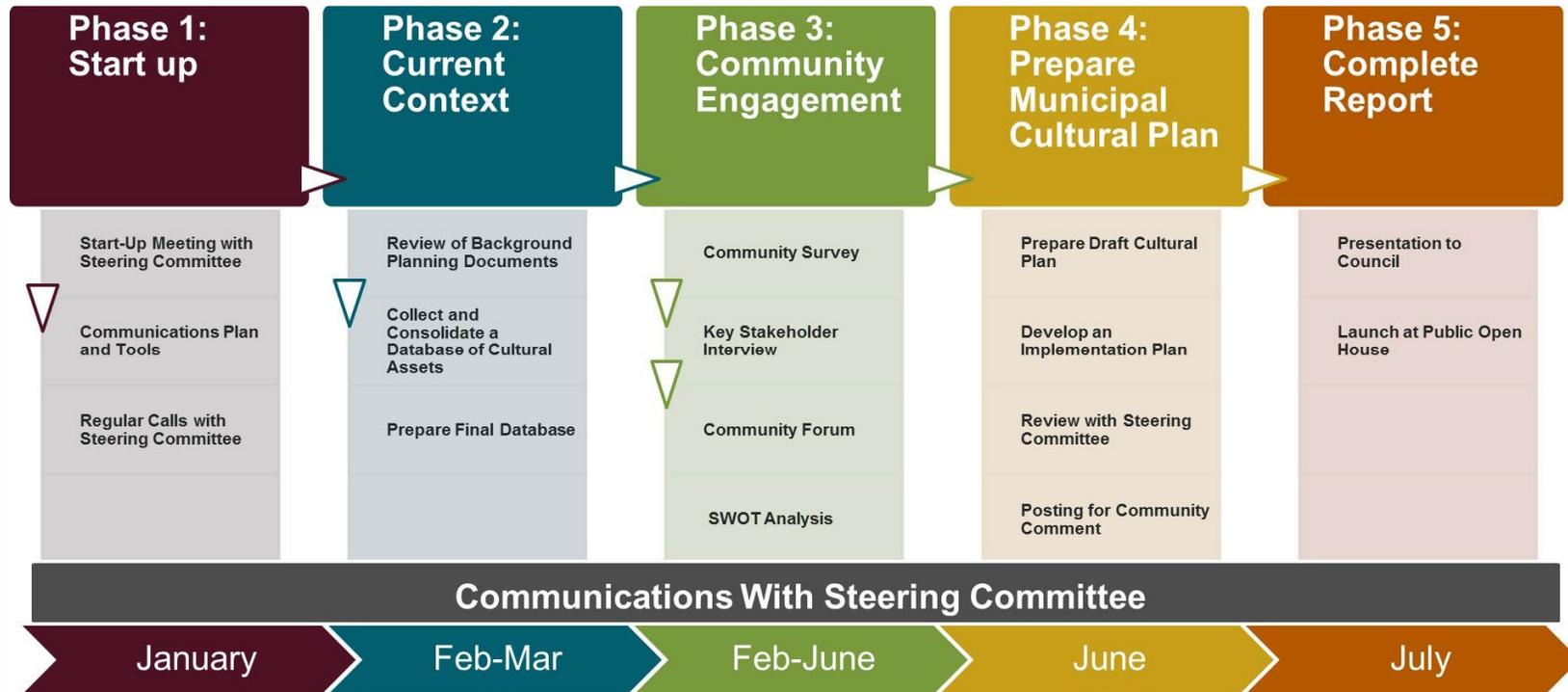
FIGURE 1: OPENING DAY CROWDS AT THE SPRINGWATER- ELMVALE FARMERS' MARKET

## 1.3 Purpose of the Key Findings and Strategic Directions Report

The purpose of this report is to summarize and synthesize the findings to date from the research and community engagement components of the planning process. The intent of this report is to define the community's ideas about culture and identify cultural assets within Springwater, as well as define a set of Strategic Directions to guide the preparation of the final Municipal Cultural Plan.



FIGURE 2: THE PLANNING PROCESS





## 2 The Planning Context

One of the defining features of municipal cultural planning is integrating culture and cultural resources into existing municipal plans, policies and priorities. The question is how can the cultural plan ‘add value’ and help to add culture into existing plans and policies. The goal is to identify new strategies and actions to advance economic and broader community development agendas.

This section of the report reviews a range of core plans in both the Township and the County of Simcoe that define a planning context for the development of the Township of Springwater Cultural Plan.

### 2.1 Township of Springwater

#### 2.1.1 Council Strategic Plan 2010-2014

A guiding document that sets the priorities for the Township of Springwater, the *Council Strategic Plan 2010-2014* sets out the vision for the community for the next four years. Largely focused on promoting the Township as a unique community with many opportunities, the plan outlines some key work initiatives that are relevant to the cultural plan:

- Implement the *Springwater Economic Development Strategy*
- Further develop the Springwater brand
- Promote Elmvale’s main street
- Manage local growth
- Continue to develop sustainable infrastructure
- Continue support of community events and partnerships

#### 2.1.2 The Township of Springwater Official Plan (1998)

*The Township of Springwater’s Official Plan (OP)* received Provincial approval in February 1998 and OMB approval in October 1998. The Township is currently awaiting the finalization of the *County of Simcoe Official Plan* to begin the review of the *Township Official Plan*.

Several provisions of the *1998 Official Plan* are relevant to the Springwater Cultural Plan, in particular the following three sections:



- **Section 4 - Economic Development:** Due to the nature of the development in the Township of Springwater the *Official Plan* states that it encourages greater home-based businesses in order to encourage a greater live and work ratio among the residents. The vast majority of creative cultural enterprises fall into the category of small and medium size enterprises (SME), many of them home-based. This section of the *Official Plan* also highlights the importance of the municipality's heritage resources as encouragement of tourist commercial development. Visual attractiveness of economic nodes is also promoted through building design and façade improvement.
- **Section 7 - Community Design Policies:** The Township recognizes the value of physical form on the social, economic and environmental integrity of the community. The design objectives encourage integrating mixed use facilities and creating pedestrian friendly spaces throughout the developed nodes of the municipality. The policy promotes the retention and enhancement of historic buildings and a variety of important natural heritage features to promote quality of life.
- **Section 27: Heritage Policies:** The maintenance of the municipality 's cultural heritage resources is placed in the context of the potential impact of new development and redevelopment and a concern related to protecting and maintaining the municipality's character and identity. The policy seeks to prevent the demolition, destruction and inappropriate alteration or use of cultural heritage resources. The policy also states that Council will consult with the Heritage Committee regarding a variety of cultural heritage issues that arise in the municipality. Public engagement and consultation areas are highlighted as pivotal to making heritage policy decisions and there is commitment from Council to support the preparation of a Heritage Master Plan to identify and map heritage assets throughout the municipality.

The *Official Plan* clearly supports cultural heritage within the Township of Springwater. The 1998 document pays less attention to the arts and cultural community which was not identified, even in Section 4 - Economic Development. The Springwater Cultural Plan will assist in giving greater profile to arts and cultural resources and creative cultural enterprises in planning and economic development.

### 2.1.3 Township of Springwater: Economic Development Strategy (2010)

In 2010 the Township of Springwater adopted its first *Economic Development Strategy* developed by Millier Dickinson Blais that outlined a number of goals for the community in the next five years; to include:

- Investment readiness
- Pursue partnerships and outreach in the community
- Effective marketing and promotion of Springwater



- Growth in key industries
- Enhance capacity of community infrastructure

This strategy provides guidance and clear actionable steps the Township of Springwater can take to continue to develop the local economy.

This document highlighted that nearly 33.9% of the municipality's labour force is employed in professional occupations and are therefore part of the 'creative class'. The document stresses the importance of promoting Springwater's natural beauty and outdoor experiences, in addition to heritage and cultural resources, to attract greater numbers of creative class workers. Jobs in the creative cultural occupations are a sub-set of this larger definition of the creative class, and among the fastest growing segments of that creative class in many jurisdictions.

In addition to the growing number of creative sector employment, three of the high potential industries highlighted were tourism, professional and technical services. Potential tourism development in the area is connected with the close proximity to Wasaga Beach, as well as the Muskoka region and the City of Barrie. However, the strength of the agriculture in the area, connected with value added through locally produced fresh foods such as maple syrup production and the Maple Syrup Festival, were also noted.

Culture, in the form of natural and cultural heritage, is portrayed as a strong economic asset throughout *Springwater's Economic Development Strategy*. By developing a Springwater Cultural Plan, the Township is identifying its understanding of the economic importance of culture to future prosperity.

## 2.1.4 Township of Springwater Tourism and Business Directories

The *Township of Springwater's Tourism Directory* is divided into eight categories including:

1. Accommodations
2. Sports and Adventure
3. Arts and Culture
4. Farms and Markets
5. Festivals and Events
6. Nature and Recreation
7. Restaurants
8. Retail



The information provided through this Tourism Directory is complemented by the Springwater Directory. Together these directories have been an invaluable source of information in undertaking the cultural mapping component of the larger Springwater Cultural Plan.

This directory is also useful in assisting in the development of a cultural mapping asset list and can act as one of many lists that will be compiled to develop a comprehensive cultural mapping project. By highlighting arts and culture particularly and by already providing key information about cultural assets the Township's tourism directory is a strong tool in cultural development for the area.

### 2.1.5 Trails Master Plan (2008)

Intended to guide the future planning and development of an interconnected trails network in the municipality, the *Trails Master Plan* outlines opportunities and issues for the Township as it moves forward to creating new opportunities for motorized and non-motorized trail use. With 8 distinct routes making up approximately 50km of trails, the Township already has significant trail infrastructure for public use. The current trails infrastructure also presents a number of opportunities for expansion and the municipality has a number of natural and heritage areas that can be of interest to the community and visitors.

The development of the trails network will require leadership in terms of development and management, user-conflicts, and monitoring. The plan outlines a clear role for the Township, which will undertake the bulk of the plan's implementation and management roles, as well as coordinate the Trails Development Committee as well as the other partnerships who will oversee some elements of the trails expansion and improvement process.

The *Trails Master Plan* demonstrates a clear commitment to the development of the trails network in the municipality to provide more comprehensive recreational opportunities in the community.

## 2.2 County of Simcoe

While the focus of the Municipal Cultural Plan is based on the Township, planning cannot take place outside the context of plans and strategies of the County of Simcoe.



## 2.2.1 County of Simcoe Economic Development Strategic Plan (2011)

The County of Simcoe adopted an *Economic Development Strategy* in 2011, also prepared by Millier Dickinson Blais. The County is home to a number of growing communities, including the Town of Collingwood and a number of smaller towns and townships. The economic base of many of these lower-tier municipalities is agriculture and agri-business, manufacturing, tourism and the public sector, which has a number of large employers in the County. During the course of developing the *Economic Development Strategy*, several themes emerged from the stakeholder and community engagement relevant to the Springwater Cultural Plan, and to the effective integration of plans and policies with the County.

- Create a clear mandate that endorses for regional economic development cooperation to ensure that the many economic development players in the region are not duplicating services and meeting business needs.
- Provide a compelling and coordinated marketing plan to guide promotion efforts for the County. As the local Regional Tourism Organization 7 develops, there will be increased funding for regional marketing and promotional efforts. Efforts need to shift from pass-through tourism marketing to destination development marketing and promotion, using Collingwood as a model.
- Provide strategic support to small and medium sized enterprises.
- Support growth in regional tourism, agricultural and recreational tourism and cultural development. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized the wide range of unique tourism and cultural assets, and the growth that this sector has seen in the past decade.

*The County Economic Development Strategic Plan* outlines an existing regional strength in culture as well as significant cultural assets located throughout the region. The cultural plan will consider the assets and priorities outlined in the *County Economic Development Strategic Plan*, and ensure its recommendations are in line with the objectives.

## 2.2.2 County of Simcoe Draft Trails Strategy

*The County of Simcoe Draft Trails Strategy* addresses the need for the coordination and development of an area-wide trail network, as well as the need to develop a Trails Committee that will provide a voice for trails activity and advocacy. The County historically had more than 500km of railway lines, which, now abandoned can serve well as recreational trails. The Trans Canada Trail is also in development, and several existing trails will feed into the new trail as it moves north and west. As a result of government investments, the County has significant trail infrastructure.



The purpose of this strategy is to continue the development of local trails, develop trail amenities, and to create a vibrant trails network for the tourist population. In order to do so, the network of trails requires clear signage, trail surfacing, attention to natural and historical details, consistent maintenance, and safe bridges and boardwalks. Using maps, promotional materials and websites will further cement the trails network as a key attraction in the region.

The *Draft Trails Strategy* demonstrates a clear understanding of the economic impact and social value of the County Trails network, and the importance of managing this cultural resource.



## 3 Community Engagement

Community engagement is vitally important to the development of any municipal cultural plan. The engagement process gathers community insights related to strengths and weaknesses in cultural resources in the community. Ideas and input gathered through engagement provide critically important insights into the needs, values and aspirations of the community as they relate to cultural development.

The community engagement process began in March 2012 and was completed on April 30, 2012. Approximately 150 community members provided their ideas and input into helping shape the Springwater Cultural Plan. In the experience of the consultants, this is a strong level of participation compared to other communities of similar population size and circumstances. Participants provided input through community surveys, stakeholder interviews, a community forum and a youth forum. The positions and recommendations made here are all community commentary that has informed the plan where appropriate.

### 3.1 Stakeholder Interviews

As part of the community engagement process, 15 key stakeholders were interviewed, either by telephone or in person. Participants were provided with an interview guide prior to interviews outlining a series of questions intended to ‘jump start’ rather than control the topics of discussions.

#### *Question 1: What is already working well in culture in Springwater? What strengths can we build on?*

Springwater was acknowledged as home to many of the County of Simcoe’s anchor cultural institutions including the Simcoe County Museum, and the County Archives. Regionally important events such as the Elmvale Fall Fair and Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival were also cited by most interviewees. The municipality is home to many of the County’s significant natural assets, including the County Forests and the Minesing Wetlands. The result is an overall positive view of the strengths of the municipality’s cultural assets.

Township staff and political leadership were seen as one of the most important assets related to Springwater’s cultural development. A number of interviewees commented on the Township’s overall guidance and forward looking perspective as key to advancing cultural development. Support for cultural groups, such as the Springwater Guild of Artists & Artisans, was seen as a positive step. The Township’s Heritage Committee was also noted as an important and effective asset by



several respondents. The Township's implementation of the Ontario Heritage Property Tax Relief Program offering a 40% tax rebate to support ongoing maintenance and preservation of designated heritage properties was applauded as a strong step in strengthening heritage preservation in the municipality. Beyond built heritage, steps taken toward preserving trees, trails and other natural assets was also seen as important and progressive.

### *Question 2: What are we not doing or not doing well that should be a priority for the Cultural Plan?*

Respondents see the lack of a single unifying downtown as a challenge that undermined a sense of collective community identity. The 'pockets' of communities (or 'community of communities') that span the municipality need to be connected with way-finding signage, community asset identification, and a coherent brand and marketing plan that would ensure residents as well as visitors are aware of the area's cultural assets and attractions. Respondents noted that the municipality is at the centre of a strong tourist area. However, despite its central location, visitors are seen as bypassing the area and not stopping to visit the community. Visibility and signage were identified as potential strategies to address this problem.

Currently, the Township is seen as promoting individual events but there is a shift needed to marketing larger and more integrated visitor experiences. Marketing and advertising were mentioned as important for supporting local vendors and local food producers. There were calls for strengthening opportunities for local purchasing, such as a local food tour. Some current festivals and events were seen to be in need of 'refreshment' through the engagement of a younger perspective. There was frequent mention of the challenge posed by an aging volunteer base and the need to recruit a younger generation to sustain cultural activities in the community.

Respondents felt that the cultural mapping process was one of the most important elements of the Springwater Cultural Plan. Mapping will help identify the many pockets of cultural assets. It will also help address the key challenge of defining Springwater as a distinct place and making residents and visitors more aware of its cultural offerings.

### *Question 3: How well do you think the economic importance of culture to the region is generally understood?*

The undertaking of the Springwater Cultural Plan signalled a growing understanding among Council and Staff related to the economic importance of culture. However, the general public in Springwater does not have a strong understanding of culture's economic importance. Many interviewed saw the Springwater Cultural Plan as an opportunity to showcase culture's value to the local economy. At all levels, there was an identified need to be better equipped with data that reflects the social and economic impact of culture in the community.



Local cultural organizations and tourism stakeholders were seen as promoting the economic importance of cultural assets and tourism attractions in the community. The development of SUMAC, a network of cultural organizations, has provided leadership in promoting a strong united voice for cultural groups and opportunities across the county, as well as strengthening collective marketing strategies.

*Question 4: What is the biggest opportunity the plan presents for Springwater?*

Most importantly, those interviewed saw the plan as an opportunity to validate the importance of culture in the Township of Springwater. The Springwater Cultural Plan would further solidify a cultural agenda by setting a long-term shared vision for cultural development in the municipality that all cultural stakeholders could work towards. In terms of Township roles and responsibilities, several stated they did not believe the Township should be planning and delivering events. Rather the focus should be more of a community development role, facilitating networks and helping to build the collective capacity of the cultural sector to address its own needs and opportunities.

The process of developing the Springwater Cultural Plan was seen as having value, providing an opportunity to bring many cultural groups and individuals together and engaging them in the formulation of a shared cultural vision and set of strategic directions and priorities. Others emphasized the importance of the Township supporting the accessibility and promotion of the final Springwater Cultural Plan. It was suggested that hard copies be distributed to key community spaces like the community centres and libraries.

*Question 5: If additional resources could be found to support cultural development what should the number one priority be?*

Once again, way finding signage and strategies for better connecting the various communities in the municipality were identified as a key investment for further developing the community's cultural assets. Stronger signage and way finding are part of the larger challenge of building a more integrated and cohesive identity and unified brand for all of Springwater. Respondents felt the need for stronger integration of culture into the new brand that was developed in early 2011 (rather than developing a new brand). While the municipality is relatively new, the Springwater Cultural Plan was seen as a way to give context and provide a historical grounding for the community, while still emphasizing that the fact Springwater is a 'community of communities'.

There must be an allocation of resources – human and financial - to implement the Plan. The Township has existing human and financial resources that could be better connected. Regardless of who takes on the role, a staff person who



coordinates the Springwater Cultural Plan's actions was seen as essential. Specific recommendations related to new investment included:

- Investments in the rail trail to better connect Springwater's many communities; natural heritage is one of Springwater's primary attractions that requires better promotion and signage.
- Storyboarding along trails, canoe routes and throughout the community can help leverage these assets and emphasize Springwater's history and heritage.
- Respondents also noted the lack of services in some communities, especially in the case of libraries. Some respondents noted a central library (located next to the Museum and Archives) would provide a central focus for the community, while others argued for investments in libraries on a community-by-community basis.
- The creation of a flexible facility or space (one interviewee referred to it as a cultural 'black box') to serve many purposes such as performance hosting and a gathering space for young entrepreneurs could serve community development and address a range of cultural needs.
- Providing business training and seed money for young entrepreneurs was raised by one individual interviewed. A program currently in place in Barrie was cited in which young entrepreneurs were given a small amount of seed money to start new enterprises, together with working spaces in unoccupied buildings in the downtown of the smaller communities.
- Currently many of the profits from the municipality's stronger events go to charity; one interviewee felt consideration should be given to reinvesting a portion of these revenues to grow existing events, or to launch new events focusing on municipality-wide themes and assets.

## 3.2 Community Visioning Exercise

The Township of Springwater held a Community Visioning Event on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, with 36 people in attendance drawn from a cross-section of municipal, community and business stakeholders. After an initial presentation, participants were broken out into smaller discussion groups. The groups were presented with four questions.

### *Question 1: What are the most important cultural assets in community?*

Springwater has a rich and diverse array of assets in its community. The seven tables identified many of the same assets, with some differences. The list below incorporates the most prevalent responses to this question.



**Natural Beauty** – The municipality’s natural heritage and geography were widely recognized as important heritage and cultural assets. The County Forests, easy access to water and waterways, the Minesing Wetlands and other natural amenities offer strong recreational opportunities. One group characterized this as a ‘Culture of Play’ which was felt to be an essential ingredient in shaping community pride and identity.

**Culture Organizations** – Participants identified a growing number of artists, and arts and culture organizations as important cultural assets in Springwater. The recently established Springwater Guild of Artist and Artisans is a new collective voice for the visual arts community; the performing arts are represented by initiatives and organizations such as the SPACY Theatre Program, Snow Valley Theatre Arts, and the Local Ghosts programming. Cultural organizations, such as the local heritage groups, Women’s Institute and other organizations are also seen as contributing to the cultural life of the community.

**History and Heritage** – Many participants pointed to Springwater’s rich heritage and history as one of its most important cultural assets. Historical landmarks, such as the Nine Mile Portage Heritage Trail, the Fort Willow Heritage Site, and the Simcoe County Museum and Archives (not a Township asset, but located in the municipality) as major assets for visitors and residents to explore the history of the region.

**Established Community Events** – Participants pointed to several strong existing events that enjoy strong attendance and are highly valued in the community. The Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival and the Elmvale Fall Fair were among the most often mentioned. Both events were seen as offering authentic community experiences.

*Question #2: Write a short phrase that describes your vision for a culturally rich Township of Springwater.*

- Exposure which showcases our uniqueness.



FIGURE 3: COMMUNITY FORUM



- Value the past, celebrate the present, and invest in the future.
- Connecting people with Springwater Township and its heritage and foundations of the past which will empower them to embrace the diverse culture of the future.
- Showcases the arts community, preserves and enhances our natural and historical culture.
- The celebration of the creativity, the dynamics, connecting people, vital.

*Question #3: What are some big ideas or strategies needed to advance this vision? What would the top five priorities be?*

### **Connect Local Assets**

While the municipality has many strong cultural assets, a lack of connections hamper their development. There are opportunities to better link and profile these assets through effective municipality-wide marketing, better signage and way finding tools. Several noted the potential of leveraging the comprehensive trails network throughout the municipality as one means of supporting stronger connectivity. The creation of a cultural map was also seen as a hugely important tool in supporting this objective.

Respondents recognized that the arts community and the Township have taken positive steps towards this goal. The establishment of the Springwater Guild Artists and Artisans and its hosting of a studio tour in the municipality in the autumn of 2012 were cited as indications of moving in the right direction. Stronger marketing and communications that contribute toward a shared vision and more cohesive 'cultural brand' would also support connectivity.

### **The Township's Role in Cultural Development**

There was a strong call for the Township to sustain and potentially expand its leadership role in support of cultural development. The Township's initiative in undertaking the Springwater Cultural Plan is seen as a positive step indicating interest and commitment. There was a call to build on this commitment and to sustain momentum. Among the actions identified for action by the Township were the following;

- Creating a cross-sectoral leadership group or committee to support the implementation of the Springwater Cultural Plan and ongoing cultural development;
- Providing additional municipal staff resources to help facilitate and strengthen communication and collaboration within the cultural community;
- Developing a strong marketing plan/communications plan to promote culture and attract visitors and new residents;



- Providing Township-owned facilities as spaces for cultural activities, and supporting through things such as basic infrastructure improvements (e.g., lighting for parks and public spaces), and
- The provision of long-term support for events to ensure they become financially viable and well-attended.

### **Stronger Coordination of Cultural Groups and Activities**

Coordination is a key theme that emerged across all aspects of the community engagement process. Specific areas of coordination identified included better coordination and scheduling of events, management of volunteers, funding and support. Volunteerism was seen as declining, with future events potentially lacking volunteers to assist in their planning and execution. Specific suggestions and strategies identified included:

- Dedicate Township staff resources to working with cultural groups to facilitate communication and more effective coordination of events, volunteers, etc.;
- Develop an online community calendar or tool to allow organizations to anticipate and plan for upcoming events (and avoid overlapping dates);
- Connect and engage local organizations to facilitate new relationships and collaborative undertakings;
- Leverage the consolidated information on cultural resources to be delivered through cultural mapping findings; and
- Create a comprehensive inventory of current and potential cultural opportunities and challenges.

### **Raise Awareness and Develop the Local Cultural Economy**

Many commented on the need to better educate and communicate the importance of culture to the local economy. It was suggested that better understanding of the economic impacts of cultural resources and events could help drive attendance, support community engagement and, potentially, increase investment. Strategies identified included:

- Encourage and support 'buy local' initiatives;
- Improve community awareness of local cultural assets through better marketing and coordination;
- Encourage school workshops or an 'artists in schools' program that engages youth and provides a clear connection with Springwater culture and heritage;
- Increase the presence of the Township and cultural organizations at local events;
- Create a marketing and cultural awareness campaign locally and partner with media;
- Develop performance measures for the impact of cultural initiatives in order to support further cultural development;
- Lead community discussions and awareness regarding the broader definition of culture and its economic importance; and
- Utilize community spaces as interactive and engaging cultural spaces.



#### *Question #4: What are some of the signs that we are moving in the right direction?*

- Increased number of cultural based businesses;
- Self-sufficient artists and cultural organizations;
- Increased community and tourist participation in unique Springwater events and festivals;
- Revitalized and vibrant community spaces (libraries, downtowns) where artists can engage the community and showcase their work;
- Stronger sense of community with an engaged citizenry;
- The area has a strong reputation as a cultural destination to attract new residents, tourists and investments;
- Improved cultural mapping and awareness of cultural assets.

### 3.3 Community Survey

A community survey was developed and implemented using a survey tool called SurveyMonkey. This survey was advertised on the municipal website as well as through social media networks and local media. Staff members and the project Cultural Advisory Committee distributed emails with survey links among their networks. In total 60 community stakeholders responded.

#### *1. When you think of the Township of Springwater, what is the first thing that comes to mind?*

Once again, respondents highlighted the municipality's rural character and identity as one of their strongest associations. Other frequently-cited images included the municipality's beautiful rural landscapes, open spaces and a peaceful lifestyle. The existence of unique individual villages each with their own character and identities was also a frequent response.

The variety of festivals focussed on the rural and agricultural heritage of each community was also cited by many respondents. The municipality is a rich producer of local and organically grown produce; respondents saw an opportunity to leverage these assets to build a reputation as a hub for local food and cuisine.

#### *2. What are the three most important tangible cultural resources in the municipality for you (e.g., places, facilities, heritage sites, festivals or cultural businesses or enterprises – this can be anything you consider a cultural resource)?*



The most frequently cited responses include:

- Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival and Elmvale Fall Fair
- Public libraries
- Heritage sites
- Trails
- Art shows/festivals/tours
- The Minesing Wetlands
- The Fort Willow site and its history.
- The farming community in general - its heritage buildings, festivals, fresh local food, local markets and fairs, etc.

One respondent noted: "Each village has events like maple syrup festivals, sites such as the Willow Fort and the Portage area, and the Minesing Wetlands, which are an internationally recognized RAMSAR site. All these things help us to celebrate our community."

### *3. What are the three most important intangible cultural resources (e.g., stories or traditions or achievements) that say something important about the unique identity of the area?*

The following five stories were the most frequently identified:

- *Hunter Russell Trail*: The Hunter Russell Trail celebrates the work of a local farmer who helped re-forest the area to protect Willow Creek and reclaim soils which had turned to a dust bowl in the early 1900's. This vision helped to make the community what it is today.
- *Carson Village*: Located in present day Midhurst, Carson Village was an Iroquoian Village from around 1445 consisting of eight longhouses. Excavated in 1988 and 1989, the dig resulted in a large artifact find, which gave insight into the village's culture. Now developed, the site speaks to a time when glacial Lake Algonquin flooded this area and the area's rich aboriginal heritage.
- *The County Forests*: The County Forests originated in Springwater and restored the resiliency of the landscape while also creating a remarkable ecosystem for all to enjoy.
- *Rural/Agricultural Heritage*: The municipality's rural and agricultural heritage is celebrated in the community, with events such as the Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival and the Elmvale Fall Fair. The strong attendance and support for these events are a significant achievement for the community and indicate the importance of the municipality's history.



- *The Nine Mile Portage:* The Nine Mile Portage is a First Nations trail and served as an important military supply line. As a recreational trail, the route now serves to connect the community to Fort Willow, link the past and the present, and connect the urban landscape of Barrie to the natural wonder of the Minesing Wetlands.

#### *4. When you are hosting a guest who has never visited the area, what aspects of the culture in the municipality do you most want them to see?*

Again, many respondents pointed to the municipality's rich natural heritage and resources. Environmental features and trails were highlighted as vehicles to showcase a wide array of natural features in the municipality including the Minesing Wetlands, the rolling farmlands, Willow Creek and the County Forest. Visitors are frequently impressed by how much of the landscape remains forested and like the opportunity to see wildlife.

Others responded that they take visitors to various places in the municipality to buy fresh produce at local road side stands and at farmers markets. Touring individual villages was also a frequent response.

Participants noted that visitors love the history of the area's pioneers and the Huron peoples. Many people visit the Simcoe County Museum which ties many of the elements together. The local zoo was also identified by a number of respondents.

#### *5. Are there cultural programs, activities or facilities not currently available that you would like to see in the municipality that would add to its vitality and quality of life?*

- Rebuilding the elementary and secondary schools, connected by a YMCA-type facility with a community pool. A new library could be included in this plan.
- More local arts programs; a drama studio or performance space.
- Commission possibilities for local artists to create focal points all over the municipality whereby the energy created by the works of art would begin to create buzz about the community
- A live theatre/concert hall.
- Annual trail days/recreational festivals, historical walks, and events featuring family activities to introduce local residents as well as tourists to the rich natural resources of the area.
- A Community Theatre complex built in Elmvale, attached to Elmvale District High School. An excellent example of a similar facility would be the Markham Theatre Complex attached to Unionville School for the Arts, and the Meaford Community Hall. This Community Theatre could have a multi-purpose structure aimed at serving many residents and



visiting performances. Funding can be shared by Springwater Township, Elmvale businesses, and partly by the County of Simcoe as these groups benefit from increased tourism dollars and tax revenue.

- A cultural network to spark ideas and events within the community
- Enhance and improve the existing festivals and fairs. Those traditions are good and strong but there is always a need for more.
- Develop a comprehensive program to improve and enhance existing efforts to preserve built heritage.
- Each village or hamlet has a history. These histories and narratives should be shared through events and curriculum at the local schools.

### *6. What do you see as the greatest opportunities for cultural resources to contribute to economic and community development?*

Opportunities here included:

- The growth of key festivals including the Elmvale Maple Syrup Festival and the Elmvale Fall Fair. Although both of these events do quite well there are opportunities to strengthen and grow them as well as develop a number of other key events throughout the year.
- The creation of additional artistic and performance spaces and facilities.
- The development of a heritage festival to celebrate the history of the entire municipality and its people (not only that of individual villages).
- The growth and development of the Springwater Guild Artists and Artisans
- The retention of young professionals through the development cultural resources that support a great quality of life
- Build agri-culinary tourism and invest in the assets already found in the area.

### *7. What are the biggest challenges to realizing these opportunities?*

Respondents pointed to the need for increased funding to the cultural sector, as well as increased participation from residents in terms of growing the capacity of the cultural community.

Overcoming the fragmentation of the community along village/geographic boundaries was also a strong and frequent response to this question. Since amalgamation, many residents still feel strong connections to individual villages. This fragmentation is preventing Springwater from reaching its full potential. Many respondents noted that a common voice or identity is needed in order to streamline efforts and increase community cooperation and collaboration.



Residents also noted that the municipality has undergone significant residential growth in recent years, and they emphasized the importance of retaining the rural way of life and identity of the municipality in the face of growth pressures.

### *8. What are the five most important words you would want to see in a vision statement for culture in a Municipal Cultural Plan for the Township of Springwater?*

The top 10 most frequently identified words are the following.

- Community
- Embrace
- Heritage
- Diversity
- Accessible
- Build
- Agriculture
- Nature/Natural
- Growth
- Protect

## 3.4 Youth Engagement Survey

A visit to a local high school was organized to seek a youth perspective on some of the issues raised through the survey and other facets of the community engagement process. Discussion was guided by a series of questions.

*Where does culture happen in your community?*

- Festivals (Elmvale Maple Syrup, Elmvale Fall Fair)
- On our Main Streets
- Community Arenas
- Public/Natural Spaces
- Local Hockey and Sports Leagues
- In our schools (concerts, fundraising events)



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Parks and Trails</li> <li>■ Everywhere</li> <li>■ Farmers' and Flea Markets</li> <li>■ In our downtowns</li> </ul>
<p><i>When you think of culture, what kinds of things or activities first come to mind?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sport and recreation</li> <li>■ Big Buddies</li> <li>■ Arts and Performances</li> <li>■ Music</li> <li>■ Community Festivals</li> <li>■ Parades and Community Celebrations</li> <li>■ Rural way of life – farms, forests</li> <li>■ Celebrations of different cultures</li> <li>■ Fresh Produce</li> <li>■ Tourist Attractions</li> <li>■ Sports – hockey, dancing, baseball</li> <li>■ Fall Fair and Maple Syrup Festival</li> <li>■ Elmvale District High School Day</li> <li>■ Winter Carnival</li> <li>■ Musical Performances</li> <li>■ Theatre (SPACY)</li> <li>■ Church Activities</li> <li>■ RC Car Racing or other hobbies</li> </ul>
<p><i>Are there cultural programs, activities or facilities not currently available that you would like to see in the township that would add to its vitality and quality of life?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Certain sports like Rugby and Football</li> <li>■ Cheerleading</li> <li>■ Outdoor skating rink</li> <li>■ Mall and Movie Theatre</li> <li>■ YMCA</li> <li>■ I think the cultural activities are pretty good</li> <li>■ More common/social places for teenagers</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Annual Battle of the Bands</li> <li>■ Host movies in community spaces</li> <li>■ Skatepark in Hillsdale</li> <li>■ Recreation Centre</li> <li>■ Better biking trails for mountain bikes</li> </ul>
<p><i>What cultural programs are not currently available that you would like to see available?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sports and activities for all ages</li> <li>■ A program that uses the existing trails system</li> <li>■ New opportunities to learn about other cultures</li> <li>■ More youth oriented programs like movie nights or art classes</li> <li>■ Musical Performances</li> <li>■ More informal sports leagues like lacrosse, ball hockey, or soccer</li> </ul>

## 4 SWOT Analysis

Reflecting on findings to date in the cultural planning process, a SWOT analysis has been completed to synthesize key issues and themes to inform the identification of draft Strategic Directions that follow.

FIGURE 4: SWOT SUMMARY

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Council and staff increasingly acknowledge the importance of culture to economic prosperity, and embracing of a proactive approach to cultural development</li> <li>■ A growing sense of a collective cultural sector (that has not always been the case) and a strong interest in enhanced coordination and collaboration</li> <li>■ Extraordinary natural heritage assets – including network of trails</li> <li>■ Major ‘anchor’ cultural facilities/institutions/attractions including: the County Museum and Archives, County Forests, Minesing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Insufficient (but growing) understanding of the economic importance and potential of culture across the community</li> <li>■ Lack of ability to attract visitors to stop and explore the municipality</li> <li>■ Fractured local identity in part owing to loyalties and associations with smaller villages</li> <li>■ Lack of coordination among the various business and economic development agencies in the community</li> <li>■ Lack of coordination among cultural groups and activities</li> <li>■ Rising concern about ‘succession planning’ for a generation of</li> </ul>



<p>Wetlands, among others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A number of strong festivals well attended by the community and tourists</li> <li>■ Volunteer support for cultural activities</li> <li>■ Trails, environmental features and other natural features connecting the community with potential to connect culture and heritage assets</li> <li>■ The Township's efforts in heritage preservation</li> <li>■ Significant population growth and opportunities for economic development</li> </ul>	<p>volunteers that have played key leadership roles in the community for many years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Low levels of youth engagement and insufficient range of cultural programs for youth</li> <li>■ Lack of small-scale performing arts space and venue</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p>	<p><b>Threats</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Leverage profile and support for cultural and tourism development identified in the Economic Development Strategy (tied to Council's Strategic Plan 2010-2014)</li> <li>■ Define a clear role for the Township and strengthen its capacity to play a leadership role in cultural development through better integration of culture into planning and decision-making and potentially as a facilitator of activity and communication</li> <li>■ Leverage opportunities to connect the municipality's cultural, tourism and broader economic agenda to those of the County</li> <li>■ Establishing ongoing partnership mechanism to support collaboration between the Township and its cultural, business and community partners, as well as stronger collaboration with the County of Simcoe</li> <li>■ Strengthening coordination among cultural groups leading to a stronger and more sustainable cultural sector</li> <li>■ Build tourism strategies and promotion based on more integrated 'experience based' vision of tourism</li> <li>■ Stronger signage and way finding tools</li> <li>■ Building on existing events/organisations supporting connections and networks (e.g., SUMAC, SAAG)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Draw of Barrie and other areas for cultural activities</li> <li>■ The lack of a clear collaborative spirit among the various villages and the need for a stronger township identity (while not ignoring individual community identities and loyalties)</li> <li>■ Set way of doing things</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Promote policies which foster small to medium enterprises (SME's)</li><li>■ With upcoming Official Plan Conformity Exercise timing is right to include cultural policies in the <i>Township Official Plan</i></li><li>■ Potential to enhance and develop existing festivals and events.</li><li>■ Potential for increased government funding from provincial ministries or agencies due to a cohesive municipal cultural plan</li><li>■ Engaging younger volunteers and recruiting volunteers and leadership roles drawing on new residents</li><li>■ Enhancing collective marketing and promotion initiatives for culture</li><li>■ Potential to create an interactive cultural map (drawing on County leadership in this area) as an important marketing and promotion tool for both residents and visitors/tourists</li><li>■ Potential to support the growth in creative cultural businesses and enterprises</li><li>■ Build on the success of current events/festivals and extend economic impact</li><li>■ The potential to establish a new 'signature' festival showing the culture and heritage of the entire municipality</li><li>■ Support the growth of culinary and agri-tourism, and integration with cultural tourism in the municipality</li><li>■ Potential to create some form of new cultural facility serving a range of cultural uses (including performance space)</li></ul>	
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## 5 Strategic Directions

### 5.1 Municipal Leadership

The Springwater Cultural Plan will define a clear mandate and leadership role for the Township in support of cultural development. There is also an opportunity for the plan to recommend strategies to help strengthen and expand business and community partnerships. By clearly defining the Township's roles and responsibilities, and by building partnerships, the Springwater Cultural Plan will help build capacity to advance Springwater's cultural development agenda.

It was noted that there are many ways in which the Township can support cultural development in the community through normal operations including things such as improved signage in the community, strengthening coordination and collaboration across departments in support of culture, new infrastructure investments, among others. The assistance that the Township provides to local events is largely in-kind, or supportive, such as public works involvement in setting up road closures, event permits, or in the investment and maintenance of recreational infrastructure. Some increased investment in human and/or financial investment was called for as necessary to the effective implementation of the Springwater Cultural Plan, an initiative that should be considered by staff and Council to determine feasibility. Other opportunities for municipal leadership include regular reporting to Council on the success of the Springwater Cultural Plan implementation, with clear performance measures to guide staff's efforts. The development of the new *Township Official Plan* in the coming years also presents an opportunity to include cultural and heritage policies within the cultural plan, to ensure its inclusion in the overall planning framework in the coming years.

### 5.2 Promote, Strengthen and Celebrate Shared Identity

The Springwater Cultural Plan must define an inclusive vision of culture that can help unite various facets of the community and combat perceptions of competition and division between villages and communities. Ensuring the vision of culture encompasses the community's exceptional natural assets and recreational opportunities can help engage a wider cross-section of the community in the rich cultural life of the municipality.

This inclusive vision of culture can contribute to building a stronger sense of shared identity among all groups in the community. It can contribute to enhanced civic pride and a commitment to tackling shared challenges together. Extending cultural mapping to include the identification and celebration of the community's intangible cultural resources and community stories – particularly those stories with township-wide importance - can be a powerful tool for building and reinforcing this shared identity.



## 5.3 Culture-Led Economic Development

The support for cultural development found in the economic development strategies for both the Township and the County presents a context and framework within which to raise the profile of culture as an economic driver. There are several dimensions of a culture-led economic development agenda ranging from growing tourism to supporting the expansion of creative cultural enterprises in the municipality. The initiative of the County of Simcoe's Economic Development Office to establish and sustain a county-wide network of Economic Development Officers could provide a forum to also connect shared cultural initiatives and programs (a number of EDOs in the county also have designated cultural mandates and responsibilities).

## 5.4 Leveraging Natural and Cultural Assets

The unique beauty of the municipality's natural heritage and environment is one of the municipality's defining features and primary assets. There is an opportunity to develop a shared vision and strategies connecting natural and cultural assets to the benefit of both. Promoting a quality of place in the municipality defined by this integrated vision of natural assets and cultural resources/amenities can be a powerful 'draw' for attracting people and investment. This same integrated vision of quality of place can also be leveraged as part of a strong tourism brand and marketing strategies.

## 5.5 Youth Engagement

The Springwater Cultural Plan must define concrete strategies and actions that engage youth in a meaningful way by giving them opportunities to define their own cultural needs and aspirations. Cultural programming must be relevant and accessible to youth and strategies are needed to increase active participation. Youth must have a genuine voice in the future of cultural development in the community. In any consideration of the establishment of a cross-sectoral leadership group to support and guide the implementation of the Springwater Cultural Plan there should be strong consideration given to youth representation on such a group.



## 5.6 Festivals and Events

Springwater's local festivals and events were repeatedly identified as one of the municipality's cultural strengths. The Springwater Cultural Plan should make recommendations about building on existing strengths to grow and expand current festivals and festival offerings. These recommendations must be integrated with those related to tourism development, but must also address some of the challenges identified including the loss of volunteers. The potential to create a new 'signature' festival or event that could help communicate a municipality-wide story and potentially also bring a more contemporary cultural brand for the community should be considered. The issue of encouraging profit reinvestment from successful events to support an expanded festivals agenda should be considered.

## 5.7 Facilities and Spaces

The Township of Springwater benefits from the existence in the community of a number of 'anchor' County institutions – notably the widely respected Simcoe County Museum and Simcoe County Archives. However, as the population of the municipality grows, there will be a need to consider its own needs related to cultural spaces and facilities. The community engagement process identified a number of potential facilities and further consideration should be given to the most strategic approach to addressing these needs. Conversations with the community indicated that many are unaware of the cultural spaces that are available for community use. A local inventory, either connected or separate to the cultural mapping would serve to address this disconnect and help ensure these spaces are well used.