




INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Mayor and Members General Issues Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 31, 2023
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	City of Hamilton Poet Laureate and Youth Poet Laureate (PED23090) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

On September 21, 2022 Council directed Tourism and Culture staff to develop and present a framework to the General Issues Committee for the implementation of a Poet Laureate Program and Youth Poet Laureate Program.

INFORMATION

Overview:

The Tourism and Culture Division will implement a two-year pilot program titled, *Poet in Place*, from January 2024 to December 2025. This program will recognize a local poet or spoken word artist who – through poetry-based projects and programs – will help enhance public spaces, connect Hamiltonians to their communities, and increase the visibility of the poetic and literary arts in the city. The selected poet will be paid an honorarium for their work and will not be a City of Hamilton employee.

Titled *Poet in Place* instead of *Poet Laureate*, this poetry program will contribute to the Division's creative placemaking efforts. A poet or spoken word artist will be selected through a community-adjudication process, by which a citizen jury will evaluate and

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

score applications based on selection criteria. Through placemaking activities, the selected poet will use poetry to connect the stories of Hamilton to its public spaces, adding authenticity to place and animating our community.

Youth Poet Position

The pilot phase of the *Poet in Place* program will not include a youth poet position. A youth position will be considered if the *Poet in Place* program is renewed after its two-year pilot term. This will provide time to evaluate the existing program and make adjustments to best support a youth position as part of the program scope.

***Poet in Place* Approach**

The *Poet in Place* program is designed to enhance Tourism & Culture's placemaking efforts. Placemaking is defined in the 2020 *Art in Public Places Policy* as "...a collaborative process by which citizens, businesses and government shape our public realm to maximize shared value, strengthen the connection between people and place, and reflect the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution".

Naming the program *Poet in Place* instead of *Poet Laureate* not only helps to demonstrate the direct link between the program and placemaking, but also positions the program as different from a traditional *Poet Laureate* Program.

The City of Hamilton will be a leader in government poetry programming by departing from the traditional approach to Laureate programs. The *Poet Laureate* role is largely centred around performances in highly visible public spaces and is a civic platform for political and social commentary. Both the colonial tradition and historical connotations of *Poet Laureate* programs often make them exclusionary, and in some cases, inaccessible to equity-deserving groups. For example:

- The word "Laureate" is tied to the ancient classical tradition of honouring high achievers with crowns of laurel leaves.
- The first *Poet Laureate* position was created in 17th C England, eventually becoming an appointment of the royal household.
- The position is one of prestige, meant to honour the most established or esteemed poet in a community.
- *Poet Laureate* positions are associated with honour and applicants are often evaluated based on merit, academic achievements, and awards.

Hamilton's *Poet in Place* program, which strongly links a formal civic poet role with placemaking to further Hamilton's identity as a community, is the first of its kind in Canada. This program will not only bring visibility to the local literary community, but it

will empower literary artists to participate in placemaking activities, providing the selected poet with resources and support to implement meaningful projects in the community. Through workshops, temporary public art projects, and placemaking programs, the *Poet in Place* program will enhance public spaces and provide opportunities for Hamiltonians to experience poetry and spoken word in new, impactful, and more accessible ways.

Research and Community Consultation

An external benchmark research study was conducted, which examined poetry programs at 15 municipalities across Canada. This study surveyed the programs' selection processes, budgets, deliverables, and terms of reference. Key findings from the research demonstrate the following:

- All municipalities surveyed use the title *Poet Laureate*.
- The main responsibility of the poet is to write and perform poetry at high-profile city events.
- Poets are either appointed to their position or are selected through adjudication conducted by a selection committee or jury.
- Literary honour and/or artistic merit are typically the focus of the selection criteria.
- A poet's term length is typically between 2 and 4 years.
- Honorariums for a poet position range between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per year.

The local literary community of Hamilton was consulted about the development of the *Poet in Place* program. Consultation was conducted through conversations with literary organizations, poets, and spoken word artists. Key findings from community consultation demonstrate the following:

- Poetry and spoken word lack visibility in the community.
- It can be challenging to engage those outside the poetry community in the poetic arts. Many people feel that poetry is not for them, that they do not understand it, or they are not welcome in the poetry community if they are not poets themselves. Some poets identify the academicized nature of poetry as a contributing factor.
- There are various inclusion and accessibility barriers facing poets and those who want to access poetry and the literary arts, for example:
 - Finding spaces to share poetry is one of the biggest challenges currently facing the literary community.
 - Educational and spatial inequality create both real and perceived barriers to access.

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- There is a consensus between members of the poetry community around creating a program focused on placemaking and moving away from traditional Laureate program models.
- There is some concern about not using the title *Poet Laureate* since it is a recognized title in the literary field.

Program Details

1. Term length

- two years
- anticipated start date of Q1, 2024

2. Honorarium

- \$20,000 over the two-year term (\$10,000 per year)

3. Application Scope and Process

- To ensure a fair and robust application scope and process, applications will be received through a formal, public call and will invite both page-poets and spoken-word artist to apply.
- Application materials will include a resume, artist statement, samples of work, and a placemaking project proposal.
- Applicants will be required to submit either published work or work that has been performed publicly. This will increase application equity between page-poets, who typically publish their work, and spoken-word artist, who typically perform their work publicly.

4. Selection Process and Criteria

- Applications will be reviewed, scored, and discussed by a citizen jury as part of a rigorous selection process.
- The jury will be comprised of poets and spoken word artists, members of the local literary community, and individuals with project and placemaking experience and expertise.
- Selection criteria will not focus on a poet's 'merit', which is a criterium used often in selection processes for municipal poetry programs. Merit-based selection can create barriers to access and decrease the program's ability to be inclusive.

- Selection criteria for the *Poet in Place* program will focus on the following:
 - Artist's voice
 - Community engagement and impact
 - Demonstrated experience in the poetic arts
 - Project planning abilities and interest in placemaking activities

5. Program Deliverables

During their two-year term, the *Poet in Place* will write and read poetry, deliver workshops, and implement placemaking projects as outlined below:

- Year 1 of Term
 - 3-4 Performances of original works of poetry or spoken word at city events or program
 - Develop and deliver 1-2 poetry workshops in collaboration with Hamilton Public Libraries offered as part of their annual 'National Poetry Month' programming
 - Develop and implement 1 placemaking poetry project
- Year 2 of Term
 - 3-4 Performances of original works of poetry or spoken word at city events or programs
 - Develop and deliver 1-2 poetry workshops in collaboration with Hamilton Public Libraries offered as part of their annual 'National Poetry Month' programming
 - Develop and implement 1 temporary public art poetry project

6. Budget

- This project is funded by the Culture Strategic Priorities Capital budget (Project ID 720155502).
- There will be no FTE implications for this program; all work will be absorbed into existing work plans.
- Total, two-year pilot program budget: \$50,000
 - \$20,000 honorarium for two-year term
 - \$30,000 for administrative and project-related expenses over two-year term, including juror fees, artwork fabrication and installation, space rentals, and programming materials among other costs

7. Implementation Timeline

- *Poet in Place* applications will open Q4 2023
- Position to be filled and program to begin Q1 2024

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A