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**'Little respect for arts in Vaughan' Municipal red tape a problem, rep says**

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Art has been forced to take a back seat to sports in Vaughan, according to the spokesperson of a fledgling arts council.

Most of the city's budget for public facilities and resources is spent on pools and arenas with relatively little for arts and arts facilities or programming, said Rick Levine, spokesperson for Arts Vaughan, a grassroots group attempting to get the council off the ground.

"Members of the community and children in particular need arts in addition to recreation and sports."

Many children are not keen on sports but would enjoy activities such as playing in a band, enrolling in a drama class or taking painting or sculpting lessons, Mr. Levine said.

Meanwhile, Vaughan is already home to a strong artistic community including the McMichael art gallery, the MacDonald House where the Group of Seven once gathered and members of the performing arts.

"The arts council is well overdue. It should have been done years ago. It wasn't and now we have to play catch up," Mr. Levine said.

An arts council, modelled on similar structures in Markham and Toronto, offers opportunities to connect artists from all disciplines, encourage community involvement in the arts and attract tourism, Mr. Levine said.

But while the group wants to work with municipal officials to quickly establish a non-profit organization operating at arm's length, Mr. Levine is frustrated by red tape.

"It should be a much simpler process to accomplish this. We would like to do what needs to be done in a reasonable time at reasonable cost. I don't want to say anything to burn bridges because the point is to build bridges, but I think the city should be working closer with us and we should be on the same page to accomplish this."

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on the same page to accomplish things."

While the city is interested in working with Arts Vaughan, Mayor Michael Di Biase said council has supported artistic initiatives in the past.

"Is it enough? That's up for debate, but the city does appreciate art."

The city formed an arts and culture advisory committee in 1993, which launched Vaughan's annual Festival of the Arts.

The committee started a number of initiatives including a quarterly newsletter highlighting arts events and published an arts and culture directory, according to cultural services manager Angela Palermo and recreation and culture director Diane LaPointe-Kay.

"The arts and culture advisory committee was eventually dissolved in 2000 due to the lack of interest by community volunteer members," they said in a report.

While the report recommends council establish an arts advisory committee, Councillor Alan Shefman prefers an arts council run by artists.

"I'm a very strong believer in community initiatives," he said.

"The initiatives coming out of the community have far greater strength than ones coming out of the bureaucracy."

Some type of arts council is long overdue, Councillor Joyce Frustaglio said.

"What Mr. Levine is suggesting is different than what we have in its approach and we will explore it in detail. Arts and culture is an integral part of society. The time is ripe."

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