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**Subject:** Niagara Biennial Awards Program

**Report to:** Planning and Economic Development Committee

**Report date:** Wednesday, May 8, 2019

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## **Recommendations**

1. That Report PDS 19-2019 **BE RECEIVED** for information; and,
2. That a copy of Report PDS 19-2019 **BE CIRCULATED** to all Local Area Municipalities for information.

## **Key Facts**

- The purpose of this report is to provide information related to the rebranded design awards program, the Niagara Biennial which is to be delivered by Niagara Region on a biennial basis.
- The new program builds upon the former 'Niagara Community Design Awards' program which was delivered annually from 2004 to 2016.
- The Niagara Biennial is aligned with other biennial awards programs in the GTHA and beyond. It will expand upon the range of eligible design fields and provide learning and networking opportunities relevant to the design industry. This will promote better exposure of design achievements in Niagara and increase both interest and relevance of the program by recognizing unique design practices found in the region which will be promoted broadly.
- The Niagara Biennial will seek submissions from the design community, the development community, and the arts community at a launch symposium in the fall of 2019. Submissions will be juried and awards distributed at an awards ceremony in the spring of 2020.
- The Niagara Biennial event will promote Niagara's global brand by placing it in the realm of other international design destinations with similar competitions, bringing broad-reaching recognition of local design achievements.

## **Financial Considerations**

The previous awards program was an annual event that ran for 12 years. It had an annual budget of approximately \$15,000.00.

The new awards program will comprise a broader scope of design and feature more events with stakeholders that will be held biennially. The new program includes a greater level of outreach and promotion of the design industry in Niagara which will supplement strategic goals of economic development and tourism. An investment in the new program for 2019 to 2020 is projected to be \$45,000.00. This can be accommodated within the Council approved 2019 Operating Budget.

Some of the projected expenses required for holding the events can be offset through submission of entry fees, sponsorships from professional organizations, and in-kind donations.

## **Analysis**

### **Background on the Niagara Community Design Awards**

The Niagara Community Design Awards (NCDA) was an architecture, landscape architecture and urban design awards program organized and hosted by the Niagara Region from 2004 to 2016.

Municipal awards programs that promote the best works of architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design in their respective communities are found in many municipalities in and around the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). These programs are aimed at raising the bar of design, promoting community pride, and spotlighting the winning designers. The programs are delivered by a planning department with input from other departments such as public works, economic development and tourism. The programs are often well-resourced with interdepartmental funding and staffing and involve extensive planning and preparation.

In the Region of Niagara, the diversity of scales and capacities of partner municipalities makes it impractical for each of the twelve communities to undertake similar programs. Accordingly, the Region has historically performed this role on their behalf.

The objective of the previous NCDA awards program was to celebrate excellence in community design in the Niagara Region by recognizing projects that enhanced the built environment, efficiently used land, and demonstrated creativity and vision. Awards were organized into twelve categories and typically awarded one project per category. These included: small and large scale projects, architecture, façade improvement, adaptive re-use, brownfield, sustainability and public realm improvements. It also included categories

such as Policy and Plans, Leadership and Legacy. Over the past six years, awards were distributed as follows: 2016=13, 2015=16, 2014=19, 2013=9, 2012=12, and 2011=10.

The awards committee that adjudicated the submissions consisted of nine community members, many of whom participated continuously over the twelve year span of the program. The committee consisted of: professional planners, architects, landscape architects, engineers, real estate agents, educators and developers.

The award that was given to each winning project was a steel sculpture entitled, "Transformation". It was created by Mark Griffis, a sculptor and art educator from Fort Erie. Award winners also received a certificate.

### **What is a Biennial?**

A Biennial is a large contemporary exhibition which is held every two years (bi-annually). The subject matter typically includes works of fine art, film, publishing, design, architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design. A typical Biennial is comprised of many events such as: exhibitions, presentations, talks, workshops and tours. Biennial events occur over a span of time which ranges from one week to several months. There are currently over one hundred biennials in major cities all over the world. Some of the most famous Biennials include: La Biennale di Venezia (Venice, Italy), Chicago Architectural Biennial (Chicago, USA) and the London Design Biennale (London, UK).

For example, the Chicago Architectural Biennial has been running for three installments. It attracts upwards of 500,000 visitors for each exhibition period. The events are increasingly becoming a source of local pride, tourism, cultural capital, and revenue for the host city.

### **Design Awards in the Canadian context**

In Canada, there are no Biennials like those found in the rest of the world. However, Canada has many design awards programs that are held biennially. These programs are design competitions that consist of a one day awards ceremony – unlike the international biennials that run for longer periods of time and consist of multiple events and programming. Canadian design awards programs typically focus on national works of architecture, landscape architecture, urban design and planning. Design award programs in Canada are held at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

Niagara Region is uniquely positioned to be able to host an awards program on behalf of the 12 local area municipalities. Building on Niagara's globally recognized name, a Niagara Biennial has the potential to evolve into an international biennial similar to other established events around the world. Being at an international border, Niagara can host Canadian and International designers, inviting new eyes to see and experience Niagara.

## **The role of a Biennial in Niagara**

A biennial awards program for Niagara is an appropriate vehicle to reward excellence in design and to showcase the state of the art in design. Works of the design and development community, arts community, and others can be paired with the diversity and richness of Niagara's attractions, events, places and people.

The biennial adds an important and unique layer which will entice a new audience to learn about, visit and appreciate design achievements in Niagara.

## **The Niagara Region Design Context**

Niagara's design community comprises a broad and diverse range of artistic and design professions that promote Niagara both locally and globally. The region is home to professional architects, landscape architects, urban designers, urban planners, engineers, industrial designers, interior designers, and graphic designers. It is also home to talented visual artists, performing artists, artisans and makers of all types.

Members of the Niagara design community are spread throughout the diverse geographies of the region. They live and work in downtown centres, historic towns, hamlets, and rural settlements. They are surrounded by a unique physical environment that includes protected woodlands, lakes, rivers, canals, waterfalls, agricultural fields, industrial areas and more. This physical context combined with the Region's historical and cultural assets strongly influence design in Niagara, setting it apart from other regions around the Greater Golden Horseshoe.

## **Niagara Region's Creative Cluster context**

The Creative Cluster includes businesses such as design services, media, publishing, marketing, entertainment, music, visual arts, performing arts and culture. Design professionals, designers, artists and artisans work in many industries that contribute to key economic sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, construction, personal services, government, education and healthcare.

In 2018, Niagara Region's creative cluster consisted of 1,314 businesses with a total of 7,538 jobs. Job growth increased 29% between the years of 2011 to 2018. This figure demonstrates the significant contribution to Niagara's economy that the creative cluster provides.

Creative people in the Region of Niagara contribute substantially to the economic growth and vitality of the region. They enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors through their work and their products. Within the design community, there is a vast range of design services that will continue to be important to the development community and to investors in Niagara's economy. Additionally, growth of the design community within

the region will contribute to the retention of youth and new professionals choosing to stay in Niagara.

### **Purpose of the new awards program**

The Niagara Biennial will be inclusive, broad reaching and relevant to the current economic development and tourism climate. In order to do that, the program will:

- Be held as a biennial event, which includes exhibitions, seminars, workshops and spin-off events. This will promote engagement with the design industry, provide learning and networking opportunities and spark interest in the industry,
- Honour and recognize the work of designers and owners with prestigious awards that highlight a 'Made in Niagara' approach to design excellence of projects and initiatives. The criteria for gaining recognition will be based upon industry standards that are clear, fair, relevant, and unbiased. Award winners value recognition for their works when it is received from well-known and respected design practitioners and industry peers,
- Expand beyond the standard categories to encompass a broader segment of the design community and award design projects that enhance the built environment and design context of the Niagara Region,
- Highlight and celebrate the substantial contribution to the region's economy that design professionals, artists, and artisans provide, and;
- Introduce innovative technologies to showcase winning projects to a greater audience and look for new opportunities to interlace these projects with other events and promotions to enrich the overall visitation experience.

### **Timelines and Phasing:**

The Biennial design awards program is currently in the planning and pre-launch stages which will continue into the summer. In the fall (Q4) of 2019, the awards program will be launched at a symposium event which will include an open call for submissions.

The submission period will close in the winter (Q1) of 2020. At that time, the entries will be adjudicated through a juried process. The program will culminate with an awards ceremony in the spring (Q2) of 2020.

## **Alternatives Reviewed**

Staff considered maintaining the Niagara Community Design Awards program that was already in place. However, many aspects of that program are no longer relevant. The previous program was largely unchanged for twelve years and experienced a decline in the number of submissions. Holding the event annually produces a limited number of submissions to make an interesting and competitive atmosphere.

Staff also considered postponing a new program until 2020, however, there is a lot of interest and encouragement from the design and development communities to create a more vital and relevant awards platform. Based upon this appetite, it was decided to embark on the planning stages of the program immediately.

## **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

The awards program will respond to two of the Regional Council's Strategic Priorities:

- Fostering Investment, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and;
- Positioning Niagara Globally.

*'Fostering Investment, Innovation and Entrepreneurship'* will be achieved in several ways. Inviting the design and development communities to submit projects that compete for awards and recognition will, over time, create a design legacy that commemorates design now and into the future. Additionally, the quality of design execution will improve as designers vie to earn awards.

The awards program will showcase the variety and breadth of design happening within the region. Through a variety of events such as seminars, workshops, tours, film nights, etc., the program will provide an opportunity for the design and development communities to gather and network. The program will also provide opportunities for learning and discovery for these communities along with the public.

*'Positioning Niagara Globally'* will be achieved by promoting the program through publications, a website, social media and advertisements. This will promote Niagara's brand name and showcase design to a global audience.

By collaborating with Economic Development and Tourism initiatives, the program will reach a broader audience of residents, visitors, investors and businesses. In turn, this program will contribute to growth within the creative cluster and to an economic uplift in the Region.

## Other Pertinent Reports

PDS-C 30-2017: Niagara Community Design Awards was a memorandum that informed the intention to rebrand the previous Niagara Community Design Awards program into a biennial event. The memorandum was dated November 08, 2017.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1                      Niagara Biennial Awards – Project Overview

# NIAGARA BIENNIAL DESIGN AWARDS – PROJECT OVERVIEW

## Phase 1 Pre-Launch

Q2 - Q3  
Spring - Summer  
2019

### PROJECT PLANNING

- Work Plan
- Budgeting
- Communication Plan
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Promotion
- Award categories, criteria and design
- Event programming
- Bookings

## Phase 2 Awards Launch

Q4  
Fall  
2019

### AWARDS LAUNCH AND SYMPOSIUM

- Symposium with Keynote speaker and workshops
- Call for Submission opens
- Communications program launches

## Phase 3 Jury Day

Q1  
Winter  
2020

### JURY DAY EVENT

- Call for submission closes
- Evaluation of submissions
- Jury day
- Jury Report
- Assigning Award winners

## Phase 4 Awards Ceremony

Q2  
Spring  
2020

### AWARDS CEREMONY EVENT

- Awards ceremony with presentations, speeches and recognition of award winning submissions

## Phase 5 Project Close

Q2  
Spring  
2020

### PROJECT WRAP-UP

- Thank-you letters
- Report to PEDC
- Lessons learned
- Prepare for next awards installment