

Item 3.

Post Exhibition - Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

File No: X099822

Summary

In 2022, the City adopted a new community strategic plan Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision (the Plan). The Plan outlines the community's vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney and identifies 8 strategic outcomes that contribute to that vision. With the Plan as a foundation, City staff consulted with local creative operators, artists and cultural organisations and developed a draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 (the Strategy) to guide the City's support for arts, culture and creative industries over the next ten years.

The Strategy builds upon the achievements of the Creative City Cultural Policy 2014-2024, and responds to a period of significant change and unprecedented challenges for artists, culture and the creative industries. The evolving, ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic has informed new research undertaken by the City. This research demonstrates the Creative Industries workforce of Greater Sydney has reduced by approximately 6% (or just under 5,000 workers) since 2012, and in our local government area, commercial floorspace used by creative industries has reduced by more than 172,000m² over the same period. In the City of Sydney, artists, musicians, writers and performers (the core creative professions) have experienced the sharpest decline, reducing by 11% (by place of residence - City of Sydney) in the past decade. The pressing challenge of retaining Sydney's creative spaces and cultural workforce requires renewed strategic consideration.

The Strategy outlines a framework to respond to both immediate and long-term challenges and opportunities under the themes - "retain, rebuild, reimagine". The Strategy proposes high-level actions to retain at-risk creative spaces and workers, rebuild capacity in a severely impacted sector, and reimagine a more sustainable, equitable, innovative and thriving cultural and creative life.

The draft Strategy was launched with a CityTalk in June 2024 and placed on public exhibition throughout July and August 2024. The community's response to the Strategy has been very positive, particularly among workers in the cultural and creative sector. Only minor changes are proposed in the post-exhibition draft as well as the inclusion of measures and goals to inform ongoing evaluation of the Strategy's success.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council note the submissions received from the community on the exhibited draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035, as shown at Attachment B to the subject report;
- (B) Council adopt the Cultural Strategy 2025-2035, as shown at Attachment A to the subject report; and
- (C) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make amendments to the Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 in order to correct any minor drafting errors and finalise design, artwork and accessible formats for publication.

Attachments

Attachment A. Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

Attachment B. Engagement Report - Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

Background

1. The City of Sydney is a strong supporter of local cultural and creative industries. Since 2014, the City has spent an estimated \$34 million in culture each year, and dedicated a property portfolio with a replacement value of \$44 million for cultural purposes. These investments have supported over 14,000 opportunities for Sydney-based artists. The City has developed a significant annual calendar of events and cultural programs that provide our communities with free and low-cost access to cultural activity and employ a large number of creative workers. These investments were made through the implementation of the Creative City Cultural Policy and Action Plan 2014-2024 which has now been completed and finalised.

Draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035

2. In 2022 the City adopted the Community Strategic Plan Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision (the Plan). The Plan is the result of extensive consultation with local communities, including the arts, cultural and creative industries. The Plan articulates a vision for a thriving cultural life in Sydney built upon the following 8 strategic outcomes:
 - (a) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultural practices are visible and respected.
 - (b) We value our cultural life and champion our creative industries.
 - (c) An increasing number of creative workers live or work in our city.
 - (d) Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities.
 - (e) There is an increasing supply of accessible creative spaces.
 - (f) Creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of our city.
 - (g) Creativity and great experiences fuel the vitality of our city.
 - (h) There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities.
3. The draft Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 (the Strategy) aims to build a practical path towards achieving these ambitions, with consideration for the current context and ongoing research.
4. The City's research demonstrates significant challenges facing the arts, culture and creative industries. The City's research analyses census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, longitudinal creative employment research undertaken by the Federal arts agency Creative Australia, the City's Floorspace and Employment Survey, the City's Wellbeing Survey, evaluation of the City's cultural programs and grants, and community consultation. The key findings are:
 - (a) The number of people who live in Greater Sydney and work in the creative industries reduced by 6% (or 4,918 workers in real numbers) between 2011 and 2021.

- (b) The number of people who live in the City of Sydney and work in the core creative professions (artist, musician, performer, writer) reduced by 11% (or 155 workers in real numbers) between 2011 and 2021.
 - (c) Sydney is the only Australian capital city to see a reduction in core creative professionals during this timeframe.
 - (d) The average cost of a rental unit in Greater Sydney is the equivalent of 62% of average incomes for core creative professionals, and sector consultation confirms that the cost of rental housing is the primary driver of migration of artists out of Sydney.
 - (e) 61% of the residents of the City of Sydney rent.
 - (f) Commercial floorspace used by the Creative Industries in the City of Sydney has reduced by 172,000m² since 2012.
 - (g) Commercial floorspace used by the core creative professions (artists, musicians, performers, writers) has reduced by 14,376m² since 2012.
 - (h) The diversity of Sydney's creative workforce has reduced. 44% of people who live in the City of Sydney identify as having British, Irish or Australian ancestry, however 70% of those working in the core creative professions in the City of Sydney identify with this ancestry. Consultation suggests cost-of-housing pressures and unaffordable creative studio workspace are driving the increased homogeneity of the local creative workforce.
5. To develop the draft Strategy, City staff consulted with the City's Cultural and Creative Sector Advisory panel and conducted eight engagement workshops with sub-sectors of the creative industries. Consultation focused on understanding the lived experience of the above research findings, exploring the context for these changes, and identifying primary challenges and emerging opportunities for the sector. The key findings are:
- (a) Unaffordable housing is displacing creative workers with impacts on local production, supply chains, and peer groups.
 - (b) The cost and complexity of planning and regulatory compliance continues to be a barrier to operating creative spaces, producing events, and sustaining creative careers.
 - (c) Both infrastructure and grant funding investments tend to favour presentation outcomes over production and development. This is seen as directing government subsidy more towards marketing and audience engagement strategies than artist incomes. Cultural investment is not seen to be adequately supporting individual creative practice as the source of creative innovation.
 - (d) A missing mid-tier in Sydney's cultural sector is impacting the viability of the creative ecosystem and sustainability of creative careers. Sydney has a large number of major national cultural institutions, but not enough mid-sized venues and organisations to support pathways from the small and independent scale to the major institutions, as well as viable export products.

- (e) The sector is suffering from burnout following years of unprecedented challenges. The local sector is reliant on a relatively small number of cultural leaders who have sustained a personal toll through the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Recovery will take time and over-burdening the sector with short-term stimulus and expectations to deliver fast results will make things worse.
 - (f) The sector is seeking a more collaborative future, less focus on competitive merit-based opportunities that favour only a few, and more focus on ecosystem-wide investment that unlocks peer-to-peer learning, resource sharing, and process-led collaborations.
6. Noting that the City's research and consultation presents challenges that require different scales of urgency of response, the draft Strategy proposes a response framework organised by 3 themes - "retain, rebuild, reimagine" that relate to:
- (a) Retain - urgent actions to retain Sydney's creative workforce and cultural infrastructure.
 - (b) Rebuild - strategic interventions to rebuild strength in Sydney's creative sector following years of unprecedented challenge.
 - (c) Reimagine - systemic change to guide Sydney's cultural sector towards a more diverse, inclusive, green and equitable future with innovative approaches to unlocking potential.
7. The draft Strategy uses these themes to propose actions for each of the 8 strategic outcomes.
8. The draft Strategy groups the strategic outcomes and actions under four cultural pillars that align with counterpart strategies at a federal and state level, including Revive the national cultural policy, and Creative Communities the NSW Government's arts, culture and creative industries policy. The four pillars are:
- (a) Right to culture - we respect and protect First Nations people's connections to Country and Culture, we celebrate the many cultures of our diverse, multicultural and inclusive city, and we acknowledge culture as vital to liveability and wellbeing.
 - (b) Creative workforce - we champion our creative workforce and build opportunities for creative employment, talent retention, cultural exports and a sustainable local sector.
 - (c) Cultural infrastructure - we provide, protect, advocate and plan for the infrastructure needed to support our creative industries and a thriving cultural life.
 - (d) Creative participation - we ensure there are pathways for everyone to engage in a creative practice and participate in the cultural life of Sydney.

9. The draft Strategy expands the City's definition of "culture" to include:
 - (a) the arts, cultural and creative industries
 - (b) the heritage, knowledge and cultural practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - (c) the expressions of identity, and shared experience and aspirations of our diverse and multicultural communities.

Public exhibition and engagement

10. The draft Strategy was placed on public exhibition from 10 July to 6 September 2024. A Sydney Your Say webpage provided information on the key components of the strategy and a downloadable PDF of the strategy. This page was visited 1,813 times during the exhibition period. Five hundred and one people downloaded the strategy and 93 submissions were received.
11. Submissions are in favour of the draft strategy. Three of the strategy's pillars were rated over 80% "important or very important" and one was rated 68% "important or very important". Submissions from people who engage in a professional arts practice are more strongly in favour, rating the cultural infrastructure and creative participation pillars both as 92% "important or very important."
12. The top 5 issues considered most significant are:
 - (a) High commercial rents and costs for operating creative spaces and venues
 - (b) Unaffordable housing supply displacing artists and creative workers
 - (c) Cost and complexity of compliance when operating creative spaces and events
 - (d) Not enough affordable facilities and training for personal creative practice
 - (e) An under-developed middle-tier in Sydney's creative sector.
13. The top 5 proposed actions considered most important are:
 - (a) Dedicated spaces for artists, musicians, writers and performers in City owned properties
 - (b) Putting underused commercial property to creative use
 - (c) Creative live/work tenancies
 - (d) Temporary street closures for neighbourhood-focused community, cultural and business activities
 - (e) Supporting artists into affordable housing.

14. Many submissions made suggestions for actions. These suggestions can be summarised in the following ten themes, included here with notes on how each theme will be addressed:

(a) Theme: Equity and Diversity (7 suggestions)

Intent: Ensuring fair representation and access for all cultural groups.

Response: The priority area "Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities" will inform how the City develops cultural programs and grants and allocates creative opportunities to ensure equitable inclusion of all cultural groups.

(b) Theme: Community Engagement (6 suggestions)

Intent: Encouraging more localised, accessible, and inclusive cultural participation.

Response: The priority area "there is equitable access to education and learning opportunities, everyone can participate in a creative practice" outlines an approach to providing space, skills and opportunities to all of the City's communities to participate in creativity and culture. The City's events and cultural programs remain free or low cost. The Strategy commits to developing community curator programs to ensure greater local inclusion in our programs.

(c) Theme: Funding and Support for Artists (5 suggestions)

Intent: Calls for more grants, better funding models, and affordable spaces.

Response: In June 2024, when Council approved the draft Strategy for exhibition, an additional \$20 million over 10 years was committed to delivery of the Strategy. This increase to the City's cultural budget will fund new grant funding programs for artists and creative spaces. In addition, the Strategy commits to reviewing the City's funding programs to ensure they are meeting emerging needs, application processes are equitable and inclusive, and City properties are made available as affordable creative space.

(d) Theme: Housing and Affordability (4 suggestions)

Intent: Addressing the high cost of living and its impact on Sydney's creative sector.

Response: Cost of living, inflation, and property market prices are outside of the City's control, however this Strategy specifically contains actions to assist the creative sector to meet increasing operating costs and to assist more artists into affordable housing.

(e) Theme: Simplifying Processes (4 suggestions)

Intent: Reducing bureaucracy for events and access to spaces.

Response: The Strategy includes actions to deliver a more straightforward model for managing entertainment sound, advocating for exempt development paths for pop-up events, and enabling temporary street closures. The additional budget allocated to the Strategy will fund a planning guidance service to assist with navigating approvals processes for venues and events.

- (f) Theme: Public Spaces and Placemaking (3 suggestions)

Intent: Utilising public spaces for creative expression and community engagement.

Response: The priority area "creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of the city" outlines an approach to designing public space to enable creativity and community activities.

- (g) Theme: Support for Small Creators (3 suggestions)

Intent: Ensuring equitable support for smaller and emerging organisations.

Response: The City's creative grants, quick response grants, accommodation grants and cultural programs are designed to provide support to small-to-medium creative operators and emerging artists.

- (h) Theme: Live Music and Events (2 suggestions)

Intent: Enhancing live music venues and extending operational hours for a more vibrant nightlife.

Response: The City's Late Trading controls, Entertainment Sound DCP and proposed delivery of Special Entertainment Precincts will provide greater certainty and protections for live music venues, additional trading hours and incentives for cultural programming in a broad range of businesses and venues.

- (i) Theme: First Nations Empowerment (1 suggestion)

Intent: Creating an Independent First Nations Creative Committee to develop First Nations arts and cultural programs.

Response: This suggestion will be considered in the development of the City's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Framework.

- (j) Theme: Environmental Sustainability (1 suggestion)

Intent: Incorporating sustainability into cultural planning.

Response: Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050: Continuing the Vision commits the City to consider environmental sustainability as central to all the City's programs and services and sets a net zero target for our local area by 2035. The City has developed guidance on how events and cultural organisations can contribute to this target, including City proposed events. The City is a certified carbon neutral organisation.

15. Four online briefing sessions were held during the exhibition period. One for the City's Advisory Panels, one for local cultural organisations and creative operators, and two open sessions for all of the community. The online briefings provided an overview of the process for developing the strategy, the research underpinning the strategy, the contents of the strategy and a chance to respond to questions.

Post exhibition edits

16. The engagement activities demonstrated broad support for the Strategy as drafted. Some minor changes are proposed, outlined below and noting the reason for the edit.

- (a) Inclusion of a chapter on measures and goals.

With community endorsement of the Strategy, City staff have developed a high-level framework for evaluating the success of the Strategy, including a set of measures and goals for each of the four strategic pillars. These measures use Australian Bureau of Statistics data, the City's Floorspace and Employment Survey and Residential Wellbeing Survey. As the datasets become available, the City will refresh the associated research and provide a public report on progress towards the goals.

- (b) The priority area "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural practices are visible and respected" has been updated to "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the cultural practices are valued and supported."

This is to align more closely with the language used in the City's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Framework currently in development and draws upon community sentiment heard during engagement activities to develop the strategic framework.

- (c) A new action has been included in the Cultural Infrastructure pillar.

"Establish a working group with the City of Sydney and Create NSW to identify opportunities for more affordable creative workspace and housing for creatives in Sydney, policy and regulatory reform, and research, advocacy and knowledge sharing."

This captures a Resolution of Council from a Lord Mayoral Minute at the June 2024 Council meeting.

- (d) Slight edit to the description of the City East creative employment precinct to elevate the role of Kings Cross as a performance precinct and the need for amenable public spaces for audiences to gather, especially near entertainment venues and at night.

Key Implications

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

17. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the city, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 outlines the City's approach to achieving the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 3 - Public places for all - the Strategy outlines an approach to public art and creative urban design and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 3.3 - Creativity and culture is embedded in the fabric of the city.
 - (b) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - the Strategy outlines an approach to library services and cultural programs and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 6.6 - There is equitable access to education and learning opportunities, everyone can participate in a creative practice.
 - (c) Direction 8 - A thriving cultural and creative life - the Strategy outlines an approach to cultural infrastructure, cultural grants programs, events, cultural programs, sector capacity building, and draft actions to support:
 - (i) Outcome 8.1 - We value our cultural life and champion our creative industries.
 - (ii) Outcome 8.2 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural practice are valued and supported.
 - (iii) Outcome 8.3 - An increasing number of creative workers live or work in the city.
 - (iv) Outcome 8.4 - Sydney's cultural life reflects the diversity of our communities.
 - (v) Outcome 8.5 - There is an increased supply of accessible creative space.
 - (d) Direction 9 - A transformed and innovative economy - the Strategy outlines an approach to supporting vibrancy, the visitor economy, events and precinct activation that support:
 - (i) Outcome 9.4 - Creativity and great experiences fuel the vitality of the city

Organisational Impact

18. The Strategy does not require an expansion of the City's ongoing cultural programs and services or changes to the composition of the business units responsible for delivering support for culture and implementing the Strategy. Rather the approach to designing cultural program and services will be informed and shaped by the new Strategy, with particular focus on areas of highest need as evidenced by the Strategy.

Risks

19. The Strategy is an evidence-based approach to delivering the community's aspirations and vision. Risk has been managed by ensuring the City's cultural investments respond to current issues facing the cultural and creative sector, drawing upon the most current available data and analysis and community consultation.

Financial Implications

20. The Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 includes actions that require additional investment of \$20 million over 10 years, in addition to the City's current investment in culture. If the Strategy is adopted, \$2 million will be funded, for these new actions, from within the City's overall operational budget for each financial year from 2025/26 to 2034/35.
21. The Cultural Strategy 2025-2035 proposes dedicated spaces for artists be delivered in suitable City-owned properties. If the Strategy is adopted, these will be delivered within existing asset renewal budgets in the long-term financial plan.

Critical Dates / Time Frames

22. Work to implement the Strategy will begin immediately upon adoption.
23. Guidelines for the creative fellowships, cultural infrastructure and creative spaces start-up grants will be reported to Council for adoption early in 2025. It is intended that submissions be received and assessed within the first half of 2025 and that funding be allocated immediately within the 2025-26 financial year.

KATE DEACON

Executive Director Strategic Development and Engagement

Lisa Colley, Manager Cultural Strategy

Lex Davidson, Cultural Strategy Advisor

Ianto Ware, Cultural Strategy Advisor