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Date March 25, 2025 **Report No.** 2025-169
To Mayor and Members of City Council
From Michael Bradley
Chief Administrative Officer

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic **Woodland Cultural Centre Capital Campaign Contribution [Financial Impact - \$1 million]**

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT report 2025-169 regarding the Woodland Cultural Centre Capital Campaign BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT the requested contribution of \$1 million to the Capital Campaign BE FUNDED in equal installments of \$250,000 annually from 2025-2028 from the Casino Legacy Reserve (RF0555).

4.0 Executive Summary

This report is being presented directly to Council with the approval of the Mayor. Woodland Cultural Centre original submitted an invitation to invest \$1 million in their “We Celebrate Our Stories” Capital campaign in May 2024. Staff is supportive of this request and are recommending this contribution can be made in four installments of \$250,000 annually from 2025-2028.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this report is to present a request from the Woodland Cultural Centre to invest in their Dwade'nyota' Dwaga:'sho:'oh "*We Celebrate Our Stories*" Capital campaign and provide funding recommendations.

The capital campaign is intended to help build a new cultural centre to honour the generations past and build a space to celebrate the stories of First Nations peoples for generations to come.

6.0 Background

The Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) was established in October 1972 under the direction of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, following the closure of the Mohawk Institute Residential School. Initially focused on research and artifact collection to develop its museum and library resources, WCC expanded its mandate to include the arts in 1975 and launched its language program in 1984. Today, the Centre houses over 50,000 artifacts, making it one of the largest cultural facilities in Canada that is managed and operated by First Nations.

WCC is dedicated to preserving, promoting, and revitalizing Indigenous language, culture, art, and history. Through innovative exhibitions and impactful programming, the Centre brings the stories of the Hodinohsho:ni people of the Eastern Woodlands to life. With its deep historical roots and strong community ties, the Woodland Cultural Centre plays a vital role in fostering knowledge and learning across its key program areas—museum, language, education, library, and the arts.

The Woodland Cultural Centre has long delivered its programs and services from the retrofitted Mohawk Institute Residential School classroom and gymnasium, originally constructed in 1954. While the building has undergone various repairs and modifications over the years, it has never fully met the functional requirements of a true Cultural Centre—lacking appropriate museum infrastructure, gallery spaces, collections storage, and adequate programming areas.

The vision for the new Cultural Centre is to establish a world-class facility that serves as a beacon of Hodinohsho:ni knowledge—a space where all are welcomed to celebrate the enduring strength, resilience, and beauty of Indigenous languages, culture, heritage, music, and art. Now more than ever, it is essential to share these stories, honour this history, and amplify Indigenous

voices within a state-of-the-art space designed to engage visitors from across the globe.

The development of this transformative project represents a significant investment, with an estimated cost of \$65 million. In collaboration with Two Row Architects, the new facility will be designed to meet current Class A museum and gallery standards, ensuring proper stewardship of the Centre's 35,000-item collection. Sustainability is at the heart of this initiative. The building will incorporate a range of environmentally conscious features, including a green roof and strategically positioned windows to maximize natural light while supporting seasonal needs for heating, cooling, and lighting. Water drainage systems will nourish surrounding gardens, thoughtfully integrated into the landscape around the Centre.

Woodland Cultural Centre provided the City an invitation to invest in the "We Celebrate Our Stories" Capital campaign in May 2024. The invitation letter is provided in Appendix A.

This visionary new Cultural Centre will reflect a deep commitment to environmental responsibility, cultural revitalization, and community connection—creating a space where the earth, the people, and their stories can flourish together.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

This request aligns with Council's priority of focusing on productive and collaborative partnerships. Specifically, this funding request supports Council's commitment to provide financial or in-kind resources to assist in honouring the history and cultural revitalization of Indigenous Peoples.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

This report involved collaboration between Finance and Government Relations.

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Current Status

Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) has increasingly become a vital resource for educators, learners, and citizens seeking to deepen their understanding and contribute meaningfully to the reconciliation movement. However, without the

necessary capacity to accommodate growing attendance, expand program offerings, and increase revenue generation, the Centre's potential for organizational growth, visibility, and long-term vitality is significantly limited.

The current limitations also restrict the Centre's ability to fully showcase its cultural knowledge and storytelling through expanded artifact displays and art exhibitions. Adequate space is essential to meet the growing demand for culturally rich experiences and to ensure that the stories, histories, and artistic expressions of the Hodinohsho:ni people are shared in their full depth and richness.

The current collection storage at the Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) has undergone numerous retrofits in an effort to better accommodate the more than 35,000 artifacts housed within the Museum's holdings. With a collection of this magnitude, the WCC is recognized as one of the largest and most influential cultural institutions in Canada that is both managed and administered by First Nations.

However, the ongoing challenges related to inadequate storage space are no longer sustainable. As museum sector standards continue to evolve, and as many non-Indigenous institutions and private collectors increasingly seek to return artifacts and cultural belongings as part of reconciliation efforts, WCC currently lacks the physical infrastructure required to accept and properly care for these significant items on behalf of the community. Addressing these limitations is critical to supporting repatriation efforts, safeguarding cultural heritage, and ensuring that the Centre can continue to serve as a trusted steward of Indigenous history and knowledge.

9.2 Investment Rationale

The Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) stands as a vital cultural, historical, and educational institution in the region—one that preserves, promotes, and celebrates the living heritage of the Hodinohsho:ni people. As the Centre embarks on a transformative capital campaign to build a new, state-of-the-art facility, the City of Brantford has a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate leadership in reconciliation, cultural preservation, and community development.

1. A Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Supporting WCC directly aligns with the City's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. The Centre plays a critical role in educating the public, fostering dialogue, and advancing reconciliation efforts—

not only regionally but nationally. A contribution to this campaign is a powerful gesture of ally-ship and responsibility.

2. Strengthening a Shared Cultural Landscape

The Woodland Cultural Centre is not only a cultural cornerstone for Indigenous communities—it is also a key part of the broader cultural fabric of Brantford and the surrounding region. The new facility will serve as a world-class destination for visitors, students, artists, and scholars, enhancing the region’s cultural reputation and attracting tourism and economic development.

3. Economic and Educational Benefits

A revitalized Centre will generate increased tourism, economic activity, and educational partnerships. It will create jobs, stimulate local business, and expand programming for schools, universities, and community groups. Supporting the campaign is an investment in the economic and intellectual vitality of the region.

4. Honouring a Shared History

The Woodland Cultural Centre is located on the site of the former Mohawk Institute Residential School—one of the first and longest-operating residential schools in Canada. Supporting the Centre’s growth is an act of remembrance, healing, and a commitment to ensuring that this history is never forgotten. It is a chance to honour survivors, support community healing, and build a more inclusive future.

5. A Lasting Legacy for Future Generations

The new Cultural Centre will be an enduring symbol of respect, reconciliation, and renewal. A contribution from the City of Brantford will help leave a legacy of cultural stewardship and civic responsibility that future generations can be proud of.

10.0 Financial Implications

Staff is recommending that the total contribution to the project be made in annual installments of \$250,000 over four years (2025-2028) from the Casino Legacy Reserve. The Use of Casino Funds Policy (Finance-010) sets out criteria for the use of Legacy allocations and specifically includes Cultural initiatives.

11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

There is no immediate climate or environmental implications.

12.0 Conclusion

By supporting the Woodland Cultural Centre's capital campaign, the City of Brantford has a unique opportunity to invest in a project that reflects shared values, honours truth and reconciliation, and strengthens the cultural and economic vitality of the region. This contribution will help create a transformative space that preserves and celebrates the rich heritage of the Hodinohsho:ni people while fostering learning, healing, and connection for generations to come. Together, we can build a legacy rooted in respect, understanding, and a more inclusive future for all.



Michael Bradley
Chief Administrative Officer

Prepared By:

Sasha Hill Smith, Chief of Staff

Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A: Request Letter for Support

Appendix B: Case for Support

Copy to:

Heather George, Executive Director, Woodland Cultural Centre

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no