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## **Grant to support local cultural prosperity**

Culture in Grey Highlands is getting a boost this year thanks to a grant from the Ministry of Culture.

Called the Creative Communities Prosperity Fund, the \$25,000 in funding will support the development of a variety of community cultural components.

“We are really getting a close look at our local culture with this grant,” said Markdale Chamber of Commerce project coordinator and grant application author Kate Russell. “We are taking a wide range of culture into account under this grant, everything from heritage artifacts to buildings, sports and recreational events as well as artists, galleries and museums.”

A listing of cultural assets in the municipality is well under way, with over 120 various organizations, businesses, individuals and heritage items already recorded. This list will identify people to approach about attending two public meetings in the fall. These meetings will be held at the two sites of the Osprey Museum, thanks to volunteers for that organization. Dates set are September 29<sup>th</sup> and October 2<sup>nd</sup>. The public meetings will allow folks to discuss local culture and identify anyone missed on the assets listing. They will also help people share their cultural stories.

“It's so important to recognize our community culture,” said Russell, who is working with consultant John Harrison of the Grey Bruce Cultural Network on the project. “We'd really like to be able to map our local culture, so we can celebrate our culture, our heritage and our stories.”

The grant also supports developing a cultural component of the Grey Highlands community profile. This document outlines the business, industrial and social parts of the community- everything from commercial opportunities, industrial workforce, median wages, populations, schools and daycares, but does not give a good look at the local culture.

“If we want to put our best foot forward to people who might be thinking about relocating or starting a business in this are, we need to update our profile and give people a better idea of who we are as a community,” said Russell. “We have to look beyond bricks and mortar and wage levels.”

The idea of the Creative Communities Prosperity Fund is to bring culture into the mix when municipalities are looking at strategic planning and future visioning. The fund is to create tools for municipalities, developers, community organizations, businesses and individuals to really look at future planning with culture in mind.

“You can't just plan without looking at the way it might affect the local culture,” said Russell. “Perhaps our local culture won't support some new commercial enterprise or a big box store, but maybe there is opportunity for the success of say, the Highlands Community Co-op in Flesherton, where a former commercial fitness facility has become community-owned and volunteer vision driven.”

Culture is hockey and skating, so talking to those groups before developing arenas is a good first step, Russell explained. Planning shouldn't be done in a vacuum, she added, it's important for people to get involved and keep their local culture and community preferences in front of them when planning. Does a village want walking paths, then maybe developers should provide them and link them with other communities too.

As part of the grant, a two-day workshop is planned for October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> at the Centre Grey Recreation Complex in Markdale. This event will include workshops and visioning sessions as well as a local food dinner on Friday night with a keynote speaker, sponsored by Municipal Cultural Planning Inc. MCPI is a provincial organization which supports the cultural planning initiative by networking with municipal, planning and government authorities.

A further public meeting will be held in early 2011 to report on the findings of the grant and provide a look at how Grey Highlands may move into a more culturally planned future. All residents of the area are welcome, if you are interested in any portion of the grant, have a suggestion for the cultural list or simply want to learn more, contact the Markdale Chamber at 519-986-4612 or email [markdalechamber@cablerocket.com](mailto:markdalechamber@cablerocket.com) or visit [www.village.markdale.on.ca](http://www.village.markdale.on.ca).