

Varley McKay-Art Foundation of Markham

The Dutchess

Minutes

Monday, December 8, 2025

6:30 PM

Attendance:

Board of Directors Present: Jim Schmidt (Chair), Craig McOuat (Vice-Chair), Connie Leclair (Governance Chair), Amin Giga (Treasurer), Councillor Reid McAlpine, Nik Mracic, and Paul Cicchini

Staff Present: Niamh O’Laoghaire, Director, Varley Art Gallery; Francesca Dauphinais, Foundation Cultural Development Officer, Vinay Sharda, Director of Economic Development, Culture & Entertainment, Laura Gold, Clerk

Regrets: Josy Jamieson, Sophia Sun, Arpita Surana,

1. Call to Order

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham convened at 6:30 PM with Craig McOuat in the Chair.

2. Approval of the Minutes

Moved by Connie Leclair

Seconded by Nik Mracic

That the November 10, 2025, Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham meeting minutes be approved as presented.

Carried

3. Directors Report

Niamh O’Laoghaire, Director, Varley Art Gallery, presented the Director’s Report. Some of the highlights of the report included:

2006 Request for Support

The Varley Art Gallery is requesting \$40K in funding for 2026 from the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham, in alignment with the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding with the City. Funds will support education, exhibitions, public programming, and operational support.

Recent Awards

The 2024 summer exhibition, *To Go Boldly* won Exhibition of the Year (Budget Over \$20K-Thematic) at the 48th Annual Galleries Ontario / Ontario Galleries (GOG) Awards.

Yan Wu, City of Markham Public Art Curator, received the Changemaker BIPOC Award, recognizing leadership and impact in the public gallery sector.

The awards highlight the Galleries curatorial excellence and its commitment to socially engaged inclusive programming.

Exhibitions

The 2026 exhibition schedule is largely finalized, featuring five exhibitions across winter, summer, and fall seasons. Exhibitions focus on themes of identity, history, photography, and contemporary artistic practice, with both regional and national relevance.

Programs and Public Engagement

An update on programs and public engagement was provided. Programs and public events remain strong and well attended.

Rentals and Community Partnerships

The Gallery continues to serve as a community hub, hosting exhibitions, studio rentals, and meetings for local artists and cultural organizations. Partnerships with groups such as the Markham Group of Artists remain active and ongoing.

Facilities and Operations

A list of key operation updates was provided.

Discussion:

The Board approved the Gallery's funding request for \$40,000.

Moved by Amin Giga

Seconded by Connie Leclair

That the Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham approve the Gallery's 2006 funding request for \$40,000.

Carried

6. Development Officer Report

Francesca Dauphinais, Cultural Development Officer, presented her Development Officer Report. Some of the highlights of the report included the following:

Key Financial Results

- Total revenue raised: \$184,725, exceeding the approved development budget by 61%.
- Funding sources included:
 - Government support (\$59,000), led by City of Markham funding.
 - Corporate sponsorships (\$38,500), with major support from TD Bank Group.
 - Private foundation funding (\$20,000).
 - A \$50,000 major gift from Dr. and Mrs. Chuang, establishing a five-year scholarship fund (\$10,000 annually).
 - Community donations and fundraising events, including a wine-tasting fundraiser at the Varley.

Events and Fundraising Activities

- The signature fundraising event was postponed in 2025 and is planned to relaunch in Spring 2026.
- The relaunched event will feature:
 - New co-chairs
 - A refreshed theme (*Glitter and Gold: Boots and Art / Boots on Deck*)
 - Expanded partnership and revenue opportunities

- Board members are expected to actively support the event moving forward.
- Donar Recognition Event for Dr. and Mrs. Chuang is scheduled to be held on February 6, 2026.

Volunteer Impact

- 127 active volunteers contributed a total of 3,799 hours, the highest volunteer contribution among City of Markham cultural venues.
- Volunteer engagement remained strong across programming and community activities.

Looking Ahead to 2026

- Strategic priorities focus on:
 - Strengthening major donors
 - Securing multi-year sponsorships
 - Increasing private foundation funding
 - Launching a monthly giving program
 - Formalizing new curatorial and scholarship sponsorships

7. Financial Report

There was no updated Financial Report since the last meeting.

8. Governance Report

Directors were reminded to review the Governance document and to provide any comments to Nik Mracic and Connie Leclair.

Lisa Reigel, Assistant City Solicitor, has reviewed the documents and will provide her comments early next week.

9. Fundraising Update

An update on fundraising will be provided in January 2026.

10. New Business

The Board discussed the following:

- The possibility of acquiring art from estate sales.
- If there is a possibility of borrowing artwork from the McMichael Gallery

- Developing a template that can be used for future donation agreements.

Francesca Dauphinais, Cultural Development Officer, will send out a copy of the agreement used for the recent donation.

11. Adjournment

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham adjourned at 6:54 PM.