

Varley McKay-Art Foundation of Markham

**Varley Gallery
(Hybrid Meeting)**

Minutes

Monday, January 12, 2026

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, and Nik Mracic

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

Regrets: Josy Jamieson, Sophia Sun, Arpita Surana, Amin Giga, and Paul Cicchini

1. Call to Order

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham convened at 6:05 PM with Jim Schmidt in the Chair without quorum.

2. Disclosure of Pecuniary Interests

There were no disclosures of pecuniary interests.

3. Review of Minutes of Board Meeting held on December 8, 2025

The Board reviewed the Minutes of board meeting held on December 8, 2025, but was unable to approve them due to there being no quorum.

4. Business arising from the minutes

There was no new business arising from the minutes.

5. Directors Report

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

Special Thanks

- The Foundation was formally thanked for approving \$40,000 in 2026 support.
- Special thanks was provided to Jim Schmidt, Chair, for funding the printing of the 2026 Winter/Spring brochures.

2025 Attendance

- 2025 was a Record-breaking year: Total attendance reached 66,998, surpassing the previous record of 62,373.

Grant Applications

- Joint application with Markham Museum submitted to the Ontario Seniors Community Grant Program.
- Preparation underway for the Ontario Arts Council Operating Grant, with a new earlier deadline (March 2026).

Exhibitions

- 2026 exhibition schedule remains on track, beginning February 7, 2026.
- Invitation extended to Board for the winter exhibition opening.
- Ongoing discussions with the McMichael Canadian Art Collection about hosting a major touring exhibition (*Listen to the Land*) featuring:
 - Work by Rebecca Belmore
 - Sketches by all Group of Seven members and Tom Thomson
- This exhibition would require additional funding beyond the usual budget.

Programs & Public Engagement

- An update on programs and public engagement was provided.

Rentals & Community Partnerships

- Continued use of facilities by community groups (UBIA, Markham Group of Artists, workshops).
- Ongoing partnerships reinforce the Gallery's role as a community cultural hub.

Facilities & Operations

- An update on facilities and operations was provided.

Discussion

The following was discussed regarding the Director's Report:

McMichael Exhibition

The following was discussed regarding the McMichael Exhibition (if the Gallery hosted the exhibit):

Anticipated length of exhibit

The exhibition would likely be 3-4 months, aligned with standard exhibition rotations. The cost of the exhibit included the McMichael fee and insurance payment.

Sponsor and Marketing of Exhibit

- Discussed potentially obtaining sponsorship of the exhibit.
- Recognized that the Gallery's marketing budget may need to be increased to promote the exhibit.
- Discussed the possibility of displaying some of the Gallery's Group of Seven works at the same time if the Varley hosts the exhibit.
- Questioned if the Gallery would have exclusivity to the exhibit, noting this is not typically granted.

Performance/ Venue Partnership

Directors expressed concern that a 3-day event is using Gallery space free of charge (between exhibits - when art is not being displayed), questioning the direct benefit to the Gallery, noting that a value needs to be assigned to venue space to ensure partnerships produce a bottom-line. Staff and the Foundation will explore how the Gallery can benefit more from the partnership.

6. Development Officer Report

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

Winter Camps

The Gallery's winter camps were a success.

Re-Opening Event of Main Street Unionville

Noted that an event is being held to celebrate the re-opening of Main Street Unionville. Destination Markham is assessing what the event could look like if they proceed.

Gallery's 30th Anniversary

Exploring aligning the 30th anniversary with programming on Main Street Unionville to increase the impact and fit with the broader community.

The Directors discussed the possibility of combining fundraising for the McMichael Exhibition with the 30th Anniversary event (if the Gallery proceeds with hosting the exhibition). They noted discussion on the event should start early and opportunities to promote the exhibit and the Gallery's 30th anniversary broadly through Destination Markham and other channels should be explored.

2027 Exhibition on Chinatown

The Directors briefly discussed a 2027 exhibition on Chinatown.

Donor Recognition Event – Mr. and Mrs. Chuang.

The event agenda for the donor recognition event for Mr. and Mrs. Chuang was presented, and the Directors were asked to provide feedback. Councillor McAlpine will possibly MC the event and the Mayor will attend the event. Jim Schmidt, Chair, will make the donation announcement. The guest list is growing – currently there is about 50 guests. Non-alcoholic drinks will be served at the event.

The Directors requested that the CAO and all of the Commissioners be invited to the event.

Line Dancing Event

The event concept is being updated to focus mostly on the dancing as attendees are price sensitive due to most coming for the dancing not the fundraising. The estimated capacity of the event is 50-70 people. The event is being targeted to be held on Saturday, March 28th with a weather back-up date. The event will be kept simple to ensure it is financially viable. Some sponsorship funds may be needed to support the event. The goal of the event would be to introduce new audiences to the Gallery but also trying to position it as fundraising event. The event could include a cash bar or non-alcoholic drinks.

The Board suggested having a social component of the event.

7. Financial Report

8. Committee Updates

A) Governance Committee

Connie Leclair, Governance Chair, thanked Councillor McAlpine and Lisa Reigel, Assistant City Solicitor, for their feedback on the governance documents.

Vinay Sharma, Director of Economic Development, Culture and Entrepreneurship, advised that he followed up with legal on their feedback on the Foundation's Charter. Legal is expected to provide their feedback in January 2026.

The Directors clarified that the purpose of the Charter is to reflect the Foundation's current intentions and opportunities, as the original MOU was created in 2006. The Charter outlines the broader role of the Foundation that goes beyond fundraising.

B) Fundraising Committee

No report was provided.

9. New Business

There was no new business.

10. Confidential Session (if required)

The Varley-McKay Art Foundation of Markham adjourned the meeting at 7:42 PM to enter a closed session to discuss the following:

- 1) Item to discuss a position, plan, procedure, criteria or instruction to be applied to any negotiations carried on or to be carried on by the Board or on behalf of the Board.

11. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting of the Varley McKay Art Foundation of Markham will be held on February 9, 2026, at 6:00 PM.

10. Adjournment

The Varley McKay Art Foundation of Markham adjourned at 7:42 PM.