



2025 Annual Report

Land Acknowledgement

The Community & Cultural Spaces Trust (CCST) acknowledges that we work and organize on land that is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. The territory is the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. Today, the meeting place of Toronto (from the Haudenosaunee word Tkaronto) is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work in this territory.



Letter from the Chair of the Board



The past year has been more momentous for the Community & Cultural Spaces Trust than any of us could have imagined.

In February we secured our first properties - marking the first acquisition by a cultural land trust in Canada. While this is a significant achievement for our organization and the land trust movement in this country and beyond, it is an equally important win for the arts and culture community which continues to lose space and affordable work environments at an alarming rate.

At the same time, our dedicated volunteer working Board has made significant progress on a number of organizational goals. We created our first Strategic Plan, continued our Space Needs Assessment, completed a second round of recruitment to fill our Board, completed full financial audits, and participated in numerous capacity-building and network-growing events. We participated in the publication of four widely-read articles on the need for affordable arts and culture space in our neighbourhoods, and shared our work and model with other land trusts by appearing on several industry panels.

As we look ahead, we are incredibly excited to begin another property search with our original settlement funds while celebrating the tremendous progress we have made. I sincerely look forward to completing this work with my Board colleagues and remain deeply grateful for the continued support we receive from our peers, partners, and the community we serve.

Sincerely,

Hannah Fleisher

Chair of the Board of Directors

Community & Cultural Spaces Trust



About Us

2019

In November 2019, after years of community organizing and advocacy, residents in Toronto's west end [won a historic \\$17 million community benefits settlement](#) with the developers of the public school lands at the southwest corner of Bloor Street and Dufferin Street. Led by the volunteer community group [Build A Better Bloor Dufferin](#) (BBBD) with support from two affordable housing nonprofits, local elected officials, countless community members, and several local organizations, the settlement provides funds for creating and preserving both affordable housing and community and cultural spaces in [Davenport - Ward 9 in the City of Toronto](#).

2022

The settlement has been used to form two trusts, with \$2 million of these funds directed specifically to preserve spaces used by local community, cultural, and arts organizations in Ward 9. In 2022 two members of BBBD co-founded and incorporated the Community & Cultural Spaces Trust to steward these funds. The housing funds are managed by a separate trust called [Community Affordable Housing Solutions](#).

2025

The final installment of our settlement will be received this year, and our Ward 9 property search will begin.

Our story would not be possible without the broad support of residents and community organizations in Toronto's Bloor Dufferin neighbourhood. We are proud that CCST started with neighbours and local organizations who welcome equitable and inclusive development. We value Ward 9's current diversity, affordability, and access to arts and culture. We are committed to leveraging the \$2 million we started with to address Toronto's rapid loss of affordable spaces for arts and culture, social services and community building.



Our Mandate

The CCST mandate is to create and facilitate sustainable processes for acquiring and maintaining real property for use by community, cultural and arts organizations in the Bloor Dufferin neighbourhood.

This mandate may be expanded in future years. In the meantime, we understand our mandate to mean that we will:

- **Convene** Ward 9 arts, cultural and community organizations and groups who are threatened by displacement.
- **Support** the community in Ward 9 to obtain or retain commercial and light industrial spaces for community, cultural and arts uses.
- **Sustain** CCST's initial asset of \$2 million. We will not deteriorate our assets.
- **Begin to serve as a resource** for Ward 9 arts, cultural and community organizations and groups, helping where we can with research, legal agreements, government relations, advocacy, partnerships and community connections.

Board of Directors

CCST is governed by a volunteer working Board of Directors.

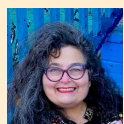
Founding Board members include:



Hannah Fleisher, Chair, an urban planner with experience in housing development, community planning, and strategic planning for both public and non-profit organizations,



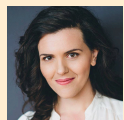
Maggie Hutcheson, Vice Chair, an Assistant Professor of Museum Studies at the University of Toronto and community-based artist, curator and organizer, with extensive non-profit leadership experience



Erella Ganon, Director, an artist, illustrator, publisher, and community activist in Ward 9 of Toronto for over 20 years,



Sean Fitzpatrick, Director, a lawyer in Toronto specializing in labour and employment law and founding member of the Community Affordable Housing Solutions who served the Board until 2025, and

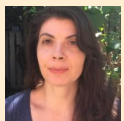


Yolanda Ferrato, a nonprofit and arts management expert who has since moved from Toronto and left the Board in 2024.

In 2023, CCST recruited new Board members, including:



Julia Culpeper, Director, a project manager, musician, and learning strategist for arts organizations and technology companies,



Liz Hysen, Secretary, an archivist and musician who has been involved in the arts scene in Toronto for over 20 years, and



Alycia Shanika, Director, an urban and cultural planner, engagement specialist and artist.

In 2024, CCST went through another recruitment process to fill all remaining Board positions.

A Year in Review: *Three Milestone Achievements*

Acquired our
first two
properties

Created a
Strategic Plan

Completed
recruitment
for our first
full Board



Our First Acquisition

In the Fall of 2023, [Inspirit Foundation](#) approached CCST seeking advice and ideas on how they could preserve 15 units up for sale through a receivership process at 180 Shaw Street, known as the Youngplace building. This former TDSB school was redeveloped and renovated in 2010 for commercial use focused on community learning, arts, and cultural production. Inspirit assisted the majority of the tenants of those units in finding funds to purchase their spaces, but two units remained at risk of sale to the market. Through discussions and engagement over 18 months, CCST and the Inspirit Foundation formed a unique partnership to preserve Unit 102 and Unit 107 in 180 Shaw and keep their current tenants in place. CCST took possession of the units in February 2025.

In order to properly navigate and evaluate this opportunity, CCST completed substantial property and financial due diligence through the assistance of real estate professionals and lawyers. This both served as a basis for sound decision-making during our first acquisition and allowed the Board to develop knowledge and skills to support our future purchasing activities.

[This partnership produced the first acquisition by a land trust for cultural purposes in Canada and preserved active art production studios for community use in perpetuity.](#) Of equal importance, the deal negotiated has allowed us to maintain affordability of the units, kept existing arts tenants in place, preserved two active art production studios, helped preserve the original intent of the 180 project, and instituted some true community ownership of property. We are incredibly grateful to the Inspirit Foundation for supporting this acquisition, the City of Toronto for contributing funds to maintain the affordability of the units for the existing tenants, and the Youngplace community for warmly welcoming us into their building.



Strategic Planning

In July 2024 CCST engaged the [Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts \(CNCLT\)](#) to design a series of strategic planning workshops for the Board. As a volunteer-run organization early in its development that is pulled in many directions simultaneously, our goal was to leverage the CNCLT's experience and objectivity to sequence our strategic priorities, identify the most urgent activities for the coming year, clearly identify our community, and develop criteria to evaluate acquisition opportunities.

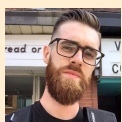
Our Board of Directors participated in the workshops throughout the Fall of 2024. Through this work we further articulated our understanding of CCST's community (who we are accountable to); established short-, medium-, and long-term goals for the organization; initiated a decision-making framework for acquisitions using existing commercial real estate listings; and identified the necessary organizational steps to be "acquisition ready". At the end of the workshops CNCLT presented us with a phased strategic work plan based on our discussions.

The time we took for this strategic planning work was indeed worthwhile, and we are grateful to the CNCLT for their workshop facilitation and sector expertise. CCST's Board activities are now driven by this plan and tracked on a monthly basis.

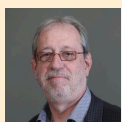
Board Recruitment

Following our strategic planning sessions in November 2024, CCST put out a call for new Board members with specific skill sets to help grow and diversify our leadership. Over the course of two months, we interviewed candidates from a wide variety of backgrounds. This recruitment effort focused on fulfilling immediate needs in the areas of financial oversight, real estate development, operations and property management, and community governance.

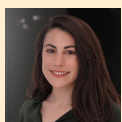
In January 2025, we formally welcomed four new candidate Directors to the Board, each bringing a distinct and valuable perspective. They are:



Eryn Maloney, a recent Master of Urban Planning graduate with a focus on arts and culture planning after working in music, theatre, and live events for over 15 years in Toronto and Winnipeg,



James Roy, an Artistic Director and producer who has worked extensively in theatre and radio for the last three decades with many leadership roles and non profit Board positions,



Danielle Singer, a Toronto-based real estate lawyer with experience in real estate asset management and commercial leasing, and



Chris Wilson, a passionate cultural leader with a wealth of experience in the arts and culture as well as the non-profit sector.

In February 2025, we held our first Board meeting with our fully-resourced Board to start to prepare for acquisition readiness as well as ongoing development of our governance policies. In preparation for our Board development, we also engaged in a skills matrix exercise in order to assess existing capacities and identify strategic gaps. As the Board grows, we will continue to map our technical and lived experiences to ensure a balanced approach to governance that aligns with CCST's core values.

Space Needs Assessment

In 2023, CCST partnered with the [University of Toronto School of Cities MUCP Program](#) to provide the Board with research and outreach support. The 2023-24 academic year project produced a pilot Space Needs Assessment survey that was sent to ten close partners in order to start tracking data on Ward 9 space needs for arts and cultural groups. This pilot allowed us to refine our research questions and begin tracking data for CCST to leverage when making decisions on what kinds of spaces to purchase.

In 2024-25, we partnered with a new group of MUCP students to iterate on the survey and distribute it widely. This group built a dashboard to display survey data in real time, updated some of the questions, performed additional research into new or previously overlooked Ward 9 arts and cultural groups, and helped distribute the survey to those groups. The students designed a poster with information about the survey and distributed flyers in the neighbourhood.

The survey received 22 responses representing a variety of arts organizations mostly from within Ward 9. 86% of respondents noted displacement as a major influence on operations, citing high rents and increased operational costs as a factor. Encouragingly, 64% of respondents responded positively to the idea of sharing space with others. This supports the CCST strategic vision of a multi-use space that can flex to the needs of multiple arts and cultural groups.

The survey was a successful first step in a longer-term strategic plan for CCST to collect and share data back with the cultural ecosystem. Next year, CCST plans to engage the Masters of Planning program to increase the level of sophistication of the research team and tackle more specific research questions. Future iterations of the project could include finessing the survey even more, and using it as a mechanism to invite further and deeper engagement with Ward 9 arts and cultural groups.

Partnership & Community Network Building Strategy

We aim to build our network within and beyond our current connections, including in the arts and culture community, the land trust and social purpose real estate communities, the local Ward 9 community, the not-for-profit community, and others. These communities operate within both Toronto, and Canada more broadly. As a collective group of individual governing members, our current partnerships and networks have been leveraged through CCST's core members. These relationships have provided us opportunities for growth, collaboration, support, learning, and knowledge sharing to fulfill the CCST's goals and expand our understanding of wider community needs. Moving forward, we will continue to build our network to support policy development, internal capacity building and training, strategic alliances, and fundraising goals.

The Board has participated in numerous partnership and community network-building activities since its inception, including:

[Training and seminars](#) including the Creative Spaces Mentoring Program (2021-2022) supported by ArtsBuild Ontario and Creative Blueprint, and the School of Cities Infrastructure Institute's Social Purpose Real Estate Organizational Readiness Program (2023).

[Interviews, panels, & conferences](#), including two panels at the Canadian Network of Community Land Trusts Conferences (2023 and 2024), and four additional arts sector panels (2023-2025).

[Co-authoring articles](#), including [Establishing Affordable Creative Spaces](#) which was featured on Spacing Magazine website. Others are listed on the [CCST website](#).

[Attending community and institutional events](#) in the art, social purpose real estate, land trust, and not-for-profit sectors, including those with partners at the School of Cities, SHEEEP school, Toronto Land Trust networks, Workman Arts Group.



[Participating in community advocacy](#) with grassroots groups including the West Queen West Neighbourhood group (an extension of Active 18), Friends of Dufferin Grove Park, Build A Better Bloor Dufferin, and the Parkdale Residents' Association.

[Developing a database of arts & culture organizations](#) which comprises the populations and groups we intend to serve in the future and was leveraged to distribute the Space Needs Assessment survey.

[Conducting dozens of meetings and engagements](#) with peer institutions, elected officials, and arts organizations in Ward 9 and Toronto to learn and capacity build. Special thanks to our Ward 9 elected officials - Alejandra Bravo, Marit Stiles, and Julie Dzerowicz - who have been generous with their time and capacity to listen to CCST advocacy, and our Toronto CLT peers for their regular and supportive advice..

Through this community network building and partnership initiative, the CCST has grown its reach and impact in many ways. We have seen significant engagement with our publications and online advocacy reaching thousands, while simultaneously developing deep peer and community connections that have yielded learning and mentorship, knowledge dissemination, and a stronger and increasingly informed Board that seeks to be rooted in community needs and awareness.

Financial Overview

In 2024, CCST performed audits of the first two operating years of the organization which confirmed a balanced financial position and growing assets through documentation and decision making in alignment with non profit accounting standards and best practices.

Since incorporation, CCST has received four out of five installments of our settlement. The final payment is due in late 2025. CCST has retained the entirety of these payments and the majority of their interest income for a future property acquisition as specified in the settlement. The Board has worked to keep expenses as low as possible as we set up our foundational operations. Just over half of these expenses (56%) in the last three years have been directed to mandatory activities such as bookkeeping, financial audits, and Directors and Officers (D&O) insurance. An additional 31% was used on consultant support to set up foundational practices and plans for CCST including advisory support on organizational and Board operations (2023) and development of our Strategic Plan (2024).

In early 2025, CCST acquired its first properties through an entirely new financing source - a 0% interest loan from the Inspirit Foundation. This loan also included an amount to cover the majority of our transaction costs. Through this strategic financing approach, the acquisition did not use any of our settlement funds and very little of our annual revenue, keeping our \$2M acquisition fund intact.

	2022	2023	2024
Revenue	\$ 1,968	\$ 30,186	\$ 62,484
Expenses	\$ 8,458	\$15,207	\$13,680
Total Assets	\$397,910	\$ 1,219,072	\$ 1,665,382
Net Income	(\$6,490)	\$ 14,979	\$ 48,804



Looking Ahead: 2025-26 Strategic Priorities

The Board is delighted to announce the following strategic priorities for 2025-26:

Build capacity & governance practices

- Develop all necessary governance policies.
- Study best practices to develop a strong, community governed organization.
- Build capacity of the Board and committees to establish a diverse and representative governance structure.

Develop an acquisition strategy

- Create a comprehensive plan for our settlement funds.
- Establish due diligence processes.
- Develop tenant selection framework.
- Create business cases for different property scenarios.
- Initiate our next property search.

Engage community & partners

- Continue and expand our outreach and participation in events, networks, and tables in the arts, culture, nonprofit, and real estate sectors.

Complete a Space Needs Assessment

- Building on the pilot Space Needs Assessment to understand arts and culture space challenges more deeply.
- Use Assessment results to inform our acquisition strategy.

The work to build and support these strategic priorities will be critical in allowing CCST to develop as an organization.



Want to get involved?

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Written by the CCST Board of Directors

May 2025