

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Planning for Your Cultural District

Planning is often required to become a state certified cultural district—in states that have official cultural districts—and the planning can be done in a variety of ways.

Many cultural districts are developed through formal planning processes, often as part of a downtown redevelopment planning process or an economic development plan. Other cultural district plans are “stand-alone” and are not part of a community’s formal planning process. If the community is applying for a state designation often a plan is required.

A cultural district plan, be it stand-alone or part of a larger redevelopment or economic plan, will usually focus on/include:

- Downtown area
- Strategic plan
- Economic development
- Main Street/Historic
- Facilities/Properties
- Business improvement
- Cultural Plan
- Design and Public Art

Cultural District Plans: Different Focuses

Downtown Area Focus

Plan-It Hennepin, Minneapolis, MN

pop. 392,880

http://hennepintheatretrust.org/sites/default/files/user/email/plan-it_comprehensive_report.pdf

Hennepin Avenue is in the heart of downtown Minneapolis. In the early 20th century, it was a major streetcar route and there were two dozen theaters along and adjacent to the Avenue. Four of those historic theaters remain today. However, there was always a lack of planning and vision for this important part of the city. There existed a real opportunity to create a new vibrant arts district and downtown.

The *Plan-It Hennepin* Cultural District Plan was funded by an Our Town grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and was developed after the Minneapolis Downtown Council released its *Downtown 2025* Plan in 2011. The planning process included community conversations and public workshops with nearly 1,500 community members and stakeholders. Some of the recommendations include strategies that build on the current strengths of the key partners of the project. It also encourages the creation of a “culture of possibility” to encourage experimentation and innovation in all aspects of the planning and implementation.

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Strategic Plan Focus

Columbus Arts District, Columbus, IN

pop. 45,429

<http://www.columbus.in.gov/redevelopment/columbus-arts-district-strategic-plan1/#sthash.o2fhbBEE.dpuf>

In 2011, Columbus Mayor Kristen Brown formed a Columbus Arts District Planning Committee with the mission of developing Columbus into the “cultural and creative capital of the Midwest.” The planning committee of more than two dozen community members worked with stakeholders and the public to learn about their visions for what the arts district should become. They also gathered public input through online surveys and community gatherings such as open houses and conversations. The projects and initiatives outlined in the strategic plan are recommendations. The plan recommended creation of a detailed, project-level blueprint to realize the vision of the Columbus Arts District. A coalition of 11 members representing stakeholders and organizations within the district managed by the Columbus Area Arts Council was appointed to develop these implementation stages.

Economic Development Focus

Economic Development Strategic Plan Cumberland, MD

pop 20,572

http://www.ci.cumberland.md.us/new_site/app/webroot/files/file/Sustainable%20Economic%20Development%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf

Cumberland, MD is located in the rural eastern part of the state. Its economy has been depressed due to the loss of manufacturing jobs and other industries, as well as the downturn in the economy that began in 2008. Cumberland is also one Maryland’s designated arts and entertainment districts, which has allowed Cumberland to develop incentives for economic development in the downtown area. This is a unique plan as it focuses many of its efforts on using the arts and cultural tourism to drive economic stability and growth. It’s also an example of plan for a cultural district within a larger economic development plan for a region.

“The Economic Development Strategic Plan seeks to leverage the flourishing artist community and upper story residential efforts that have been instrumental in revitalizing the downtown into an effort that transitions Downtown Cumberland back into a regional center of commerce, culture, and entertainment. By focusing on the Central Business District as the primary economic generator, this plan seeks to solidify the progress that has been made and expand upon it to positively impact the entire city.”

Main Street/Historic Downtown Focus

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Silver City, NM

pop. 10,273

<http://www.gonm.biz/uploads/files/ACDCulturalPlanSilverCity2009.pdf>

Silver City, NM began as a frontier outpost and then grew to be a prosperous mining town. As the extractive industries moved to other areas of the world and many artists began to relocate to Silver City, the city's focus moved from an industry-driven economic development to a people-driven economic development strategy. Silver City also became a designated main street community. In 2007, New Mexico announced the development of the New Mexico Arts and Cultural Districts program. This program allows designated New Mexico MainStreet (NMMS) communities to access certain incentives and technical assistance in order to establish and sustain a designated arts and cultural district. As part of this designation, the state also required a plan for the cultural district. The Silver City Arts and Cultural District Plan was developed to create a framework for ways that this cultural district could serve its local artists and creatives. And because it is a state-designated district, the plan also demonstrates ways that incentives can be used to benefit Silver City business owners and arts and culture nonprofit groups that are located within the district.

Facilities/Properties Focus

San Angelo Historic City Center Cultural District, San Angelo, TX

pop. 95,887

<http://sanangeloculturaldistrict.org/assets/san-angelo-cultural-district-planning-study-may-2012.pdf>

San Angelo is an historic Texas city that was the outpost of the frontier and home to Ft. Concho. In 1992, the city formed the Regional Urban Design Assistance Team that issued a report that led to the revitalization of the Downtown District on both sides of the North Concho River. In 2009, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts led a large steering committee to apply for Cultural District designation from the Texas Commission on the Arts, and the San Angelo Historic City Center Cultural District was designated as a cultural district in the state of Texas. This cultural district was initially 100 acres and was later doubled to include the San Angelo Health Foundation and two nearby neighborhoods.

In early 2012, a consortium of funders associated with the district, including SAMFA, the City of San Angelo through Fort Concho, the Health Foundation, and the Barrow Foundation, commissioned this planning study for the cultural district. The plan identifies opportunities for the arts, historic, and health properties to work together and create a vision for this cultural district.

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Business Improvement Focus

The Wynood Arts District, Miami, FL

pop. 413,892

<http://egov.ci.miami.fl.us/Legistarweb/Attachments/70925.pdf>

Taking over what used to be the warehouse and manufacturing district of Greater Miami, property developers transformed existing warehouses, shuttered factories, and other spaces into condos, art galleries, performing arts spaces, restaurants, etc. Spearheaded by the Wynwood Arts District Association and local businesses, a planning process was developed that recommended the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) in 2013. The Wynwood BID mission is to “solidify Wynwood as a globally recognized center for art, creativity, and culture with visibly clean and safe streets while enhancing the streetscape, artistic programming and neighborhood advocacy to promote Wynwood’s pedestrian activity and overall sense of place.”

Cultural Plan Focus

The City of Chicago Cultural Plan, Chicago, IL

pop. 2,714,856

<http://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/depts/dca/Cultural%20Plan/CCP2012FinalExecSummary.pdf>

Many communities create cultural plans for their cities or regions. Cultural planning is a public process in which representatives of a community undertake a comprehensive community assessment and create a plan of implementation for future cultural programming. Chicago’s cultural plan is unique because it not only has created a framework to guide the city’s future cultural and economic growth but also includes several recommendations related to cultural districts.

Design and Public Art Focus

Master Plan for the Worcester Arts District, Worcester, MA

pop. 182,669

http://www.worcestermass.org/uploads/U0/e2/U0e2aC4MjSDft_-_Sx92Lrw/ArtsDistrictMasterPlan.pdf

This plan is part of an overall urban design approach presenting a variety of recommendations on physical design improvements, public art, cultural and economic development opportunities.

For more information on planning cultural districts, check out Adele Fleet Bacow’s post on ARTSblog: [What Does it Take to Create a Cultural District?](http://blog.artsusa.org/2013/07/22/what-does-it-take-to-create-a-cultural-district/)
(http://blog.artsusa.org/2013/07/22/what-does-it-take-to-create-a-cultural-district)