



City of Houston Arts & Cultural Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Fifth Ward Jam, Dan Havel and Dean Ruck, Lyons Avenue.
Photo by: Debra Ham

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The vision for the City of Houston Arts and Cultural Plan is to foster an environment in which art and culture flourish for the sharing and benefit of all residents and visitors.

Houston has tremendous artistic and cultural assets, and each year the City of Houston makes important investments in these resources for the benefit of its 2.2 million residents and nearly 15 million annual visitors. With the city expected to grow by more than one million people over the next 20 years, the City's Arts and Cultural Plan identifies community concerns, sets a vision for the future and recommends actions to achieve the City's long-term priorities. The Plan was developed by looking at local data and relevant research as well as by listening to community residents, artists, arts and cultural groups, an Advisory Committee, City (City of Houston) staff, elected officials, leaders and experts. Over just six months, hundreds of individuals contributed to the Plan through meetings, interviews and events, and thousands more accessed the project online.

PLAN VISION

THE VISION FOR THE CITY OF HOUSTON ARTS AND CULTURAL PLAN IS TO FOSTER AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH ART AND CULTURE FLOURISH FOR THE SHARING AND BENEFIT OF ALL RESIDENTS AND VISITORS.

This vision is based on Houston's many past accomplishments in expanding its cultural life and on its leading position as the single most ethnically diverse major metropolitan area in the country. The vision embraces change and reflects the evolving role of culture in the community.

A WORLD CITY

Houston's strengths are abundant—it is a dynamic, open, welcoming city, rediscovering urban life and discovering the importance of its public realm, soon to have the nation's largest system of recreational trails, rich and diverse in its food and cultures, plentiful and excellent in its arts, and a global economic center racing into the future. But Houston has emerged as something more—a true world city, linked by both commerce and culture to countless places around the world.



"Preservons la Creation" AKA "The Biggest Mural in Houston," Artist: Sebastien "Mr. D" Boileau, Project Manager: UP Art Studio.
Photo by: Aisha Kahn

Houston already has brand strength in energy, space, medicine and petrochemicals. It is one of the best places in the world for the arts and its cultural assets represent a strategic opportunity for Houston's civic identity.

Houston has abundant success in arts and culture on which to build. Houston's internationally-renowned cultural institutions drive a growing creative economy. The city is home to the first and largest art car parade in the world, the largest rodeo in the world and one of the world's largest and most respected international photographic events, FotoFest. Houston is anchored by leading museums and performing arts organizations. It has the highest-attended youth museum for its size in the country, the largest "always free" proscenium outdoor theatre program in country and the most Cultural Districts in the state—five – designated by the Texas Commission on the Arts. The First Ward has the highest concentration of artist studios in Texas—second in the nation after Hollywood.

The city's magnificent skyline is made up of award-winning architecture, landmarks and historic buildings. Houston has originated groundbreaking faith, place-based and literature organizations that fuse art with human rights, community development and education. Locally created exhibitions and productions tour the country routinely, shining a spotlight on the city's artistic excellence. Houston is one of a few U.S. cities with resident companies in symphony, opera, drama and ballet, and more than 500 organizations are devoted to the arts, science and history in the Houston area. Each year these groups have more than 9 million visits by adults and children.

In the city and county, nonprofit arts and culture are a significant industry, annually offering thousands of programs, projects and activities to residents and visitors. The nonprofit arts and culture sector generates \$977.7 million in total economic activity. This spending—\$414.6 million by nonprofit arts and culture organizations and an additional \$563.1 million in event-related spending by their audiences—supports 29,118 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$702.9 million in household

income to local residents, and delivers \$130.4 million in local and state government revenue.¹

A 2015 update to the "Creative Economy of Houston" study has shown that Houston has a total demand of \$25.6 billion from the local Creative Industry (10-county region) of which \$10.5 billion is produced and sold locally. This data reflects a total employment of about 114,000 workers in Creative Industries. The demand for more investment in the Creative Industry Economy has increased by over \$5 billion in the past 4 years since this study was first conducted.²

Many local arts and cultural organizations of all disciplines and sizes are responding to Houston's growth and its transforming community. From the commissioning of new works about the immigrant experience to featuring non-Anglo artists and those cultivated from folk and spiritual traditions, all residents can increasingly find themselves in the creative products of Houston's arts and culture sector. Much is being done in the way of affordability, and on any given day, there are multiple opportunities to take in excellent free, discounted and pay-what-you-can activities.

BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

Cultural vitality is among the four pillars³ of sustainability, as are economic prosperity, social equity and environmental

¹ Americans for the Arts, Arts & Economic Prosperity IV, 2012, <http://houstonartsalliance.com/research/aepsiv/>

² Houston Arts Alliance, University of Houston, Greater Houston Partnership & EMSI, and funded in part by the City of Houston, The Creative Economy of Houston 2, 2015, <http://houstonartsalliance.com/research/creativeeconomy/>.

³ Broadly defined, sustainable development is a systems approach to growth and development and to manage natural, produced, and social capital for the welfare of their own and future generations. The three-pillar model of economic, environmental and social equity has been expanded by some authors to include a fourth pillar of culture. James, Paul; with Magee, Liam; Scerri, Andy; Steger, Manfred B. (2015). *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability*. London: Routledge.



Art Recycling Trucks, *Green Dream*, Pablo Gimenez-Zapiolo.
Photo by: Marc Newsome

responsibility. As such, cultural planning inevitably draws out issues and concerns that intersect with these areas. Barbara Jordan, the great Texas legislator and orator, best expressed the transformative persuasion of the arts in public policy—*The arts, instead of quaking along the periphery of our policy concerns, must push boldly into the core of policy. The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature and help to shape our identity. The arts are not a frill and should not be treated as such. They have the potential to become the driving force for healing division and divisiveness.*

Houston has seen amazing growth in the rich and varied cultural communities of the world making the city their home. However, isolation of ethnic groups exists in Houston, as it does in other growing multiculturally rich cities, and leadership and decision-making is not yet as inclusive as it will need to become. A well-established body of research has shown that cultural participation correlates positively with civic participation and in developing social capital. Places found to have higher levels of community attachment were also found to have higher levels of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth.

Houston falls short—as large American cities tend to do—of achieving deep equality of opportunity. A decreasing middle class means fewer citizens being able to afford participation in typical forms of cultural enrichment such as ticketed performances, tuition-based enrichment and arts education programs as well as opportunities requiring transportation that may prove too expensive.

In the cultural sector, revenue is highly concentrated among Houston's largest institutions, with median revenue among nonprofit organizations in the local sector far below what is found in comparable regions. Houston also has a lower density of artists than comparable regions and is underserved by local creative businesses (residents import more than half of the creative goods they use).⁴ Like a growing number of Houstonians, housing availability and affordability is a principal concern for artists and creative workers, as is work space

for creative businesses. **Equity was raised in every meeting about the Plan, from a need for more fairness in how the City allocates its cultural investments, to residents' ability to access Houston's cultural sector.**

Another important aspect is the indisputable role that arts education plays on student achievement, college entry, talent development, cultural understanding, compassion and civic participation. There are currently 18 independent school districts serving the city limits. Recent data collection from the area's largest school district, Houston ISD (HISD), found tremendous gaps in quality, consistency and access related to arts education and that seven percent of schools serving grades K – 8 reported that their students received a single field trip in third grade.⁵ **The need for systemic increased arts education is paramount.** While Houston's cultural landscape includes strong institutions dedicated to improving arts education in the schools and organizations are working to expand programming including a new arts access pilot with HISD, far too many students are being left out.

Arts and culture is central to enhancing both quality of life and quality of place, and cultural vitality flourishes where there is opportunity and broad participation. Creative, vibrant and strong cities are attractive to investors in industry, business and tourism, and in turn, generate employment opportunities, expand the tax-base and generally add to the real wealth of the community.

⁴ Houston Arts Alliance, University of Houston, Greater Houston Partnership & EMSI, *The Creative Economy of Houston*, 2015, <http://houstonartsalliance.com/research/creativeeconomy/>

⁵ Fine Arts Education in HISD, October 16, 2014, Daniel Gohl, Chief Academic Officer, Houston Independent School District, Arts Access Initiative 2014 – Young Audiences of Houston. [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCUQFjAAa-hUKEwiTspXO3OrHAhXLOYAKHZmKA3o&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.houstonisd.org%2Fsite%2Fhandlers%2Ffiledownload.ashx%3Fmoduleinstanceid%3D109240%26dataid%3D122497%26FileName%](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCUQFjAAa-hUKEwiTspXO3OrHAhXLOYAKHZmKA3o&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.houstonisd.org%2Fsite%2Fhandlers%2Ffiledownload.ashx%3Fmoduleinstanceid%3D109240%26dataid%3D122497%26FileName%26)



En Masse, University of Houston Spirit of Houston Cougar Marching Band.
Photo by: David Brown

OPPORTUNITY AND IDENTITY

Houstonians love their city, its rich history, its belief in what's possible and its desire to reach for more. It is this grand sense of optimism that has fueled its growth and put Houston on the map in multiple arenas including science, medicine, industry and the arts. The Plan's community engagement process revealed a shared identity of Houston being a land of opportunity, new ideas and a "town of big chances".

There is reason to be cautious about how this identity, as a city overflowing with opportunity, is contributing to "attention blindness" to the reality of inequality—which can lead to community division, and too many residents disconnected from the opportunity to thrive. Houstonians understand the importance of arts and cultural resources for themselves, their children, their communities and their heritage. People are asking for more affordable cultural experiences, opportunities to participate in the arts where they live and more arts education in the schools. Strong cultural policies ensure fair treatment in allocating public resources and integrate arts and culture across all facets of government planning and decision making.

If Houston can push past its attention blindness to inequality and begin to create new opportunities for its most neglected citizens, it will set a new standard. It is not an accident that many of the immigrants and people who moved for the money but stayed for the place all agreed that they saw themselves as Houstonians first. **Among the wide variety of people engaged in the planning process, a sentiment surfaced that the city holds up more promise than Texas and even the nation.**

THE PLAN

The Arts and Cultural Plan leverages the City's unique position in the local cultural ecosystem to respond to current circumstances with 27 recommendations that represent the

City's long-term priorities. To advance Houston as a worldwide cultural destination and opportunity center, the Plan suggests strategies to promote Houston's exceptional collection of globally significant museums, performing arts institutions and creative talent, as well as the cultural organizations that comprise Houston's "world" communities. The Plan is part of an integrated, place-based approach in building a vision and strategy to realize the value and potential of local cultural assets. The recommendations are organized under three priorities:

■ PROMOTE ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY ARTS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING

■ ENHANCE THE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE CITY'S DEEP CULTURAL ASSETS

■ ADVANCE STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE LOCAL CREATIVE ECONOMY

MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE ARTS AND CULTURAL PLAN IS DESIGNED SO MORE RESIDENTS AND VISITORS CAN FULLY BENEFIT FROM HOUSTON'S ARTS AND CULTURAL VITALITY.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Plan recommends ensuring a fair and equitable process for arts and culture grant applicants.

It proposes that arts and culture become a central theme in the City's destination marketing, as well as promotion of Houston's cultural assets to residents.

The Plan builds on partnerships and aligns resources linking the City with its community partners.

It identifies opportunities to strengthen relationships with anchor cultural institutions, increase sustainability in the sector and it identifies a pathway to build support for new revenue.



ART/LIFE Bert Long, Looscan Neighborhood Library.
Photo by: Beryl Striewski

It affirms the importance of quality arts education in public schools and neighborhoods and offers tools to expand the Civic Art Program to more communities.

It calls for elevating the standing of arts and culture within the City organization, greater oversight of public investments and for ongoing public input in City arts and culture goals.

The City's leadership can ensure that visitors have every opportunity to enjoy Houston's cultural vitality and that every resident has an opportunity to lead a creative and expressive life.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Arts and Cultural Plan process had broad community input from residents, stakeholders, community leaders, City department directors and City office leaders through: **two** Town Hall meetings, **three** Quality of Life Committee meetings, **six** public meetings, **six** focus groups, **nine** Community Advisory Committee meetings, **25** presentations, **100** interviews, **429** intercept surveys and more than **7,000** unique visitors to ByYouCity.org.

Public meetings were held throughout the city at: Charlton Park Community Center, the Ensemble Theatre, Fifth Ward Multi-Service Center, Sharpstown Community Center, Sunnyside Multi-Service Center, Third Ward Multi-Service Center, Metropolitan Multi-Service Center, White Oak Conference Center. A complete public engagement report and participant list are available in the Plan's Appendix.

The Arts and Cultural Plan has been developed concurrently with the creation of the City's first General Plan. **The General Plan identifies culture as a principal area of the City's policy focus.** It identifies core strategies to achieve community goals in alignment with the Arts and Cultural Plan.

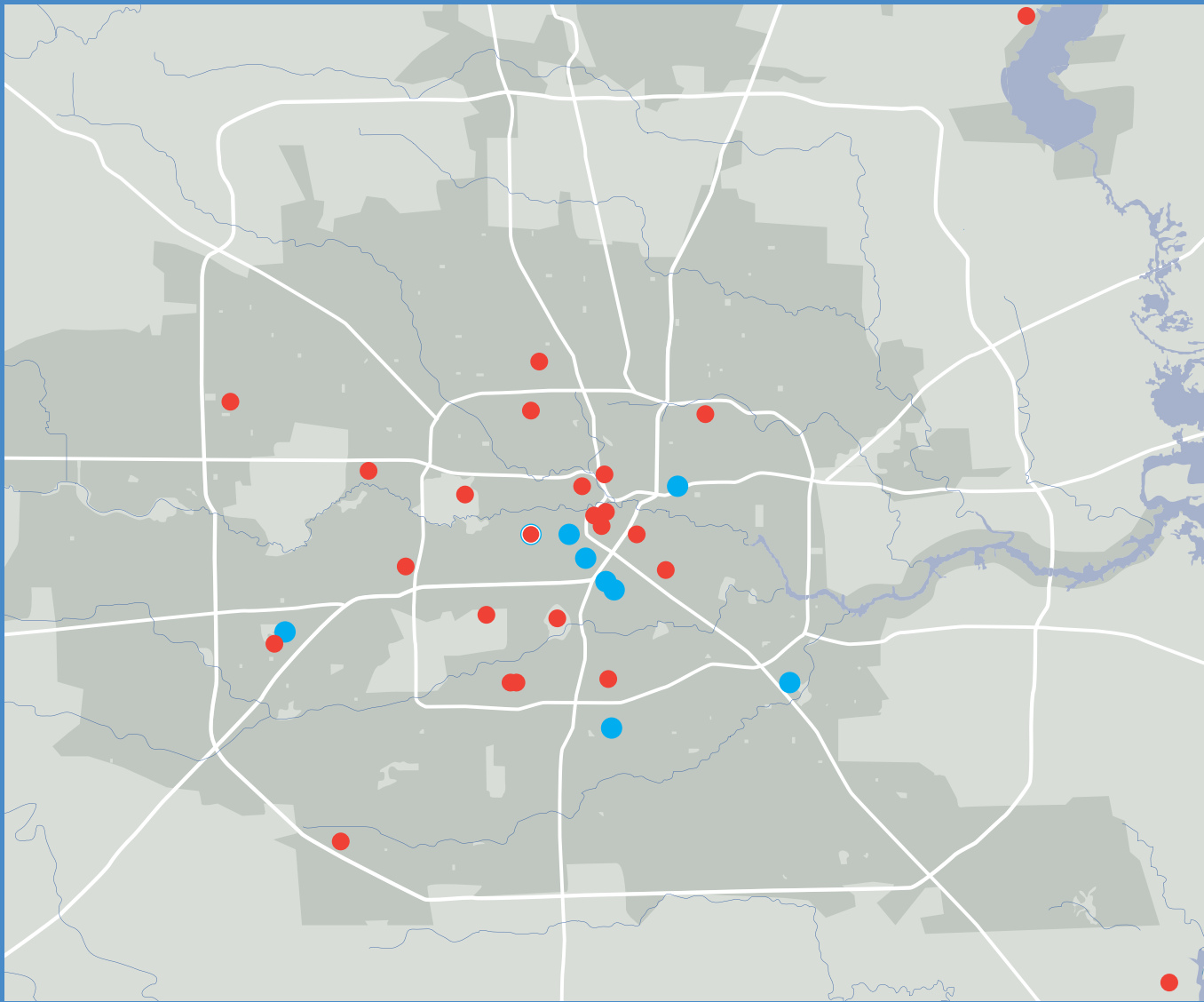


AFA Symphony Orchestra performs at Jones Hall for the Houston Symphony Day of Music.
Photo by: David Dehoyos.

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND PRESENTATIONS

● PUBLIC MEETING LOCATIONS

● EVENTS WHERE PLAN INFORMATION WAS PRESENTED



CITY OF HOUSTON ARTS AND CULTURAL PLAN PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PROMOTE	ENHANCE	ADVANCE
ENGAGEMENT IN QUALITY ARTS AND CULTURAL PROGRAMMING.	THE SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE CITY'S DEEP CULTURAL ASSETS.	STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN THE LOCAL CREATIVE ECONOMY.
Develop strategies to deliver arts and culture programs, arts education and public art into neighborhoods.	Elevate arts and culture as a priority in the City structure and ensure the efficient and effective use of City resources.	Nurture the development of artists and creative talent.
Update the Civic Art ordinance and include some aspects of horizontal construction to include more areas of the City for Civic Art.	Join efforts to augment Hotel Occupancy Tax funding for arts and culture with a new dedicated revenue source.	Support and strengthen relationships with anchor arts and cultural institutions as key economic and community drivers.
Leverage Houston's "world city" image, international arts venues and diverse cultural offerings in destination marketing with the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau and other partners.	Seek federal, state and other grants and funding opportunities available to municipalities.	Highlight and develop cultural arts initiatives that celebrate Houston's diverse artists, cultures and communities.
Develop a program of neighborhood-based cultural tourism with the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau and other partners.	Centralize Civic Art oversight in the Office of Cultural Affairs.	Advocate for systemic access to quality arts and culture education in Houston's public schools.
Implement a comprehensive City Arts and Cultural Policy to provide guidance for City initiatives and departments.	Provide increased oversight, transparency and accountability in the allocation of City arts and culture grants.	Encourage and partner with area universities, corporations, businesses and institutions to elevate and enhance arts and culture.
Assess options to expand awareness of cultural offerings via smart phones and by enhancing/replacing ArtsHound.com.	Set goals for City arts and culture grants utilizing Hotel Occupancy Tax funds and ensure a fair and equitable process for applicants.	Advance efforts for regional arts and cultural planning.
Monitor Plan indicators, evaluate contract performance and review local research surveys and reports.	Create a common process for application and reporting for all City arts and culture grants in consultation with stakeholders.	Research creating a purchasing cooperative for goods and services needed by local artists and nonprofits.
Continue to convene the arts and cultural constituencies and other stakeholders around critical cultural policy issues.	Increase the funding available for small, emerging, culturally focused and ethnic organizations and artists.	Support State funding for area Cultural Districts designated by the Texas Commission on the Arts.
	Augment capacity building programs for Houston's arts and cultural organizations to reinforce sustainability.	Develop a public art master plan to guide the future development of the Civic Art Program.

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Utilize Economic Development partnerships to implement existing and new tools for artists and creative consumers.

Arts and Cultural Plan co-chairs:
Philamena Baird and Rick Lowe