

Urban Affairs Committee Hearing
LR 126

Wednesday, October 17, 2019

Testimony submitted by:
Doug Zbylut, Executive Director
Nebraskans for the Arts

Good afternoon Chairman Wayne and members of the Urban Affairs Committee. On behalf of the Nebraskans for the Arts - a statewide organization of artists, teachers, businesses and individuals committed to advancing opportunities in the arts to improve the lives and learning of all Nebraskans – we wanted to share some information related to LR126 and potential tools for municipalities in Nebraska to use for economic development.

As you explore urban development tools during this study, we encourage you to consider options where arts organizations can be one of the partners and assets. We would like the committee to explore supporting creative placemaking initiatives.

What is Creative Placemaking?

Creative placemaking is a growing concept across the country, where the arts and culture partner with private sector businesses and community residents to create vibrant infrastructures and programming. In larger cities, many such hubs reflect the ethnic or historical character of place and invite residents and visitors alike to visit, patronize, and enjoy. In smaller towns, distinctive cultural centers and festivals revive emptying downtowns and attract regional visitors.

Why look at Creative Placemaking?

At all levels of government, there is the call for strategies and programs to create thriving communities.

The National Endowment for the Arts, which operates a creative placemaking program called “Our Town”, describes four general goals for creative placemaking projects: 1) strengthen and improve the local community of artists and arts organizations; 2) increase community attachment; 3) improve quality of life; and 4) invigorate local economies.

President
Patsy Koch Johns
Theatre Educator - Lincoln

President-elect
Rex Barker
Midland University – Omaha

Secretary
Suzanne Wise
Nebraska Arts Council

Treasurer
Jarod Ockander
David City Public Schools – David City

Vice President of Education
Becky Stahr
York High School - York

Vice President of Legislation
Jamie Ulmer
Beatrice Community Players - Beatrice

Vice President of Marketing
Chris Hochstetler
Hastings College - Hastings

Membership Chair
Barbara Zach
Lincoln's Symphony Orchestra - Lincoln

Advisor
Rich Vierk
Vierk & Associates LLC - Lincoln

At-Large Members
Steve Barth
Crane River Theater - Kearney

Ann Bauer
Music Educator – Kearney

Matthew Boring
Lied Center for Performing Arts - Lincoln

Brent Comstock
BCom Solutions – Auburn/Lincoln

Debbie DeFrain
Nebraska Dept. of Education – Lincoln

Skyler Dykes
Omaha Performing Arts - Omaha

Megan Elliott
Johnny Carson Center for Emerging Media Arts - Lincoln

Barbara Gehringer
Fremont Area Arts Association - Fremont

Shari Hofschire
UNO Center for Innovation in Arts Education – Omaha

Darrel Huenergardt
Huenergardt Law Office – Lincoln

Danielle Laurion
The Moving Company – Omaha

Ruth Meints
Omaha Conservatory of Music - Omaha

Betsye Paragas
Marketing Consultant - Omaha

Jennifer Patrick
Keep Omaha Beautiful – Omaha

Marty Skomal
Arts Administrator – Omaha

Anne Sorensen-Wang
Midland University – Fremont

Doug Zbylut, Executive Director
P.O. Box 8517
Omaha, NE 68108
402.595.2125
www.nebraskansforthearts.org

In the *Blueprint Nebraska* report released earlier this year, one of the major findings was that not all regions in the state have access to the same level of arts, entertainment, and recreation offerings, creating a barrier to retain the top talent in Nebraska and for attracting new workers and families. This initiative proposed targeting state investment and other incentives to aid partnerships of the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and government in mapping, planning and marketing their community arts, entertainment and recreation assets.

At the local level, we see creative placemaking plans - such as what's included in the Lincoln Downtown Master Plan and in Omaha the developing "People's Cultural Plan" - are being developed to coordinate community development efforts.

The connecting thread in all these efforts is the fundamental understanding that through creative placemaking, the arts and its partnering businesses can make substantial contributions to local economic development, livability, and be a magnet for worker attraction and retention. Creative placemaking also helps communities in capturing a higher share of state and local taxes, as residents stay locally for their cultural entertainment and shopping.

There are many other factors – quality schools, affordable housing, reliable transportation – that are all blocks in constructing a strong foundation in making a community vibrant. Creative placemaking is one of those blocks that must be included. A recent Americans for the Arts study shows there are now over 300 designated creative districts in the United States, demonstrating that states are committing tools and resources to create these areas of creativity to help with community vitality and attract and retain employees and businesses. Nebraska must step up with support and strategies to compete with other states if we wish to meet our goal of "Growing the Good Life."

To aid in this interim study's research, I have included an attachment with links to resources and studies. Thank you for your time and consideration of this information. Artists and arts organizations are willing and able to help our local communities craft a future of growth and prosperity for all Nebraskans.

Creative Placemaking/Cultural District Resources

- Americans for the Arts (AFTA) has an online depository of toolkits and resources related to Cultural Districts. <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/toolkits/national-cultural-districts-exchange-toolkit>
- The National Association of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) has a website with resources related to Cultural Districts. Susan Wise, the Executive Director of the Nebraska Arts Council, is the President of this organization and a great resource for exploring creative placemaking. <https://nasaa-arts.org/research/creative-economy/>
- This is the webpage for the National Endowment for the Arts' (NEA) repository for creative placemaking. <https://www.arts.gov/artistic-fields/creative-placemaking>
- The National Governors Association (NGA) has a webpage, Arts & The Economy, that includes several publications that include the role of arts in economic development. <https://www.nga.org/center/issues/arts-the-economy/>
- While a bit dated, this presentation of Louisiana initiatives has good information on approaches to support artists and cultural industries from National Council of State Legislatures: <http://www.ncsl.org/print/standcomm/sclaborecon/GayeHamilton.pdf>
- At the federal level, this is a bill to assist artists and creative businesses – the CREATE Act: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/legislation-policy/legislative-issue-center/the-create-act>.
- There is an academic site that collects creative placemaking case studies: https://arts.blackbaud.com/creativeplacemaking?utm_source=Copy%20of%20Design%20September%202017&utm_campaign=Design%20September%202017&utm_medium=email