



4. Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy

Summary

Analysis

- Lowertown has a large contingent of self-employed individuals, artists, small firms and non-profits engaged in the creative economy.
- The creative community is primarily engaged in art production and creative services, as opposed to presentation and marketing.
- Over 30 years of investment have been made in creating affordable live and work space for artists and creative enterprises.
- Lowertown's identity as an artist and creative community is not immediately evident in the physical environment and has not been asserted clearly.
- The vulnerability of the creative community to market forces in real estate on the one hand, and the community's need to attract a market for its products on the other, are in some ways in conflict.
- The artist community is well-networked but, at-large, not strongly organized or fully engaged in neighborhood activities, governance and other creative sector businesses.

Goals

- Position and expand the Lowertown creative cluster as a significant contributor to the regional economy.
- Maintain and expand live and work spaces, as well as gathering places, that are affordable for artists and attractive to the creative community.
- Define and grow the identity of Lowertown as a vital community of creative and cultural production.
- Foster a more diverse and complete mixed-income residential community that provides walkable access to daily needs and services.
- Strengthen the network and quality of creative output of artists, arts producers, creative entrepreneurs and creative sector workers.

Objectives

- Protect the affordability of residential artist buildings from escalation in the real estate market, and increase the number of affordable work spaces and gathering places suited to artists and creative entrepreneurs.
- Advance an identity that serves to maintain the neighborhood as a creative sector cluster producing high-quality work.
- Integrate public art, creative design and streetscaping, and other cultural activity in the public realm and built environment.
- Build markets for artists and creative entrepreneurs, their skills and work product.
- Create a neighborhood that is inclusive, culturally diverse and connected to other communities.
- Develop artists and creative community members as leaders in Lowertown, the city and the region.
- Identify opportunities for using Union Depot as a site for arts activities, arts marketplace or work spaces for artists.
- Establish a strong and integral role for creative producers in district management and implementation of the Master Plan.

Summary

Strategies

- Identify the most immediate opportunities for stabilizing artist live/work spaces and gathering places.
- Prepare a comprehensive database to map the creative community (individuals, venues, activities) and develop economic data to measure the impact of the Lowertown creative cluster.
- Inventory underutilized and vacant spaces and work with property owners, the artist community, the City and potential occupants to create appropriate arts-related uses.
- Work with existing networks and organizations to strengthen the creative community, the creative cluster infrastructure, district identity, and participation of artists and creative entrepreneurs in leadership development activities.
- Encourage policy makers to protect the creative sector workforce and work spaces, and steer developers to create appropriate spaces and support services using Community Benefits Agreements to protect and enhance creative sector jobs, spaces and programs.
- Explore opportunities to grow educational spaces and opportunities for creative skills transfer.
- Maintain state-of-the-art technology infrastructure needed for a competitive creative sector.
- Explore the value of an Arts or Creative Overlay District in collaboration with historic preservation representatives.
- Work with Union Depot managers to incorporate public art, public programs, retail marketing and other opportunities.
- Seek out and develop appropriate venues and partnerships to enhance markets for locally-produced creative products.
- Leverage the diverse range of people who come to Lowertown for the Farmers' Market, Art Crawl and other events – as well as those who travel through the Union Depot – to create a welcoming multi-cultural environment.
- Identify appropriate spaces, partners and activities to expand networking and career development among artists and creative workers.

Analysis

Primary Observations

- **Lowertown has a large contingent of self-employed individuals, artists, small firms and non-profits engaged in the creative economy.**
- **The creative community is primarily engaged in art production and creative services, as opposed to presentation and marketing.**
- **Over 30 years of investment have been made in creating affordable live and work space for artists and creative enterprises.**
- **Lowertown's identity as an artist and creative community is not immediately evident in the physical environment and has not been asserted fully.**
- **The vulnerability of the creative community to market forces in real estate on the one hand, and the community's need to attract a market for its products on the other, are in some ways in conflict.**
- **The artist community is well-networked but, at-large, not strongly organized or fully engaged in neighborhood activities, governance and other creative sector businesses.**

Individuals working in the arts are ten times more likely to be self-employed than workers in all other industries. Those in the more broadly-defined creative sector are twice as likely to be self-employed. Lowertown is home to approximately 600 artists and in the arts sector; many more work in a variety of other creative occupations. This indicates an unusually high number of self-employed residents in Lowertown. Self-employed workers and those who work in home-based businesses maintain more varied schedules and spend more daytime hours in their neighborhoods than most residents. Public or semi-public gathering places such as coffee shops, libraries and non-profits involved in community building or professional development – as well as regular social and cultural events – are especially important to the success of creative communities such as Lowertown.

Arts or cultural districts in cities vary widely. Some focus on arts consumption, some primarily around cultural or ethnic communities, others house creative workspace in older industrial buildings. Lowertown combines creative professionals and live/work space for artists within a dense historic downtown

residential and business environment. With some non-profits and small presentation venues, Lowertown represents a creative cluster where art is made, where artists live, and where other creative services are produced. Working mostly in residential studio spaces, Lowertown artists are active in the visual arts, painting, drawing, photography, media and sculpture, with some working in performance, music, writing and other forms. Other professionals work in design, architecture, software development and other creative enterprises.

Led by efforts of the Lowertown Redevelopment Corporation, Artspace Projects, other investors and many pioneering artists, the vacant warehouses of Lowertown evolved into a thriving and productive residential community. Several buildings were redeveloped purposefully as affordable live/work space for artists; others were re-purposed or built for mixed and market-rate housing. More than three decades of work and investment have brought Lowertown to this vital and pivotal point. Now the creative community faces significant changes and challenges.

As home to many working artists, Lowertown has become a well-known enclave within the Twin Cities arts community, perhaps the densest concentration of artists and creative live/work spaces in the region. The semi-annual Art Crawl, over 30 years old, draws wide interest. Whether by conscious choice or lack of organized marketing, significant public promotion of the district or even banners and signage on the street level have not been pursued. While the neighborhood's thriving, award-winning artist community works with little fanfare, it is now becoming a focal point for new investment. Some would like wider visibility for the creative community; others fear that attracting too much attention could elevate real estate values and make Lowertown unaffordable – a not uncommon phenomenon in cities around the world.

Lowertown's artist community is well-established and comes together for Art Crawls and other events, or around critical issues as needed. This cohesion is not perceived outside the arts community and has not been harnessed to advance the collective interest of the creative sector. Artists are not fully integrated into other on-going planning and development in Lowertown. While some individuals choose not to be engaged, there are more opportunities to connect artists with the District Council and other formal associations representing the area.

Arts Workshops

The planning process included two Arts Workshops. The purpose of these workshops was to reach out to working artists in Lowertown to better understand the challenges they face and the opportunities they present to the Greater Lowertown community. Approximately 40 artists attended each of the meetings. The meetings consisted of open dialogue, brainstorming and problem-solving around topics related to how the artists, arts and creative economy can flourish in Lowertown.

Selected Quotations from the Arts Workshops

Find ways to cross-fertilize with the broader creative community, foster innovation, incubate new ideas and businesses, create leaders. Create a great park, bigger than a square block or at least make it more natural. Give us places to learn new things: languages, cooking, even the arts, like the ballet school but for adults, lecture series, etc.

These several blocks where artists and others live and work is not unlike a farm community of a half century ago. People work together, look out for one another and help when and where they can. It is a feeling of solidarity that I have not felt in other parts of the Twin Cities that I have lived in, or even other parts of the country.

What was supposed to be artist friendly rents are suddenly increasing, forcing one to find non-artistic work to pay the bills.

Invite us to the table- to be part of the discussion and vision for this place. Help put to rest the impression that artists are unstable wackos that refuse to conform. That non-conformity part can actually be a virtue when you need new solutions to intractable problems. I'd love to see people clamoring to get a spot in Lowertown, because it is such a hotbed of ideas. I wish the City and businesses made it part of their modus operandi to have creatives at the table. Now I will grant that some of my tribe are indeed kinda wacky and wouldn't be the best choices for this fusion, but many of us are self employed entrepreneurs.

My biggest hope is that the artist community will not be destroyed/dispersed because of the light rail coming through.

I like being part of an artists' community--my neighbors are always up to something: working on a new piece, getting ready for a show, etc. It contributes to a creative vibe in the community that is almost tangible. Being part of an artists' community also provides great opportunities for artistic collaboration and creative cross pollination. Also, it is not uncommon for artists in my building (Northern Warehouse) to loan and/or donate equipment and materials to other artists in the community. As far as what is specifically good about being in Lowertown: A) The St. Paul Art Crawl and all the exposure/opportunity that comes with it and B) the space I live in is much less expensive than a comparable space in Minneapolis would be.

I feel that having the creative community present at the table during discussions involving the rapid change/growth in Lowertown is vitally important. Whatever we can do to reduce a feeling of powerlessness regarding neighborhood development would be a good thing. We need to feel that inclusion of the creative community in big decisions is not a token gesture, but born of a genuine interest in our feedback and an underlying belief that we have, can, and do make valuable contributions. Assistance with assessing our strengths and weaknesses as a community, learning how to speak with a common voice, and generally advocate for ourselves could be very helpful.

I would like to see the public coming to Lowertown to experience and support the art community on a regular basis, visiting galleries and shows, coming out to hear a concert, whatever their interest is. If the community is going to thrive we need the public and if they are going to show up it has to be fun.

Goals

- **Position and expand the Lowertown creative cluster as a significant contributor to the regional economy.**
- **Maintain and expand live and work spaces, as well as gathering places, that are affordable for artists and attractive to the creative community.**
- **Define and grow the identity of Lowertown as a vital community of creative and cultural production.**
- **Foster a more diverse and complete mixed-income residential community that provides walkable access to daily needs and services.**
- **Strengthen the network and quality of creative output of artists, arts producers, creative entrepreneurs and creative sector workers.**

This Plan calls for bold actions to affirm and grow this community. It lays out comprehensive strategies to: 1) establish the key role of this creative cluster in the region; 2) to dedicate sustainable living, working and gathering spaces for the creative community; and 3) to build on the creativity produced through a diverse, livable transit-friendly neighborhood. The Plan recognizes that the introduction of light rail and other infrastructure improvements, along with a likely increase in the attractiveness of Lowertown as a residential and retail area, may be perceived as a threat to the continued presence of many artists and creative entrepreneurs in the neighborhood

Based on research conducted for other cities, the significant cluster of creative industry and enterprises in Lowertown can be assumed to have great impact on other sectors of the regional economy. A full assessment of the cluster's scope and impact is needed to build awareness of its importance, and to provide policymakers, developers, and investors with more information on how this creative cluster can be protected, fostered and better integrated as an economic driver.

Only one of the artist live/work buildings in Lowertown is under ownership of its artist residents. Others are more vulnerable to market forces. For the Lowertown creative cluster to thrive, living and studio spaces need to be kept

affordable, and the availability of work spaces needs to be expanded for an increasingly varied range of creative endeavors. The popular Black Dog Café has provided a critical informal gathering place for the creative community. As the community grows, more opportunities, events and gathering places are needed to stimulate the social, professional, and aesthetic/creative development of the community.

A tension exists within Lowertown's creative community. Its ability to remain intact, let alone grow, is highly vulnerable to market forces in real estate. On the other hand, the community needs to attract attention to its assets and to build a market for its products. These are in some ways in conflict as the community works to maintain affordable space in light of its increasing attractiveness as a place to live, visit and do business. Defining the best approaches to identify and promote Lowertown as an arts district or creative cluster will be critical to finding the balance between these forces. This will include making the case for the vital role cultural and creative producers have in the region's economic and cultural well-being.

With a growing residential population and construction of new transit infrastructure, retail and service amenities become more viable. Artists and other residents desire an urban village with more complete services (See Complete the Village, Chapter 1). A neighborhood that is welcoming and provides housing and opportunities for people of diverse incomes and ethnicities is more vibrant, creative and sustainable. The artist community will continue to contribute to an inclusive and welcoming place, to the success of new retail, and will help local businesses be more unique and aesthetically stimulating.

Building on relationships within the artist community, while expanding the network to be more inclusive of the creative sector, will broaden the base for advocacy, grow the capacity of the creative community to take action on its own behalf, and stimulate the creative range and quality of work. New leaders will emerge from the ranks of the artist population. The Saint Paul Art Collective, parent of the Art Crawl and First Friday openings, represents a well-established network within the Lowertown arts community. While its emphasis is on the visual arts, it has good reach across disciplines. This, or another group, could expand its network to embrace creative sector workers in all fields to build a stronger voice for Lowertown's creative sector.

Objectives

- **Protect the affordability of existing residential artist buildings from escalation in the real estate market, and increase the number of affordable work spaces and gathering places suited to artists and creative entrepreneurs.**
- **Advance an identity that serves to maintain the neighborhood as a creative sector cluster producing high-quality work.**
- **Integrate public art, creative design and streetscaping, and other cultural activity in the public realm and built environment.**
- **Build markets for artists and creative entrepreneurs, their skills and their work product.**
- **Create a neighborhood that is inclusive, culturally diverse, and connected to other communities.**
- **Develop artists and creative community members as leaders in Lowertown, the city and the region.**
- **Identify opportunities for using Union Depot as a site for arts activities, arts marketplace or work spaces for artists.**
- **Establish a strong and integral role for creative producers in district management and implementation of the Master Plan.**

The possibility of market-driven turnover of the Northern Warehouse, Tilsner, Jax and other buildings causes instability in the artist community and affects its productivity. Investments in the city's economic vitality should include leveraging a more stable structure for ownership and rental for these and future creative residential workspaces in Lowertown. New development, either the restoration/re-purposing of existing buildings, or leveraged investment in new creative live/work and gathering spaces, will grow the community of creative producers – allowing an essential element of the Saint Paul economy to thrive. The transformation of the Diamond Products Building/site into a cluster of creative workspaces that includes offices for creative sector start-ups and light industrial uses would be an excellent addition.

Arriving at a Lowertown brand that both protects and expands the creative sector will set the stage for strengthening and growing the cluster in ways

that maintain its productivity, high quality of output, and contribution to the regional economy and quality of life. This will require a continuing effort between the artist community, Greater Lowertown Master Plan Task Force, CapitolRiver Council, City of Saint Paul, local businesses and others.

Thoughtfully building on the historic assets and character of Lowertown, public art and other cultural events can unfold on the sidewalks, facades and other public spaces. The 4th Street Artway, called for in the Downtown Station Area Plan, connects the light rail terminus to the central business district. It will provide a key spine to bring new creative work into the public arena. Integrating a historic signature into new design will be important to bridge the community's past and future.

Activities including the Art Crawl, First Fridays, the Farmers' Market and Springboard for the Arts's successful Community Supported Art model (based on Community Supported Agriculture) represent existing collective efforts at connecting producers directly with buyers and efforts at expanding markets. Every artist, every farmer and every creative entrepreneur has developed his or her own relationships with buyers, suppliers and support services. Seeking to grow these through collaborative marketing and market development opportunities will help advance the creative community in Lowertown.

Creative environments thrive on a diverse mix of people, ideas and cultures. A diverse and welcoming environment is considered a fundamental ingredient for a thriving creative economy. The arts can serve as a bridge across cultures and across incomes, involving people in a multitude of celebratory events and volunteer community activities. Lowertown will take advantage of its rich arts community to engage more people while creating a lively, interactive and welcoming neighborhood. This includes opening its connections to the east and the Bruce Vento Nature Sanctuary. Public art work and gateways, in addition to programs engaging artists, youth and others in the Vento Sanctuary can help build these connections.

Other sections of this Plan address an on-going and evolving role of the Greater Lowertown Master Planning Task Force, and implementation of other forms of district coordination or management. Strong leadership from

the creative community in future Lowertown management will be critical to maintaining and growing the neighborhood's economic, social and cultural vitality and maximizing its contributions to the larger region.

As a regional transit hub, a reinvigorated Union Depot offers new opportunities as it re-emerges as an active public space. It can house public art, public events and/or a marketplace for local art and creative products. Alongside planners, architects, engineers, historians, City officials, project managers and many others, the artist will play a key role in transforming this important civic place. Ideas include a micro-cinema, flexible galleries, artist incubator spaces, events and music, artist-made furnishings, and an artist-in-residence creating work and engaging visitors on a daily basis.

Growing the creative community from within requires artists and others to step into various leadership roles to expand both internal networks and relationships across the larger community including businesses, non-profits, government and other civic groups. New and existing opportunities in the area for leadership development will help expand community capacity.

Strategies

Identify the most immediate opportunities for stabilizing artist live/work spaces and gathering places.

Existing buildings occupied by artists provide the most likely opportunities for stabilizing ownership to protect low-cost space for artists. Investigation can begin with the Tilsner and Northern Warehouse buildings, and possible development of the lower floors of Lowertown Lofts Artist Cooperative. The Diamond Products Building and site should be considered for creative work spaces. Other social and professional gathering places also need to come on-line. This can include cafes, non-profits with regular cultural programming, or other market-driven facilities. The Union Depot may provide an important space as a creative sector meeting ground.

Prepare a comprehensive data base map to the creative community (individuals, venues, activities), and develop economic data to measure the impact of the Lowertown creative cluster.

A comprehensive inventory and mapping of artists and other creative enterprises and workers in Lowertown, along with presentation venues, will be important to document and calculate the scope and impact of the creative cluster. Surveys identifying the nature of artists' work, their revenues, business networks and supplier needs would be an important follow-up. Calculating the economic activity, impact and reach of the Lowertown creative cluster using proven economic measuring tools will help to better understand and illustrate the sector's true importance to the region. At the same time, data can be collected to examine other activities and contributions, including skills transmission and impact on youth, seniors and other social sectors.

Inventory underutilized and vacant spaces and work with property owners, the artist community, the City and potential occupants to create appropriate arts-related uses.

Opportunities for adding artist live/work spaces, creative business incubators, venues for presentation and sales, education and training, and other support services related to creative production will enhance the future of the neighborhood. This includes residential space, live/work space, and various workspace options. Conducting a full inventory of physical space use, condition and opportunities will be needed to advance the sector. A site such as the Diamond Products property and building provides an ideal opportunity for creative work space that could include light industrial uses for artists engaged in activities such as metal fabrication and others that create noise or require large spaces.

Work with existing networks and organizations to strengthen the creative community, the creative cluster infrastructure, district identity, and participation of artists and creative entrepreneurs in leadership development activities.

Existing groups with interest in neighborhood development, including the Saint Paul Arts Collective, Springboard for the Arts, McKnight Foundation, Saint Paul Foundation, McNeely Foundation, and Public Art Saint Paul provide a skeleton for building a stronger network and nurturing leadership. This will be done in concert with the Greater Lowertown Master Planning Task Force, Lowertown Future Fund and others. A reformulated network or possible new entity will be needed to implement identity development and marketing, advocacy and development of new and expanded services in support of artists and creative entrepreneurs. Grassroots advocacy by residents who have a stake in Lowertown's creative sector will require people stepping into a variety of leadership roles. Appreciating the range of skills needed for various levels of civic involvement will help make that process more productive. Local groups offer community leadership programs open to artists.

Encourage policy makers to protect the creative sector workforce and work spaces, and steer developers to create appropriate spaces and support services using Community Benefits Agreements to protect and enhance creative sector jobs, spaces and programs.

A strengthened and broadened network of artists, creative entrepreneurs and creative sector workers, equipped with data on the impacts of the sector, will position the community to affect public policy around space use and valuation, public and private investments and the direction of new development in Lowertown. This includes influencing City policymakers, and making the case for both public and private investment. Needs identified through this planning process include live and work spaces with guaranteed affordability, shared work spaces, and gathering places for social and professional interaction. Likely future private or public development – whether for sports facilities, residential or business developments or additional public infrastructure – and the impact of these developments, will be mitigated through negotiation of Community Benefits Agreements. These legal tools guarantee distribution of public benefits or short-term or long-term funding streams. These might be used for building or operating public amenities or to offset the impact of property value increases on existing residents.

Explore opportunities to grow educational spaces and opportunities for creative skills transfer.

Teaching is one of the most common secondary occupations for artists. A creative workforce is one of the priorities of contemporary businesses of all kinds. Growing the numbers of people prepared to contribute to creative enterprises and to the cultural arena is a valuable role artists also fulfill. Locating and advocating for educational spaces in Lowertown will provide great synergy.

Maintain state-of-the-art technology infrastructure needed for a competitive creative sector.

Public and private investment in upgrading and maintaining communication technology infrastructure is critical to growing the creative economy. As home to Twin Cities Public Television, Cray Research and nearby Minnesota Public Radio, and as Saint Paul's strongest creative cluster, Lowertown is the ideal spot for expanding this investment.

Explore the value of an Arts or Creative Overlay District in collaboration with historic preservation representatives.

Protecting and enhancing historic assets and the creative community in Lowertown may be accomplished with the assistance of municipal tools such as an overlay district. It could help direct public funds and leverage private investment, stabilize long-term values of live/work spaces, and provide incentives for sales of art work in the district through a sales tax exemption. If established by the State, an overlay district could provide income tax reductions. Investment incentives, as well as regulatory, zoning or tax exemptions, can be packaged within an overlay district to achieve some objectives in this Plan. Whereas most permanent building design issues will be regulated by the current and future design guidelines, an overlay district could incentivize the conversion of vacant storefronts into temporary arts-related spaces or displays.

Work with Union Depot managers to incorporate public art, public programs, retail marketing and other opportunities.

Revitalizing the Union Depot as a regional transportation hub creates an opportunity for new public art and public programming. Public Art Saint Paul, the Saint Paul Arts Collective and other local groups will partner to generate permanent and temporal work, manage galleries, or operate artist-in-residence or work spaces. These will be carried out to enhance Lowertown's identity, to create new opportunities for artists and performers, and to add to the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors.

Seek out and develop appropriate venues and partnerships to enhance markets for locally-produced creative products.

The identification of Lowertown with the Farmers' Market and the level of traffic it generates is an asset the artist community can build on in working to develop buyers for their work. Exploring partnerships with the Farmers' Market, as well as building on the success of the Art Crawl, offer some possibilities for expanding the economy for Lowertown's creative community. Development of a center for artists to network, offer workshops, and connect with wider publics should be explored.

Leverage the diverse range of people who come to Lowertown for the Farmers' Market, Art Crawl and other events - as well as those who travel through Union Depot - to create a welcoming multi-cultural environment.

While Lowertown has a friendly feel, its residential diversity has not kept pace with changing demographics. Regular events such as the Farmers' Market and Art Crawl draw many and diverse visitors. Light rail transit and rail connections at the Union Depot will generate many more visitors, workers and customers. Activities, events and public art representative of diverse cultures, along with a welcoming atmosphere, will be produced and fostered by Lowertown leaders, artists and arts groups.

Identify appropriate spaces, partners and activities to expand networking and career development among artists and creative workers.

Existing resources for artists and an expanded network of entrepreneurial support services will help advance individual and group capacity for generating income, and for artists and creative workers to act in concert. Lowertown artists have local access to Springboard, Public Art Saint Paul, Minnesota State Arts Board, the Jerome Foundation and other resources. Entrepreneurs now find a home in CoCo, a new incubator facility. Nautilus, Zeitgeist, Ballet Minnesota, McNally Smith College of Music, Twin Cities Public Television and other producing groups generate daily activity. These and others can help connect and bolster the success of artists and creative start-ups.