

City of St. Louis Park

# Strategic roadmap for advancing arts and culture



friends of the arts  
ST. LOUIS PARK  
[slpfota.org](http://slpfota.org)

## City of St. Louis Park

# STRATEGIC ROADMAP FOR ADVANCING ARTS AND CULTURE

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...connecting people, voices, places, spaces...

The purpose of this framework is to serve as a blueprint, outlining paths along which St. Louis Park can strengthen the cultural life of the city as an important element of achieving Vision 3.0 to be *A Place for all People*, the city's Livable Community Principles, and its Strategic Priorities.

The intent is to share a vision where arts and culture can be a key contributor to economic and community development when approached strategically and included as a tool and part of the solution to our community's challenges.

Since late summer, 2019, there has been a multi-pronged effort to engage residents in conversations to gather input on what the community values, where they hope efforts should be focused, and perceptions of the importance of creativity, culture and the arts to community vitality. The process included an extensive public listening and comment process. A steering committee led over 25 focus groups, engaging a breadth of community voices spanning age, cultural, social and economic interests. In addition, 259 electronic surveys were completed. The ideas that emerged from the community listening sessions and survey processes are incorporated into this framework shaped by the steering committee and the executive team composed of City of St. Louis Park and Friends of the Arts leadership.

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### WHY ARTS AND CULTURE?

Arts and culture have measurable impact on community cohesion, on economies, and on personal health and wellbeing. They are powerful tools for community engagement in support of community vitality, as well as community resiliency in times of significant change. Equity can be successfully advanced through arts, creativity, and cultural celebration. In addition, through arts and culture, we are invited into public dialogue often in a less threatening setting. We nurture a strong next generation of creative thinkers and problem solvers through arts in our educational curriculum, and finally create healthy communities capable of meeting the demands of the future.

There is a significant body of literature documenting the importance of arts and culture in building local identity and pride of place. Through participatory arts initiatives communities strengthen connections among residents, frequently bridging differences, forming new bonds, and building stronger links between different neighborhoods or cultural groups. Arts and culture have been proven to improve public health and safety. Further, as they improve quality of life and community appeal, they can improve business climate, support the economy, and in many cases invite tourism. Community spaces and public life can be energized through arts and culture.

The literature tells us that

- Arts, culture and creativity create an aesthetic appeal and a quality of life that invite community and economic investment.
- Arts participation builds civic engagement. Individuals involved in the arts are more likely to partake in a wealth of civic and social activities.
- Culture builds social capital, builds community, grows institutional networks.
- Arts participants are more than twice as likely to volunteer in their communities.
- Arts and culture provide improvements to the overall quality of the neighborhood; and improve the local economy.
- Engaging with art is essential to the human experience. Research provides strong evidence that arts educational experiences can produce significant positive impacts on academic and social development.

Culture, creativity and the arts at their core have an intrinsic value, which must not be overlooked as economic and social impact is explored. Personal experience enriches our inner lives, touches our emotional world, and serves to express what it means to be human. Culture, creativity and the arts are important tools in galvanizing individuals and communities.

*Arts and culture are positive, often playful, vehicles to:*

- *invite participation*
- *build local identity*
- *strengthen the business climate*
- *bridge cultural differences*
- *celebrate pride of place*
- *invite collaboration across economic, civic, and social interests.*



## LOCAL LEADERSHIP

St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts has been building community through the arts since 1995. The organization was founded after neighbors came together to advocate for maintaining art and music programs in St. Louis Park schools amidst potential budget cuts. The newly-formed group of passionate arts advocates then organized its first community-wide arts and culture event in public parks, and took their advocacy efforts to the city government to push for additional investments in arts and culture. Leadership from both the city council and staff were receptive, leading to official recognition of Friends of the Arts as St. Louis Park's arts council.

The City of St. Louis Park has embraced public art and taken steps to proactively integrate it into the community fabric. Art has been incorporated throughout the city in new developments and public infrastructure improvement projects; project grants through the annual Arts and Culture Grant Program; placing art in city buildings, parks and public spaces; as well as through the creation of other art opportunities.

Friends of the Arts has worked closely with the City of St. Louis Park for its nearly 25 year history, and has also helped form three local theater groups, provided fiscal sponsorship to many small groups and projects, created a scholarship fund for residents, and organized dozens of community projects bringing people together to participate, learn, and enjoy the arts in their community.

The breadth of programs and broad support for the arts by Friends of the Arts and the city is a result, in large part, of advocates from the community and within city government, and the strong relationships that have formed. To ensure the long-term stability of arts and culture in the community, the city and Friends of the Arts are working together to determine where efforts should be focused, how to express and communicate its importance to community vitality, and building cross-sector support and partnerships. Guided by the knowledge that arts and culture are a key contributor to economic and community development, this framework will enshrine past efforts and offer a strategic path to approach arts and culture as a tool in solving community challenges and developing policy on which the future of arts and culture in St. Louis Park will grow.



Summer concert series at the Wolfe Park Veterans Memorial Amphitheater

*Friends of the Arts has achieved significant cross-sector partnership and collaboration. It has implemented projects with commercial and nonprofit businesses, health and social service organizations, a variety of City Commissions, faith-based communities, arts organizations, and cultural institutions.*



'Recollection and Promise,' an art glass installation by Amy Bauer and Brian Boldon at St. Louis Park City Hall



MN Citizens for the Arts Executive Director, Sheila Smith, presents the 2016 St. Louis Park CreativeMN Economic Impact Report to residents and City Council

## WHY NOW?

Culture, creativity and the arts are in alignment with St. Louis Park priorities. These strategic priorities can be realized in part through making arts and culture a mainstay in the community. In crafting this framework, our intent is to invite arts and culture as key contributors to community development and economic vitality, a lens and a tool as the city seeks solutions to our community's challenges.



**Why now?** St. Louis Park is becoming more racially/ ethnically diverse. The city has adopted priorities both to be a leader in racial equity and inclusion, as well as to build social capital through community engagement. Culture, creativity and the arts are vital tools in bridging differences in cultures and race, addressing equity, and creating involvement opportunities thereby galvanizing and engaging communities.



**Why now?** The population of St. Louis Park is steadily growing and changing. Growth in new rental housing attracts a younger demographic. Culture, creativity and the arts are a valuable means of integrating new, more diverse and younger residents into the community. Individuals involved in arts and culture are more likely to stay in the community and more likely to participate in a wealth of other civic and social activities.



**Why now?** St. Louis Park has adopted as a strategic priority expanding options for people to make their way around the City. New mobility options for making our way around the city includes punctuating the routes with interesting, aesthetically-pleasing art, buildings, and places that are comfortable to travel to and gather together in. The arts offer many options for enhancing new transportation alternatives.



**Why now?** Climate change has been named as a significant priority issue for St. Louis Park. The arts have an important role to play in raising awareness to environmental issues, as well as gaining commitment to achieve the city's goals. Arts and culture serve to address climate change in our built and natural environments where we spend our lives.



**Why now?** A 2016 study by the City of St. Louis Park, St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts and Minnesota Citizens for the Arts demonstrated that the nonprofit arts and culture sector alone, without inclusion of the commercial arts sector, is a substantial industry in St. Louis Park, generating over \$1.5 million in total economic impact annually as of 2016. In announcing this study, Sheila Smith, Executive Director of Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, said "Clearly St. Louis Park's arts and culture organizations are bringing people to town who wouldn't otherwise be there to spend their money in local businesses. There is something special going on in St. Louis Park."

### Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts Sector, 2016

TOTAL DIRECT EXPENDITURES BY <b>ORGANIZATIONS</b> ..... <b>\$758,069</b>	+	TOTAL ARTS AND CULTURE RELATED SPENDING BY <b>AUDIENCES</b> ..... <b>\$759,072</b>	=	TOTAL <b>ECONOMIC IMPACT</b> ..... <b>\$1,517,141</b>
STATE GOVERNMENT REVENUES: \$128,000	+	LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUES: \$36,000	=	<b>TOTAL GOVERNMENT REVENUES: \$164,000</b>

Data from MN Citizens for the Arts, 2016 Creative MN Report

## OUR HERITAGE – PLAYING IT FORWARD

St. Louis Park can lay claim to a rich and diverse history of participation in arts and culture that without doubt makes this place distinctive.

- In 1891, the St. Louis Park Community Band formed, which thrives still to this day more than a century later. For decades, concerts were held at Bandstand Park, which is now known as Jorvig Park.
- The roots of the Parktacular festival too date back to the early 1900s. The 1914 event was dubbed the “biggest jubilee celebration ever” in the Minneapolis Daily Newspaper.
- St. Louis Park youth have a rich history of music, arts and culture. A 1912 ‘May Fete’ involved students “representing different nations in costume, song, and folk dance.” At the high school, choir and band date back to the early 1900s, with dance instituted in 1944 and graphic arts in 1952, all continuing to this day.
- Public art in the city has strong ties back to “beautification,” as the movement was called in the early 20th century—1930s roadway beautification projects created roadside parks along Lilac Way. In 1997, the City commissioned its first contemporary public artwork, paving the way for a significant number to follow.
- A culturally diverse city, home to the Jewish Community Center and Wat Promwachirayan (Buddhist temple and Thai cultural center), people of many backgrounds express and celebrate their culture in St. Louis Park.



*The St. Louis Park Village Band in 1903  
(photo from the St. Louis Park Historical Society)*



*The inaugural Thai Street Food Festival  
(photo from the Thai Cultural Council of MN)*

## STRENGTHS – OUR FOUNDATION TO BUILD ON

The strength of the cultural community in St. Louis Park, as identified in our assessment process, is summed up in the word **PARTICIPATION**. Residents appreciate and also seek more opportunities for

- Outdoor festivals, fairs and gatherings of the community. This strength was frequently tied to bridging cultures through events and celebrations that intentionally bring together diverse ethnic and cultural groups.
- Public art and beautification of public spaces dispersed throughout the city, often in unexpected places.
- Art and music programs in the schools.
- Support for artists and arts organizations.

St. Louis Park residents value

- Being together with friends and neighbors
- Celebrating and sharing their own cultural heritage; experiencing other cultures
- Arts and culture opportunities in their neighborhood, accessible and close to home
- Opportunities to express oneself artistically or culturally

*“I need to ask myself, ‘What kind of town do I want to leave for my kids?’”*

*“We all want to live in a beautiful town.”*

*“We need more chance encounters with the arts.”*



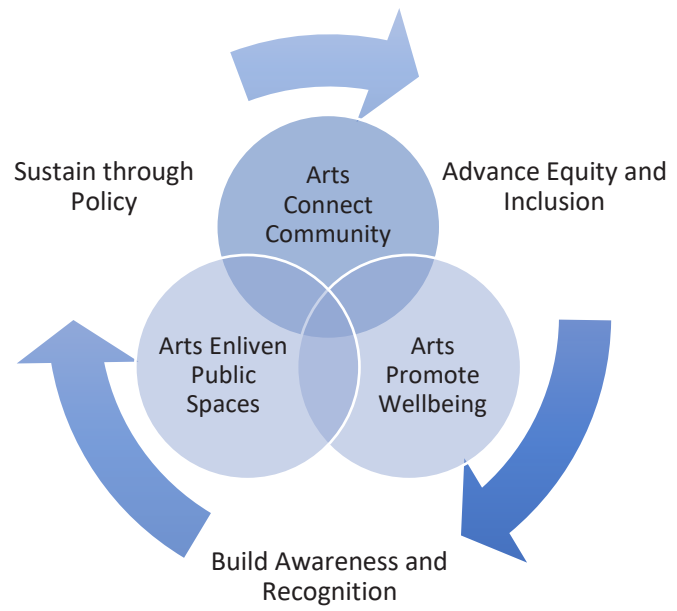
## VISION

St. Louis Park's vision for community vitality is a city defined and recognized as a place where

- individual ingenuity is nurtured;
- enduring bonds among diverse communities are solidified;
- culture and the arts are recognized as critical to fostering positive social change.

A city where ....

- creativity, culture and the arts foster and celebrate social cohesion and celebration;
- streets and neighborhoods are enlivened by the arts in ways that support both community-gathering and are rooted in cultural expression;
- creativity and culture strengthen and improve community health and wellbeing for both our natural world and our residents.



## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: BUILDING CONNECTIONS – RESPONSIVE, COLLABORATIVE, INTEGRATED

*The arts make our values visible.*

This framework explores key priorities identified as critical to building on current assets and strengths, honoring the community's desire for participatory, dispersed arts and culture opportunities that connect, enliven, and improve the wellbeing of our community. The vision suggests a model in which these three core areas of development are all continuously informed and tested through the lenses or questions: Are our ideas guided by a commitment to embrace equity and inclusion? Are our ideas amplified by proactive efforts to build awareness of arts and culture, as well as recognition of a unique civic identity? Are our ideas sustained through policy and resource commitment?



*The Historic Walker Lake community mural, created by GoodSpace Murals*



*ElemENTRY Art Project at Peter Hobart Elementary School, led by teaching artist Joe DeCamillis*

## CORE THEMES FOR ARTS AND CULTURE DEVELOPMENT

### **Connect** People, Ideas, Communities

Focus on the power of culture and creativity in building social cohesion through the nurture and development of public celebration and unexpected or chance encounters with the arts.

### **Enliven** Public Spaces

Focus on the power of arts and culture to enliven streets, neighborhoods, public and green spaces as important assets to the city that support both community-gathering and are rooted in cultural expression. Support arts in public spaces, with formal and informal opportunities to create aesthetic beauty.

### **Promote** Health and Wellbeing

Focus on creativity and the arts as important vehicles to strengthen and improve community health and wellbeing through programs and projects that support mental health, encourage active lifestyles, support sustainable greenspace—creative opportunities encouraging healthy minds, healthy bodies, and a healthy natural world.



*Community participants create a mandala for the '100 Hands Mosaic' public artwork*



*The '100 Hands Mosaic' permanent installation at the West End Showplace Icon Theater*

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## PROCESS LENSES INFORMING ALL CORE THEMES

### **Advance** Equity and Inclusion

Advance and celebrate St. Louis Park's diversity of people, places and cultures, while providing creative community voices in efforts to eliminate the underlying barriers and disparities—social, economic, health—that impact under-represented communities.

### **Build** Awareness and Recognition

Distinguish St. Louis Park as a city of innovation and a breadth of artistic activity, a place that leverages the unique voices of a culturally diverse, active and growing creative community.

### **Sustain and Strengthen** through Policy and Resources

Leverage and strengthen St. Louis Park's arts and cultural assets and capacity, ensuring that residents experience the value that arts bring to the city through incorporation of creativity, culture and the arts in the ongoing dialogue and deliberation of all public policies, as well as setting aside financial and human resources sufficient to sustaining this resource within the city.

## STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES: BUILDING CONNECTIONS

**Strategic Imperative: Connect People, Ideas, Communities.** Engage the power of arts, culture and creativity in overcoming barriers and creating opportunities to build social capital through community engagement.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Expanded festivals and street fairs, creative placemaking activities showcasing the breadth of cultures present in St. Louis Park.
- Neighborhood tools are in place to leverage arts, culture and heritage and to celebrate diverse identity and vibrancy.
- Neighborhood cultural assets are activated, successfully utilizing arts and culture to invite opportunities to welcome, to know neighbors, to experience diverse cultural practices.
- There is a strengthened commitment and access to arts in education that meets youth where they are physically, economically, developmentally and culturally.

**Strategic Imperative: Promote Health and Wellbeing.** Focus on both the wellbeing of people and the natural world. Strengthen and improve community health and wellbeing through encouragement of creative opportunities encouraging healthy minds, healthy bodies, and a healthy natural world that are dispersed throughout the city.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Individual resident health is strengthened through opportunities for personal expression of one's creative voice. Personal isolation is mitigated.
- Creativity and the arts are engaged in support of efforts that increase opportunities to connect with nature, and that incorporate arts and culture elements in our green spaces and trails; programming encourages both healthy bodies and a healthy natural world.
- Wellbeing is enhanced as creativity, culture and arts are consistently defined to include the traditions and expressions of the many cultural groups within St. Louis Park; diverse cultural traditions are recognized and reflected throughout our arts and culture, making local arts accessible to all.

**Strategic Imperative: Enliven Public Spaces.** Continue to develop arts in public spaces as opportunities, formal and informal, to create a sense of local identity. Enliven streets, neighborhoods, public and green spaces as important assets to the city that support both community-gathering and are rooted in public expression.

**Key Outcomes:**

- Develop systems to ensure that aesthetic beauty is promoted in conjunction with function in city infrastructure projects.
- Develop mechanisms to further develop and responsively integrate unique local identity within neighborhoods through arts and culture.
- Institute planning procedures that engage creativity and the arts in support of efforts to expand networks of sidewalks, trails and bike facilities.



## KEY PROCESS LENSES: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Key Process Lens: Advance Equity and Inclusion.** Engage creativity, culture and the arts to create a more just and inclusive community for all. Advance and celebrate St. Louis Park's diversity of people, places and cultures, while working aggressively to address the underlying disparities—social, economic, health—that impact under-represented communities.

### Key Outcomes:

- More frequent engagement in arts, culture and heritage activities are experienced by more people and more diverse communities throughout St. Louis Park.
- Creativity, culture and arts are consistently defined to include the traditions and expressions of the many cultural groups within St. Louis Park.
- Diverse cultural traditions are recognized and reflected throughout our arts and culture, making local arts accessible to all.

**Key Process Lens: Build Awareness and Recognition.** Create a unified arts and culture identity/brand. Distinguish St. Louis Park as a city of innovation including a breadth of artistic and cultural activity; a place that leverages the unique voices of a culturally diverse, young and growing artistic community.

### Key Outcomes:

- The community knows and recognizes the importance of culture, creativity and the arts in strengthening the city's vitality.
- The value and impact of culture, creativity and the arts in strengthening the city's vitality is broadly communicated within and beyond our city's boundaries.
- Creative hubs and cultural offerings throughout all neighborhoods are known and activities broadly communicated.

**Key Process Lens: Sustain and Strengthen through Policy and Resources.** Leverage and strengthen St. Louis Park's arts and cultural assets and capacity through incorporation of creativity, culture and the arts in the ongoing dialogue and deliberation of all public policies, as well as committing financial and human resources sufficient to sustaining this resource within the city.

### Key Outcomes:

- Policies are in place that embed, strengthen and solidify arts & culture strategic imperatives throughout municipal decision-making processes as a lens and a tool for policy development.
- Strengthen the collaboration between Friends of the Arts (FOTA) and the city.
- Artists are welcomed, find a business climate inviting entrepreneurial business development, and thrive.
- St. Louis Park maximizes resources to build a creative city through mutually beneficial partnerships spanning business, city and private sources.
- This work is sustained through the establishment of an ongoing Steering Committee representative of leadership key to the implementation of Framework goals, and charged with implementation plan development, oversight and strategy implementation.

**Steering Committee Members:**

- Robyn Awend, Sabes Jewish Community Center, Director of Cultural Arts
- Becky Bakken, Discover St. Louis Park, CEO
- Paul Danicic, Park Nicollet Foundation, Donor & Community Relations Officer
- Darius Gray, City of St. Louis Park, Community Organizer
- George Hagemann\*, St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts, Board Member
- Larry Kraft, Environment and Sustainability Commission, City of St. Louis Park
- Kim LaBo, Minnehaha Creek Watershed District, Education and Engagement Coordinator
- Jamie Marshall\*, St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts, Executive Director
- Meg McMonigal\*, City of St. Louis Park, Principal Planner
- Korawan (Yin) Muangmode, Thai Cultural Council of MN, President
- Astein Osei, St. Louis Park Public Schools, Superintendent
- Maria Solano\*, City of St. Louis Park, Senior Management Analyst
- Denise Tennen, Artist

\*member of Executive Team

**Consultant and Facilitator:** Sharon Rodning Bash

CREDITS

**St. Louis Park Friends of the Arts** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building community through the arts in St. Louis Park, Minnesota. Since 1995, Friends of the Arts has worked to support, promote, and enhance arts and culture activities in partnership with the City of St. Louis Park and other community partners. Learn more at [www.slpfota.org](http://www.slpfota.org).

**The City of St. Louis Park** is dedicated to promoting and integrating arts, culture and community aesthetics in all city initiatives, and partners with Friends of the Arts to do so.

**Special Thanks to:**

The St. Louis Park Historical Society, the Sabes Jewish Community Center, Wat Promwachirayan and the Thai Cultural Council of MN, and all who contributed to the development of this framework in the community listening process.



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*The inaugural St. Louis Park Art Fair at the ROC, 2018*



*Sabrina Datt leads and instructs youth participants in a dance at the 2018 Children First Ice Cream Social*