



8147 Delmar, Suite 218
St. Louis, MO 63130
314.727.2880
Fax 314.727.0348

<http://ams-online.com>

email:
agreenberg@ams-online.com

TO: Joshua Barney, Project Coordinator
Members of the Coordinating Committee
Minneapolis Plan for Arts & Culture

FROM: Arthur Greenberg, co-Project Manager
Bill Bulick, co-Project Manger

RE: Key Informant Interview Themes

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Key interviews have been conducted with a cross section of cultural and civic leaders. Participants were asked about critical issues for Minneapolis (in general), leadership, their expectations of the planning process, cultural strengths and challenges and opportunities. In addition the Advisory Committee for the Minneapolis Cultural Plan met on March 9th to review the planning process and were provided an opportunity to voice their expectations and identify important issues. The follow is a synthesis of what we have heard so far.

Critical issues in Minneapolis

Cultural planning and development always takes place against a backdrop of critical community issues which help to shape perceptions, limits and opportunities. Among those mentioned most frequently:

- The city is facing severe financial constraints. Residents are feeling the “tax pinch” and are growing more resistant to tax increases.
- The city has absorbed huge numbers of new immigrants, particularly Hmong, Somalians and Latinos. Demographics are shifting dramatically.
- The city has played a major role as a development partner. Current focal points are the riverfront, where the Guthrie is relocating and thousands of units of housing will be built and the gigantic Sears building on Lake Street, which the city has just sold to a private developer.
- As the most liberal and urbanized area of the state, Minneapolis faces growing challenges in garnering support and funding at the State level.

Plan expectations

- Advisory committee members expressed that the planning process should be inclusive and engage all segments of the community. This was also voiced in interviews.

- The Plan should be balanced and evidence support for the range of cultural development, from major institutions to neighborhood and community based cultural activity.
- Stakeholders want a realistic, implementable plan.
- Many, especially in interviews, voiced low expectations – even cynicism – about the planing process. There is a history of planing going nowhere because of a lack of support and funding. Much that has been accomplished in building the cultural sector has largely been in spite of City government.
- This Plan should foster the development of public cultural infrastructure that is sustainable and will outlive one mayor’s term.
- The Plan must articulate City roles and policies and a rationale for cultural support

Strengths of the Arts

- Minneapolis features an unusually dense and high quality mix of cultural assets, including.
- World class major institutions, several of which are in the midst of major, successful capital campaigns
- Many high quality mid sized and small organizations.
- Discipline based support organizations, such as the Playwright’s Center, Open Book and the Northern Clay Center.
- Many cultural organizations with strong ties to their neighborhoods, that are undertaking significant community development roles.
- A high concentration of individual artists and many examples of artist or non-profit owned and operated studios and live work spaces.
- Stupendous foundation and corporate support is generally credited with enabling the cultural community to achieve its enviable depth and breadth.
- Non-profit cultural leadership is of unusually high and consistent caliber.
- Participation is very high; higher than St. Paul, and many other communities.
- The public school system’s commitment to arts education has been strong – so far.
- The arts contribution to economic development is well understood and appreciated; the presence of arts is now a part of urban development mythology. Many parameters were mentioned, from the downtown theatres’ role in attracting visitors and commerce, to the presence of cultural organizations and businesses as a revitalizing force along commercial corridors, to the transactions chains stimulated by the high concentration of individual artists. Several studies can be cited.

Challenges for the Arts

- Can the quality of arts in Minneapolis be sustained without stronger financial support, including from the city? State funding has been scaled back, as have corporate and foundation sources.
- There is a growing perception that the major institutions are receiving the bulk of support, including \$.5 billion in capital campaigns. They have also received substantial help with their projects from the city. Smaller organizations are struggling. There is concern that the generally convivial atmosphere in the arts could deteriorate quickly into competition
- Changing demographics and the presence of new immigrants present challenges. Neither they nor their artistic expression are integrated into Minneapolis' understanding of itself and its culture. "We have to create different institutions and organizations to work with immigrant populations. They are not going to be suddenly assimilated into the Walker or Guthrie." Mosaic is applauded as a concept but concerns are expressed about the lack of planning and actual funding support.
- There is a perception that the arts are not reaching out to the next generation. "We need to bring the arts to them instead of expecting them to show up at the doors of the institutions."
- Minneapolis has experienced many cycles of the "Soho syndrome," in which artists help to revitalize neighborhoods, but are forced out as property values rise during gentrification. There are a limited number of remaining affordable neighborhoods for artists (NE Arts Action Plan).
- The "balkanized" structure of government inhibits leadership and action. City Council members are elected by ward and guard their turf; and there are 13 wards in the city. The weak-mayor system is also limiting. Many functions that would normally be part of a centralized government are governed separately, including Parks, Libraries and Schools.

Opportunities/Strategic issues/directions

Several strategic directions were mentioned frequently:

The need for a strong City role was mentioned by virtually all participants. It is hoped that the Plan will provide a policy framework and rationale to inform City decision making about cultural support and advocacy.

- Many lamented past City attempts and failures, including the former Office of Cultural Affairs and its programming initiatives, the loss of the small grants program, and, generally, the lack of City financial support to arts organizations.
- Though the city was applauded for its frequent support to organizations' facilities initiatives, many mentioned "bureaucratic red tape and hurdles" that had made progress difficult.
- Several possible roles for the city were mentioned:
 - Clearinghouse for information. It was frequently stated that the city needs a catalogue or map of its cultural resources.
 - Convener for discussions about cultural needs and issues, such as diversity, venues, capital campaigns, etc.
 - Stimulate strategic alliances.
 - Promote the arts.
 - Provide advice to City departments and elected officials on how the arts can be integrated into City functions and how the city can support the arts as a resource. It was frequently expressed that the city's decisions about its development role in supporting arts organizations were made inconsistently.
 - Public art: move the program forward with a definite commitment and policy.
 - Most expressed that the city should have a strong, visible, staffed and financially supported Office of Cultural Affairs.
 - Most voiced that the city should provide direct grant support to arts organizations and artists.
 - Many suggested that the Plan include examples from other major cities reflecting roles and structure of cultural agencies, programmatic functions and funding mechanisms.

City support for neighborhood/district based cultural development was cited frequently as a positive role that should be continued. A variety of imaginative support mechanisms have been tapped, from the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, to commercial corridor

development, federal Empowerment Zone funding, low interest loans, and the sale of historic properties at below market rates. Significant private support has been leveraged and a dozen or more small and large cultural facilities have been developed.

- There are some excellent examples of support for cultural development in communities of color.
- Some “deals” such as the sale of properties to the West Bank School of Music, Ballet of the Dolls and Artspace have been criticized as being too generous and “unbusinesslike.” A more comprehensive and compelling rationale, outlining community and economic benefits of such initiatives is needed.
- Some representatives of arts organizations have expressed considerable frustration in dealing with the city’s “red tape.”

Promote the Arts! It was frequently expressed that Minneapolis is not taking full advantage of its cultural resources. Branding research carried out by the Convention and Visitors Association confirms that “arts and culture were not “drivers” to visit. The following were mentioned frequently as being important.

- Enhance leaders and the public’s awareness of the value of the arts to Minneapolis.
- Integrate the arts into all facets of civic life.
- Promote the city as a cultural destination.

Increased collaborations: the arts community needs to unite and cooperate.

- Several people mentioned the possibility of organizations sharing functions such as marketing, PR, development and accounting in addition to space.

Funding: It was frequently stated that more funding, including City support, is needed to stabilize and sustain the current cultural infrastructure. Yet others, including city officials, indicated a strong expectation that whatever is proposed be “revenue neutral.”

- Participants are interested in exploring imaginative approaches to funding at the local, regional and/or state level.
- Minnesota Citizens for the Arts, the statewide advocacy organization, is currently advocating for an arts and culture amendment to the “preserve Our Outdoor Heritage bill that would constitutionally dedicate a small percentage of sales tax receipts to the arts.
- It is suggested that the Plan include examples of cultural funding mechanisms from other communities.

Arts Education and Youth Development

- It was stated by many that the city should be concerned about the viability of its schools and opportunities for its youth.

- Many arts organizations offer education and youth programs but there is no city-wide coordination of these efforts.

Leadership

- Strong corporate and foundation leadership - the “wizards” – still exists and should be encouraged to engage with and support this Plan.
- Mayor Rybak is perceived to be a strong and positive advocate for the arts, whose leadership for planning and implementation is critical.