



# Background Report: Arts and Community Culture

## Milwaukie Comprehensive Plan Update

### Block 1 Topic Area

Prepared for the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee

January 2018



### Introduction

Milwaukie residents are proud of their strong community culture and appreciate the influence that creativity has on their city and their lives. Our residents represent a range of backgrounds, ethnicities, and experiences that all add value and diversity to our community. Additionally, art adds cultural, economic, and emotional value to our community while supporting economic growth and livability. Recognizing the connections between the arts, our pasts, and our future, and the incorporation of arts and culture into the Comprehensive Plan Update supports the Milwaukie Community Vision goal which seeks to *“inspire the public to be engaged with the city’s past and future.”*

This background report will discuss elements related to art and community culture as they currently exist in Milwaukie as well as trends and opportunities for the future.

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### Arts & Community Culture and Milwaukie’s Comprehensive Plan

Milwaukie’s current Comprehensive Plan does not have a chapter relating to arts and community culture. Therefore, instead of updating an existing section, we now have the opportunity to create new content that represents our community’s wishes as documented in the Milwaukie Community Vision. By including a new arts and culture element in the Comprehensive Plan Update, the City of Milwaukie recognizes these important influences in our city’s past and future and we demonstrate the City’s commitment to supporting creativity, innovation, community engagement, economic development, and increased quality of life for all residents.

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### Arts & Community Culture in Milwaukie

The creativity, vision, and independent spirit of Milwaukie residents is a key part of our community culture and has been demonstrated in local architectural feats over the years. Buildings such as the Masonic Temple in downtown Milwaukie and St. John the Baptist Catholic Church offer visual reminders of the innovative and eclectic nature of our city’s past eras of growth. As treasured as these historical buildings are, many have been lost over the years as the city has grown. Recognizing the significance of our local historical resources

and the importance of preserving them helps foster a sense of place and heritage that is tied to arts and helps support our sense of community culture.

In addition to its historical resources, Milwaukie is also home to a range of activities that embrace and celebrate arts and culture within the community. Weekly and monthly reoccurring events such as the Farmer's Market and First Fridays offer opportunities for community members to shop and socialize while enjoying the wares and performances offered by local artisans and musicians. Annual celebrations such as the Umbrella Parade and Tree Lighting, Christmas Ships Parade and Winter Solstice Bonfire bring community members together in a way that fosters our small-town appeal. And throughout the year, the Milwaukie Arts Committee, better known as ArtMOB, works to support artists and connect community members with art by sponsoring a range of events and activities, including artist series and sculpture gardens. For our young adult community members, the Milwaukie Academy of the Arts public charter school housed at Milwaukie High School offers an arts-based curriculum that consistently ranks as 'outstanding' in statewide evaluations. Each of these activities and resources are important elements in our community's culture that allow us to share with one another, support each other, and come together to celebrate our differences and similarities.

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## Milwaukie's Community Vision

Embracing our community culture and encouraging the growth of the arts in culture within Milwaukie emerged as important themes in the Milwaukie All Aboard visioning process in 2016. Community members who participated in the visioning process expressed their appreciation of local arts and cultural events and their desire for these and other elements of arts and community culture to remain a prominent part of Milwaukie's community life.

The following priority actions from the [Milwaukie 2040 Vision and Action Plan](#) capture the community's priorities that are associated with arts and culture planning:

*People 1.1: Continue to support neighborhood block parties, tool libraries, book exchanges, community gardens, "barn-raising" type activities and other neighborhood events and resources that serve to bring residents together.*

*People 1.2: Continue to provide city staff support and funding for events and celebrations that showcase the community, such as the Sunday Parkways, Umbrella Parade, Earth Day/Arbor Day, and the NDA summer concert series.*

*People 1.3: Develop additional Police Department programs that help build relationships with the community, such as Coffee with a Cop, the Citizen's Police Academy, the creation of a Latino Youth Coalition, and increased participation in community events like National Night Out and Sunday Parkways.*

*People 2.1: Promote small business development through mentoring, incubation and entrepreneurial programs as well as loans and grants distributed across Milwaukie's neighborhoods.*

*People 2.4: Expand the City's volunteer program to organize and promote community volunteer events, projects and other opportunities, connecting volunteers and resources with those in need.*

*Prosperity 3.1: Support and retain existing small businesses in our downtown and other business districts and attract new businesses that contribute to an open, inviting, and diverse atmosphere*

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## Assets & Trends for Incorporating Arts & Culture in Planning

As a field, the arts encompass a variety of mediums, including acting, architecture, dance, design, music, and photography. These activities can be engaged in on a formal or informal basis, from grand operas and fine art shows to impromptu performances in a local park or storytime at the library. It is equally important for community vitality that there are the spaces and talent to produce these art and cultural events as it is to have people attend and experience them. Planning for a community that supports the arts includes weaving art and performances into the physical and cultural fabric of the city while also fostering a community culture that supports and engages in the arts.

### *Local Historic Resources*

Past expressions of art are a part of our community heritage. Seeking to preserve architecture, photography, writing, and other works of art from the past is a key activity in building and understanding our community's identity. One of the ways that Milwaukie has ensured the incorporation of the arts into our community fabric over the years is through the preservation of local historic buildings and architecture. The City's [inventory of historic properties](#) lists both significant and contributing resources and includes homes and commercial buildings. Milwaukie's zoning code supports local historic preservation by requiring Planning Commission review for the designation, deletion, alteration, or demolition of an identified contributing historic resource. This process helps to preserve these resources for continued enjoyment, a better understanding of our city's history, and an increased sense of community pride.

### *Art & the Local Economy*

Supporting arts and culture activities also supports local businesses. By creating opportunities for local artisans and performers to support themselves through their work, we encourage their work to continue to benefit our community. As identified in the North Milwaukie Industrial Area (NMIA) plan framework, Milwaukie can support local economic development by encouraging emerging and small-scale businesses through the provision of "maker" spaces that offer the flexible, light industrial type of workspaces needed to foster this type of growth. In addition to supporting local artists, a thriving arts and culture sector helps attract and retain skilled workers in our area that appreciate this type of livability-enhancing amenity. Similarly, a strong arts and culture sector also helps engage youth and introduces them to the lifelong skills of innovation and creativity which can serve them well in their future careers.

### *Sense of Place*

The American Planning Association notes that "arts and culture contribute specifically to strengthening cultural values and preserving heritage and history, building community character and sense of place, enhancing community engagement and participation, [and] enhancing economic vitality." As the people of Milwaukie have discovered, art can help us understand the context and diversity of our community at the same time it strengthens our sense of community culture. Continuing to support and promote Milwaukie's current arts-based community culture activities while encouraging and supporting new ones will help meet the goals of the community that are outlined in Milwaukie's 2040 Vision Statement.

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## Opportunities & Challenges Influencing Arts & Culture Planning

Several cities of all sizes around the country have begun to recognize the personal, economic, and community benefits of the arts their long-range planning efforts. These benefits can be pursued in a way that best suits the needs of a given city and can include exploring shared or differing narratives within the community, building a better understanding of one another, and building an enhanced sense of place.

### *Community Character and Culture*

Art and culture events allow for the development and expression of community character for community members themselves, as well as for visitors who are drawn to experience these events that celebrate our community. Exploring each other's stories and experiences via art helps us learn about our different experiences in a way that allows for multiple stories to coexist simultaneously. The resulting expression of community character and culture is a truer representation of a diverse community fabric and helps create a shared understanding of how our community might develop in the future. Continuing to hold community events such as First Fridays and Milwaukie's holiday celebrations while also discovering new ways to reach out to our community members, especially those who may not be engaging in these celebrations currently, can help build and strengthen our collective sense of community culture.

### *Preservation*

Ensuring that the artistic endeavors of past and present generations are preserved builds a richness of local culture that helps tell our city's story for present and future generations. While Milwaukie does maintain a list of historic resources throughout the city, the City's most recent Historic Inventory was completed in 1988. Among other considerations, one of the criteria for a building, site, structure, or object to qualify as a "significant" resource is that it is over 50 years old. With Milwaukie's most current Historic Inventory turning 30 years old in 2018, there are likely many more resources that may now qualify to rank as a historic resource, including our midcentury modern buildings and buildings that have been annexed into the city since the last inventory. Updating this inventory to create a more current list of historic resources will help us continue to preserve the local landmarks that contribute to our community's sense of place. At the same time, we also have the opportunity to strengthen our current mechanisms for protecting historic resources to better meet the requirements of Oregon Statewide Planning Goal 5 - *Natural Resources, Scenic and Historic Areas, and Open Spaces*. We can consider whether our community's preservation goals could be better met with different program elements, potentially including programs education and incentives for preservation.

### *Our Community's Youth*

Art offers opportunities for expression and helps develop new ways of thinking about our world. By immersing our young people in the arts at an early age, we can encourage their appreciation of and participation in the arts and cultural events that help give our community its identity. The Milwaukee Academy of the Arts (MAA) is a free public charter option for high school students that provides academics geared toward college preparation with a strong focus on the visual and performing arts. MAA's approach of using the arts to teach academic core subjects has resulted in high scores on statewide tests and high levels of student and family satisfaction, demonstrating the importance of continuing to engage our community's youth in the arts. MAA's approach can provide inspiration and guidance for further programming that seeks to involve young people with the arts.

### *Funding*

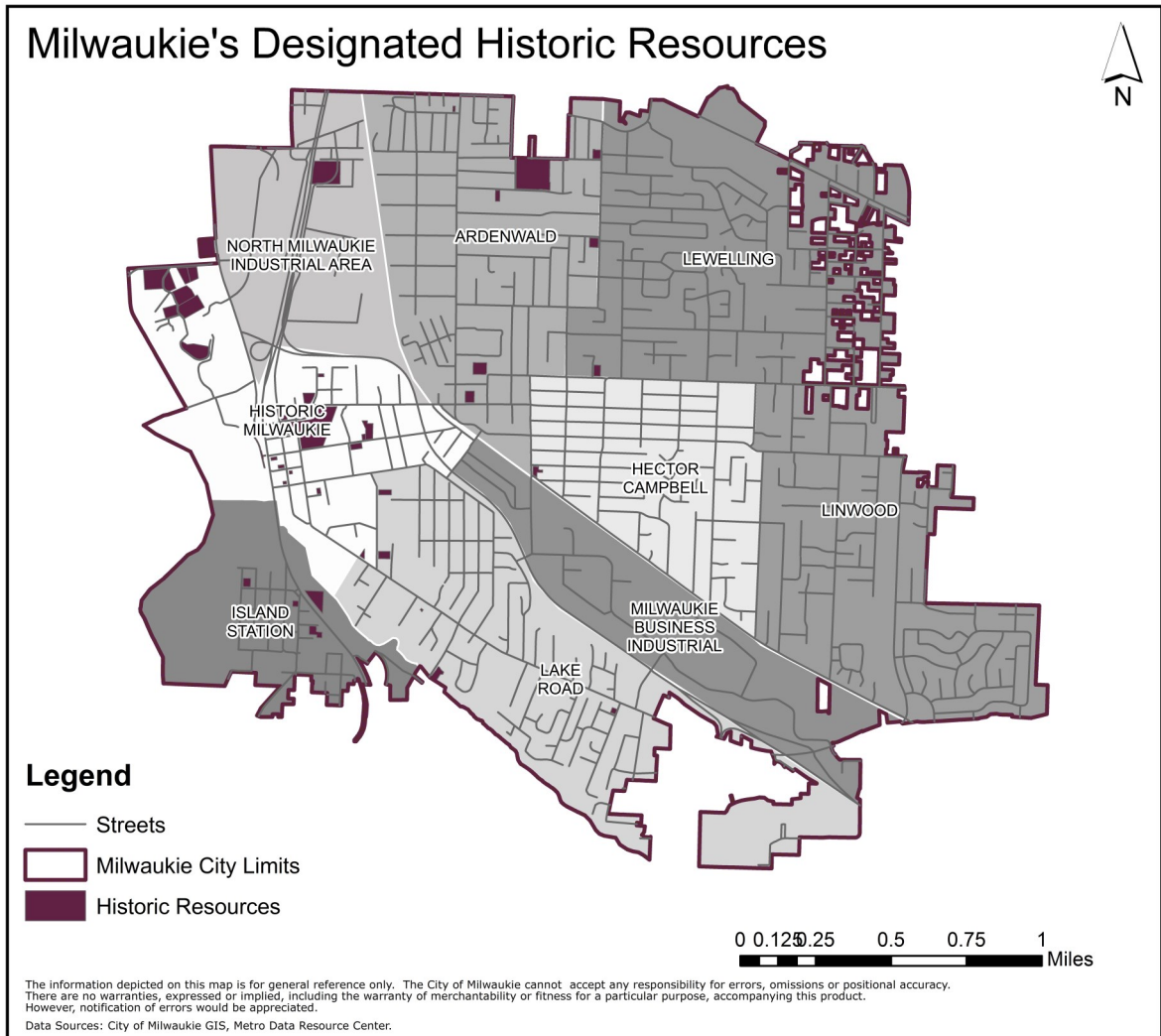
Securing financial resources for arts and cultural activities can present challenges. Funding typically comes from multiple and varied sources, including non-profit organizations. Understanding the economic benefits that are borne by having art and cultural events can also encourage support from businesses and downtown associations. The state of Oregon was one of the first in the nation to pass "Percent for the Arts" legislation, which has resulted in a statewide art collection of more than 2,500 artworks created by more than 1,000 artists that have generated over \$6 million of revenue to these artists. Smaller communities across the country have successfully incorporated similar funding programs such as a "1% for the Arts" to support their own goals of creating public art, building community culture, and supporting local artists.

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## Geographic Observations of Art in Milwaukie

Consistent with settlement patterns over time, Milwaukie’s historic resources tend to be clustered around the downtown area where the town was originally founded. However, there are additional significant and contributing resources distributed throughout the surrounding neighborhoods as shown on the map below. In the time since the last historic resource inventory was completed, there may also be other historic resources located throughout the city.



Milwaukie also has public works of art distributed throughout the city. TriMet’s public art installations along the Orange MAX line have brought sculptures and mosaics to the SE Tacoma St/ Johnson Creek station, the Milwaukee/Main Street station, and the Kellogg Light Rail Bridge. The sculpture garden at Milwaukee City Hall includes works from over a dozen local artists, including those shown on the following page. The garden is open to the public for viewing and is enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

Community art should be accessible by all, yet this has not always been the case. A unique aspect of art is its ability to showcase multiple simultaneous histories, figures, and events. Even within a shared history, there are different interpretations and experiences within groups. Art and performance are mediums which allow the expression of dichotomous experiences for the acknowledgement and celebration of all. The placement and prioritization of works of art and

performance for the public should be done in a thoughtful and logical manner so that the benefits of these works reach the most number of people, with an emphasis on communities and populations who have been traditionally underserved.



Sculpture Garden at Milwaukie City Hall

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## Policy Questions, Observations, and Implications

Milwaukie's 2040 Vision Statement declares that:

*"Milwaukie's government ... strongly encourages engagement and participation by all and nurtures a deep sense of community through celebrations and collective action."*

In determining how the Comprehensive Plan Update can support Milwaukie's Community Vision, we can consider the following questions and observations:

- What does "supporting the arts" look like in terms of policy language?
  - How do these Arts & Community Culture policy goals support our "quadruple bottom line" framework categories of *People, Place, Planet, and Prosperity*?
  - How can we ensure that the benefits of a strong arts and culture program are accessible by all?
  - How can we address funding challenges? Should we institute a "Percent for the Arts" program? Who would this affect and what are the benefits and drawbacks of doing so?
  - How do we both support our existing community culture while allowing for it to change and grow as our community changes over time?
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