

Creative Portland Cultural Plan

Phase 1- Executive Summary

6/2/17

This executive summary of Phase 1 Tasks is intended to offer a snapshot of the needs and concerns of the arts, cultural, and creative economy organizations, businesses, and individuals in the City of Portland. As the first phase of the Cultural Plan initiative, these tasks also delve into the role and perception of the Cultural Planning process as well as of Creative Portland itself so that the organization can get feedback that will be helpful in moving forward. This summary is also meant as the first step in assessing how (and if) Creative Portland should move forward with the cultural planning process.

Cultural planning seeks to take advantage of alignments of missions, goals, and interests of arts and cultural organizations, city agencies, and individuals to make the best use of community assets and achieve ambitious goals for residents and businesses. Cultural plans have power in the information and data provided through the planning process (what do we have, where do we want to go, what is our impact?) as well as the collaborations that grow from planning (what can we do together?), and the attention put on endeavors (this is what we are doing, this is how we make positive impacts in our communities).

The context for this current cultural planning effort includes the recent comprehensive planning initiative for the city, the recent Maine Arts Commission plan (2015), and the 1998 Celebrating Community Portland Cultural Plan which is the last comprehensive arts and cultural plan produced for Portland.

Portland's [Comprehensive Plan 2017](#) provides support for arts and culture by focusing on two primary strategies – leveraging a creative economy and creative placemaking.

The plan for the City of Portland, much like many cities across the US, is to take advantage of the Creative Economy movement. As stated in the plan, a creative economy is economic activity created by creative pursuits (see page 43). Portland has recognized that leveraging the synergies of entrepreneurial activities and artist expressions is beneficial to the local community. The other way that Portland is growing its art and culture is through creative placemaking. The placemaking program focuses on five goals:

1. arts and culture
2. community engagement
3. partnerships to rejuvenate open space
4. stewardship over parks
5. equity in access to all of the community initiatives

Arts and culture, however, are given very little space in the 2017 plan and are referenced in implicit rather than explicit ways. The arts and cultural community is keenly interested in how mention of arts and culture in the Comprehensive Plan will translate into action and support in the coming years.

The 2015 [Maine Arts Commission](#) Five Year Cultural Plan sets priorities (but no funding or detailed implementation plan) for:

1. Attract and leverage greater investment in Maine's arts, culture, and creative economy.
2. Increase awareness of creative opportunities and their value to communities and local economies
3. Build on and further strengthen PK-12 arts education and lifelong learning programs.
4. Build arts and tourism synergy.
5. Strengthen Maine Arts Commission's capacity and stewardship.

In 1998 the Celebrating Community Cultural Plan was completed and contained seven goals and 24 main action ideas. The Plan did not designate who would be specifically responsible for implementation of each of the action ideas but states that the Cultural Plan was incorporated into the City's Comprehensive Plan and indicates that PACA would take the lead in implementation. The goals are quite broad and the action steps are extensive, with each step having multiple possible initiatives. There are no prioritization of actions, specific responsibilities identified, nor funding resources identified or allocated. PACA is identified as the lead on implementation but was then incorporated into Creative Portland in 2008, leaving the Cultural Plan without its key "owner."

Of the 24 main action ideas, only a few were implemented.

Summary of Interviews and Focus Groups

CivicMoxie conducted focus groups with small arts organizations, entrepreneurs in the creative industries, and artists. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the leaders of larger arts organizations in the City, artists, creative professionals, and other organizations. CivicMoxie met with the City Manager and City of Portland Planning staff and also participated in Creative Portland board meetings. Questions were focused on three main areas:

1. The overall state of arts, culture, and creative economy in the city
2. The potential role of a cultural plan
3. The perception and role of Creative Portland

Answers are summarized below:

Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy in Portland

Overall State of Arts and Culture and Creative Economy

- There is too much supply for the existing demand
- All individual pieces...no greater whole
- Arts and culture hasn't done a good job of articulating its value
- Need to measure/develop indicators for success
- Red tape burying everyone
- Community needs most:
 - Vision and direction
 - Affordable housing and resources...
 - Help in integrating into the economy

Challenges faced by arts and cultural organizations:

- A lot going on for a city of Portland's size. Don't create more!
- Organizations are cannibalizing themselves – need to figure out a way to share resources.
- Need one voice with which to lobby the city and advocate for arts and culture.
- Need a better relationship with the tourism industry...an untapped market for artists and organizations.
- This is not a culture that buys art.
- Difficult to get the city to say "yes" about anything.
- Arts are leaving...if you can't retain the artists and the vibe that go with it, it's really hard to attract the talent you need to support a creative economy.

Immigrant Populations -outreach and inclusion

- Schools program is best way of reaching them.
- Challenges include lack of support systems that help kids get to events...no rides, no support.
- This can't be superficial...this takes intentionality, patience and lots of time.

Cultural Plan

Questions to understand the need, concerns, and possibilities for a new cultural plan for the city.

What are your general thoughts about the Cultural Plan?

- Feel like there needs to be an accounting of implementation of previous cultural plan – what was accomplished?
- If there is no City buy-in it isn't worth it.
- A lot riding on this Plan...can Creative Portland pull this off? Should it pull this off?
- City touts arts as a recruitment tool but arts is really being used by the City without support in return.
- Really worried nothing will come of this. Creative Portland doesn't have resources.
- Figure out relationship between cultural plan, Creative Portland and City

Power/Usefulness of a Cultural Plan

- It would be great if Creative Portland would take on role of City liaison.
- City advocacy and solving nuts and bolts issues.
- Clarifying and supporting the arts district...it doesn't work as a visible entity now.
- Address affordability for artists.
- Can create a real eco-system for the arts.
- Bring the benefits of immigrant and refugee populations to light.
- Get all the creatives in the same room.
- Create City buy-in regarding streamlined permitting, shared rehearsal space, tax breaks for Arts District purchases, etc.
- Identify things that can be done that are larger than the stakeholders individually
- Focus on a few clear things that address challenges that everyone can work on together.

What should the Plan include?

- Tourism...is a big part of this.
- Identifying bold moves that everyone can get behind...lobby for it, make it happen.
- Creating opportunities for public-private and non-profit...fighting the fight together.

- Strategies for building a gallery economy and maker space economy.
- Affordable space
- A clear argument for the Arts District
- Articulate very clearly what sets Portland apart.
- Gallery space plan
- Cross-sector - People want to go to the museum, go to stage, eat food.
- Cultural tourism
- Parking strategies/solutions
- Thinking about experience design from the first to last encounter of every audience member, museum goer, perspective resident, or business.
- Clear plan for what Creative Portland and others will do
- Affirm that the arts are the soul and economic center of Portland
- Space for a serious conversation about why the City's policies aren't working for artists
- MOU between organizations to commit to working together
- Policies in place to bring artists/creatives in early on City projects instead of at the end
- Identify all City programs and initiatives where arts might be incorporated/introduced

Creative Portland

Summary of Findings Regarding Perception, Roles, and Potential Role in Cultural Plan and Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy of the City

Creative Portland was formed in 2008 and PACA was merged into the organization. The Mission of the organization, as stated on its website, is as follows:

Creative Portland leverages, grows, and sustains Portland's creative industries, enterprises, and workforce. As the City's official local arts agency, we also support artists and cultural institutions that are central to Portland's identity, economy, and community.

The City of Portland website describes the role of The Creative Portland Corporation as follows:

The Creative Portland Corporation (CPC), established November 2008, is a nonprofit organization created to receive donations, grants, and contributions in support of the City of Portland's economic development efforts, which enhance and create business in the creative economy, arts district development, and employment opportunities.

According to the Creative Portland website (accessed May 2017), current programs include:

- First Friday Art Walk
- 2 Degrees Portland
- Creative Spaces data base
- Artist Professional Development Series

The following are the questions posed during interviews and focus groups, with aggregated answers.

What is your understanding of the mission and role of Creative Portland?

- No momentum in any direction

- Creative Portland is ALWAYS in the process of figuring out what it is.
- Unclear about mission...no sense of what Creative Portland does.
- Quasi municipal arts
- Elitist
- Serves downtown/Old Port – speaks for larger organizations
- Hasn't articulated how it adds value
- Was clear in the past, but not sure what policies are anymore. Seems like Creative Portland is trying to get a handle on what it is.

There was overwhelming consensus among all groups interviewed that Creative Portland's message and mission are not clear. It is also interesting to note that many acknowledge the impossible task of being all things to all people, particularly with limited resources:

- It's a Catch 22 – can't do it all with limited resources but Creative Portland can't get more resources until it proves its worth
- Creative Portland can't do both – advocate for artists and support economic development through creative economy. They are two very different tasks and constituencies...there needs to be two organizations.

What would you like Creative Portland to take on in the future? How do you think Creative Portland could support your organization?

Most stakeholders have very definite ideas of possible roles for Creative Portland which fit into the following categories:

- Advocate/Liaison with City Hall
- Resource
- Connector
- Program help/Programming leadership
- Marketing

The role of advocate was the one most often cited when stakeholders were asked about possible future roles of Creative Portland. Details of what that role entails include:

- Need a larger emissarial presence for creativity and arts and culture
- Convene everyone (City, organizations) to align efforts, make the most of limited resources
- Create the "space" to ensure that the missed opportunities everyone sees are addressed and that the most is made of this moment in time
- Build support from City Council
- Cheerleader for the arts; it's the only thing saving us from a tourism-based economy.
- Interpreter....City Hall and artists don't speak the same language
- Help the City say "yes" more often.
- Serve as one umbrella for all the arts.
- Be an advocate for affordable space:
- Creative Portland could act as a clearinghouse for regulatory issues/permitting for events, public art, space development.
- Be a strong advocate for shared space for performance/making.

A consistent message from most stakeholders, including the large arts and cultural organizations, is that Creative Portland take a strong leadership role in shaping policy at City Hall:

- Need to be more proactive to lead City officials, government, arts and culture, businesses...what Portland should look like in 10 years.
- The City doesn't have a plan and someone needs to be leader...it could be Creative Portland. Feel the City is in reactive planning mode and not looking at bigger picture things that can really pull everyone together and make a difference.

Key Takeaways

This cultural planning effort has uncovered two areas of concern for Creative Portland. The first area of concern is focused on the very idea of a cultural plan. Many see the issue of "ownership" as a question that must be answered before a cultural plan can be undertaken; who "owns the plan" in terms of a commitment and the necessary resources for implementation? The second concern is a strategic plan question, "What is Creative Portland and how can it have a positive impact on the city's arts, culture, and creative industries?"

These questions about Creative Portland's ability to lead the planning process to successful implementation, and City Hall's commitment to arts and culture are deep concerns for almost everyone interviewed as part of this Task 1 process.

Creative Portland

There is remarkable unanimity regarding perceptions of Creative Portland, wishes for its future role, and concerns about arts, culture, and creative enterprise in the city. Key takeaways from this stakeholder outreach include five major points:

Identity, focus, value, policy, and advocacy

1. Creative Portland must develop a strong identity that is easy to convey and that clearly defines its role and relationships with varied constituents and City Hall.
2. Creative Portland cannot be all things to all constituents. The reasons for this are varied and include:
 - a. Creative Portland doesn't have the resources (not enough staff and funding)
 - b. Advocating for artists and cultural organizations and recruiting creative economy workers and businesses are two very different things (with some overlap) with different tasks, skillsets, and resources needed.
3. Creative Portland must decide how it will add value to the city and identify ways to measure success so it can demonstrate its worth.
4. The organization should not focus on creating new things until it determines what its focus is but rather, should focus on being a leader in policy and City Hall advocacy.
5. There is a strong desire for Creative Portland to lead by gathering everyone together, setting an agenda, and advocating for this in City Hall.

Cultural Plan

A single question was posed by every stakeholder: "Who will be responsible for implementation of the

Cultural Plan and is City Hall really supportive of this effort?” Many stakeholders expressed reluctance to get involved with the planning process, and to commit time and resources to the cultural plan without understanding the level of the City’s commitment to implementation. Other comments included key elements that should be included in a plan. A summary of takeaways includes:

1. It is not worth embarking on a cultural planning process without complete buy-in from City Hall and a commitment to implementing plan elements. Many pointed to the 1998 Cultural Plan as an example of what happens when resources and clear responsibilities are absent.
2. Many organizations, businesses, and individuals will not devote additional time or resources to the cultural planning effort unless there is a real sense of commitment on the part of the City.
3. A Cultural Plan must address policy issues that include support of the Arts District, parking/transportation in the Arts District and beyond, permitting and tax policies, marketing and tourism links, and affordable space.
4. The City is at a critical time of opportunity and there is a general feeling that this is something that is not to be missed. Many feel a sense of urgency to get everything in alignment so that everyone can stop reacting and start planning in proactive ways for big, bold things.

Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy in Portland

Things are rapidly changing in the city and stakeholders had a surprisingly unified message about what they need and what the stressors are:

1. Affordable space is desperately needed. Artists and creatives are leaving for Biddeford, Westbrook and other places and the city is in danger of losing enough of the arts and cultural scene to affect its uniqueness and “authenticity.” Everyone believes that losing these qualities will also affect the City’s ability to attract and retain businesses and skilled workers.
2. There are too many organizations, initiatives, events, and programs for a city the size of Portland. Groups need to find a way to share or everyone will cannibalize each other.
3. Everyone is competing for the same finite pot of money. Without growth in business and population, the audience/buyer base is stagnant.
4. Arts and cultural initiatives/organizations are not taking advantage of the tourism economy in the city and better marketing that connects these two sectors together would enhance the visitor experience and support arts and culture through increased audiences and a larger buyer pool.
5. It’s a struggle to get the City to collaborate on important issues and also frustrating when it often says “no.” There is a sense that because the City often acts alone, there are missed opportunities. There is also no sense that there is a bold plan...everything is approached piecemeal. Artists and creatives are problem solvers and want to be at the table (not at end of the discussions but at the beginning) to make a difference.

Recommendations

Two major issues have been uncovered during this first phase of the cultural planning process.

A strategic plan for Creative Portland?

The Cultural Planning process can inform the question of Creative Portland’s role. Stakeholders feel that the organization’s role is unclear and that it doesn’t have the resources to take on all projects at once. Some feel it can’t even begin to serve the varied constituencies it now represents—is it an economic

development arm of the City or an advocacy and programming organization for arts and culture? If the cultural planning effort moves forward, Creative Portland can listen carefully to determine what roles it most needs to play. It is therefore recommended that Creative Portland make no major changes in its organizational structure, programming, or spending until either the cultural planning process is complete, or absent a cultural plan, that it embarks on a strategic planning process to determine its future role and core stakeholders.

To plan or not to plan?

To embark on the extensive effort and resources needed to create a cultural plan and to expend political capital in that process would be foolhardy if there is not a commitment from City Hall for implementation of the plan nor participation and buy-in from major stakeholders. This seems, then, to be the very next step in the cultural planning process –determining what resources and support are present for plan implementation to ensure that this effort is not an abstract exercise, and ensuring that there is significant enough buy-in from major stakeholders to move forward.

A comparison of the major non-profit arts organizations' strategic plans and interviews with leaders of those organizations reveals that there are certainly common interests that can be addressed by a cultural plan. Of particular note are the areas of alignment around concerns regarding physical facilities, visitor/audience experience (from web site exploration to parking to walking city streets, to engagement with the arts), and parking/transportation. All three of these things can be effectively addressed in a cultural plan and can inform the City's planning initiatives.

In summary, it is recommended that:

1. Creative Portland expand the tent to ensure that everyone understands that this is NOT Creative Portland's Cultural Plan. Creative Portland will have to articulate that it has no agenda other than to support arts, culture, and the creative economy in the city, and that it is open to shaping its path forward after hearing Cultural Plan feedback.
2. It be very clear what this cultural plan should include:
 - a. Clear next steps
 - b. Prioritization of issues and actions
 - c. Clearly defined responsibilities and buy-in from parties that must be involved
 - d. Identification of funding and other resources
 - e. Identification of measures for success and built in evaluation schedules and methods
3. Creative Portland consider the cultural planning process as the foundation for its own strategic planning process that will potentially reset its direction and clarify its roles and goals.
4. A new cultural plan should be incorporated into the City's comprehensive plan. The arts and cultural component of the 2017 Comprehensive Plan is very small, with no specifics to help guide moving forward. A cultural plan can address this void and offer the detailed road map needed to ensure that a key characteristic of the city be supported.

It is recommended that the very next steps in this planning process involve gathering the major organizations to the table to discuss concerns and potential benefits, as identified in this Task 1 report and to address the outcome of this meeting with City Hall to determine the level of commitment to the cultural planning process and implementation.