

EMPOWERING A CREATIVE COMMUNITY

The City of Takoma Park Cultural Plan

A Vision for 2018-2023

The Arts and Humanities Commission shall advise and assist the City Council with respect to developing and promoting the arts and humanities for the enjoyment, education, cultural enrichment and benefit of the residents of the City of Takoma Park.

- Takoma Park City Council Ordinance

Our Vision

The Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission is dedicated to strengthening Takoma Park's identity as a creative community that is welcoming to all. We celebrate and support the rich mix of cultural expression of our residents through the visual arts, performing arts, literary arts, and our multicultural heritage. Our goal is to make the arts and humanities, in their many forms, a part of daily life in Takoma Park.

This five-year plan will chart a course from 2018 to 2023, creating a cultural roadmap that will provide guidance to local policymakers and community leaders as they consider the allocation of resources and encourage the strategic development of programs and partnerships. This plan recognizes the need to deliver diverse cultural programs, advocates for increased support for our cultural assets, argues for improved public access to those assets, and aims to meet the cultural needs and aspirations of future generations.

As its recommendations are implemented, the Cultural Plan will advance the City of Takoma Park's ongoing efforts to create an equitable and livable community for all, with a government that is engaged and responsive to the needs of its diverse residents.

History

When the Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission was chartered by the City Council in 2003, it reflected a priority for the residents of Takoma Park. The city is known locally and nationally for its support of the arts and humanities, including painters, sculptors, musicians, poets, writers, and historians, among many others. Local businesses and cultural organizations have shared the city's creative spirit through popular festivals, house concerts, exhibitions, and performances. The Commission has worked with these groups, the City Council, and City staff to further weave the arts and humanities into the social fabric that binds our community together. These efforts also stimulate economic development and support the financial viability of the creative community.

The first task of the Commission was to provide guidance for renovations of the Takoma Park Community Center. During a multi-year process that resulted in the renovation of the Council

Chambers and the construction of an arts room and dance studio, the Commission's members highlighted the importance of creating and providing access to public spaces for art and cultural activities.

Our efforts—and the efforts of scores of others— succeeded. Today, the Community Center is a hub for a wide range of programs, including poetry readings, film screenings, concerts, dance, theatre, lectures, children's programs, and more. The Commission also oversees the rotating bimonthly art exhibitions in the galleries at the Community Center and sponsors the annual Holiday Art Sale, which attracts hundreds of visitors and supports local artists and artisans.

In recent years, the Commission has moved beyond the Community Center to extend the reach of arts and cultural events to underserved areas of Takoma Park. Most prominently, the Commission has been a driving force in the development of public art projects, including murals and pop-up art installations at city parks, public buildings, businesses, and other locales across Takoma Park. The Commission has selected sites and mapped potential locations for future public art projects and held competitions to select artists to design and implement those projects that can be enjoyed by everyone.

2006 Cultural Plan

The first Cultural Plan, titled *Creative Vision: A Cultural Plan for the City of Takoma Park*, was adopted by the Takoma Park City Council in January 2006. It took more than a year to complete the plan, a process which included a public survey, public forums, and interviews with community leaders, local cultural organizations, artists and others. The main objectives were to create or increase arts and cultural events, promote the offering of culturally responsive educational programs, establish a public art program, facilitate the expansion of community arts facilities, and increase funding for artists. Most of those objectives have been achieved, and the new Cultural Plan for 2018-2023 seeks to expand upon those efforts through new and existing programming, public outreach efforts, and an emphasis on multicultural understanding.

One major objective of the 2006 Cultural Plan was the renovation of the City Council Chambers into the Takoma Park Community Center Auditorium, in response to an identified need for a suitable public venue for performances and other community events. Completed in 2007, the 156-seat auditorium is a LEED-certified facility that incorporates a state-of-the-art sound and projection system. City TV frequently televises public meetings and events and posts videos on YouTube, reaching an international audience. Events sponsored by the Commission have included poetry readings and our first "poetry slam," lectures, film screenings, art exhibitions, dance, theatre and concerts, as well as many classes and community meetings.

Goals for New Cultural Plan

Building upon past successes, research, and public input, we have identified the following

goals for the advancement of the arts and humanities. They are offered in celebration of the cultural diversity of our community and are designed to improve access to and awareness of the arts and cultural programs offered by the City and its partners.

Cultural Events and Performances

Expand Takoma Park's reputation as a destination for the arts and humanities by providing and promoting programming that is diverse, multicultural, and accessible to audiences of all ages, abilities, economic statuses, races, ethnicities, and countries of origin.

Facilities and Venues

Expand opportunities to host cultural activities and events at existing or newly designed public facilities, while also advocating for the expanded use of private facilities.

Educational Programs

Facilitate access to educational programs that foster an appreciation for the arts and humanities, increase cultural awareness, and develop practical skills.

Capacity Building

Work with local partners to facilitate workshops or training programs in business skills for artists and others in the creative community to help them succeed in their careers.

Public Art

Encourage and facilitate temporary and permanent public art installations throughout the community, expand the public art program, and provide increased opportunities for visual and performance artists.

Priorities

As we look ahead to the next five years, the Commission has ambitious goals and priorities. While maintaining our current programs, we also see new opportunities to further strengthen the artistic and social fabric of our community.

Our priorities, as outlined in this five-year plan, include the following:

- Support programming that appeals to Takoma Park's diverse citizen groups and broaden outreach to those groups;
- Continue and expand activities in underserved areas outside the Community Center and the downtown corridor;
- Collaborate with city agencies, local organizations, and businesses on creative programming;
- Upgrade spaces within the Community Center and adjoining buildings;
- Create a clearinghouse of information about arts and cultural activities in the city;
- Serve as a venue to showcase the creative talents of artists, lecturers, poets and other performers;
- Support and promote long-standing cultural events and festivals in Takoma Park;

- Leverage the arts and humanities as a catalyst to strengthen Takoma Park socially and financially.

Objectives and Recommendations

The City of Takoma Park and the Arts and Humanities Commission will work in partnership with the community to implement the following recommendations.

Cultural Events and Performances	
Objective	Recommended Action
Increase attendance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a greater awareness of the <i>We Are Takoma</i> series. • Create a marketing plan to promote events, using community websites, organizations, listservs, etc. • Expand upon city-linked traditional media and social media by creating a weekly e-newsletter to promote upcoming events. • Develop cultural programming and public service announcements for CityTV and Takoma Radio.
Increase diversity of cultural programming.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey local populations about desired programming. • Develop specialized programs and outreach to underserved populations, including Hispanic, Ethiopian, and Southeast Asian communities. • Facilitate development of and support for multicultural events and festivals.
Increase diversity of program proposals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand distribution of applications for <i>We Are Takoma</i> programs, including outreach to local organizations, cultural centers, and institutions. • Host open house or virtual information sessions to provide guidance on the proposal process. • Create “emerging voices” series, including lectures, screenings, performances, and exhibition opportunities.
Provide inclusive and racially equitable cultural opportunities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure that all programs are welcoming and affordable. • Implement a “safe spaces” policy for the discussion and exploration of sensitive topics. • Increase the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Arts and Humanities Commission.
Expand upon Takoma Park’s reputation as an arts and cultural destination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a marketing plan for cultural activities. • Promote Takoma Park as a cultural destination in community marketing campaigns. • Investigate the potential for the designation of Takoma Park as an Arts and Entertainment District.

Facilities and Venues	
Objective	Recommendation
Maximize use of the Community Center.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade lighting in gallery spaces. • Promote use of Community Center for cultural events organized by private groups, nonprofits, or individuals. • Evaluate feasibility of proposed expansion of the Arts Room. • Investigate potential for repurposing existing space for creative programs.
Develop other City facilities as cultural centers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporate exhibition space in the design plans for the Library renovation. • Encourage development of new and expanded arts spaces at the Recreation Center, City parks, and other locales.
Become an information clearinghouse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop online resources identifying local performance venues and exhibition spaces. • Develop online resources connecting artists to local art buyers and available exhibition spaces.
Educational Programs	
Objective	Recommendation
Expand educational opportunities in the arts and humanities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay foundations for programs for lifelong learning among diverse audiences, including children, teens, adults, and seniors. • Promote cultural awareness among all residents. • Continue poetry and photography workshops and consider adding new workshops focused on other artistic pursuits.
Bring arts and humanities education to underserved groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage pop-up programs (classes, performances, interactive art, readings, etc.) in underserved neighborhoods and Wards. • Work with the Recreation Department, Library, and other City departments to expand multicultural components in new and existing programs, including camps, field trips, etc. • Incorporate classes or other educational aspects into new and ongoing events. • Facilitate a mentorship program to tap experts in our creative community to help develop the potential of local students, emerging artists, musicians, etc. • Develop a volunteer program through which local students can receive Student Service Learning (SSL)

	hour credits for volunteer work with City arts and culture programs.
Increase educational programs and partnerships in digital and radio production.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand classes in digital art. ● Increase support from Takoma TV for digital production training programs. ● Pursue additional educational opportunities and partnerships for digital production. ● Support after-school Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM) programs.
Capacity Building	
Facilitate development of practical skills for the creative community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with partners to facilitate business or practical skills training for local artists and others in the creative community to help them succeed, such as applying for grants, writing an artist statement, publishing tips, etc.
Increase access to funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand the eligibility criteria of the Community Grants program to include individual artists, performers, etc.
Public Art	
Objective	Recommendation
Advocate for public art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue to budget for funding of public art. ● Pursue alternative funding opportunities such as grants and sponsorships. ● Create a standardized and inclusive process for seeking public input on proposed public art projects, identification of sites, review of proposals, and the design consultation process.
Increase diversity of public art installations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand public art solicitation to include visual, audio, performance, light, film, etc. ● Include poetry and other expressions of art at public meetings.
Facilitate temporary art installations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitate the temporary installation of public art in new, transitioning and underused spaces, such as City parks, offices, businesses, sidewalks, vacant lots, etc.
Create new opportunities for permanent installation of public art.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seek or renew public and private partnerships, creating new opportunities for the installation of public art throughout the community. ● Facilitate the development of a sculpture garden at the Community Center or in City parks.

Implementation

The Arts and Humanities Commission will take a lead role to implement the 2018 Cultural Plan. The initial focus will be on high-priority short-term actions that have a minimal financial cost. Additional time, resources, and community involvement may be needed to implement mid-term and long-term efforts.

<p>Short-term (1 to 2 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop guidelines that identify and measure diversity and inclusiveness goals. ● Increase attendance. ● Increase diversity of program proposals and cultural programming. ● Provide inclusive, racially equitable cultural opportunities. ● Support emerging artists, performers, and students. ● Increase access to funding.
<p>Mid-term (2 to 4 years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitate temporary public art installations or “pop-up” events. ● Advocate for increased diversity of public art and more opportunities for permanent installations. ● Become an information clearinghouse. ● Expand educational and capacity building opportunities in the arts and humanities. ● Bring arts and humanities education to underserved groups. ● Increase educational programs and partnerships in digital and radio production.
<p>Long-term (5 plus years)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand upon Takoma Park’s reputation as an arts and cultural destination. ● Maximize use of Community Center. ● Develop other City facilities as cultural centers.

Methodology

The Commission has completed an extensive planning and outreach process to update the Cultural Plan. Undertaken in three phases, the process included an evaluation of the progress made since the adoption of the first Cultural Plan in 2006, an inventory of local cultural resources, and the engagement of key stakeholders and community residents. Throughout the process, participants were asked how the City of Takoma Park and the community could work together to provide greater access to the arts and humanities.

Those efforts included the following discussions:

- Community leaders, former Commission members, City arts staff, and local residents and organizations were interviewed, providing insight on the progress made in advancing the goals of the 2006 Cultural Plan.
- Roundtable conversations were held with representatives of the arts and humanities community. Participants identified opportunities to enhance and expand current cultural programming, discussed the challenges and assistance needed by communities they represented, and provided recommendations on ways to better inform residents and the creative community about available resources.
- Members of the community completed an online survey with additional feedback gathered at cultural programs, community festivals, farmers markets, and special events. Input collected during previous surveys also was reviewed.

The Commission used this information to create a framework for the new Cultural Plan, along with setting recommendations for future programming, policy decisions, and budget requests to the City Council.