

Arts and Culture

Iowa City is a small city with big-city arts and culture. At no time is this more evident than during the summer when Iowa City comes alive with the Summer Concert Series, Artsfest and Jazzfest, the University of Iowa's Summer Writing Festival, Riverside Theatre's Shakespeare Festival, the Iowa City Farmer's Market, and the Outdoor Movie Series. Add to this year-round offerings of local galleries, restaurants, theatres, and entertainment venues as well as the Public Library and the University of Iowa and it is understandable why more than one attendee at planning workshops made the statement: *There is almost too much going on—I find it hard to choose!*

In recognition of our community's substantial support for arts and culture, the state of Iowa awarded Iowa City a unique cultural distinction with the designation of two cultural districts: The Old Capitol Cultural District and the Iowa River Cultural District. In 2008, the United Nations designated Iowa City as the world's third City of Literature after Edinburgh, Scotland and Melbourne, Australia. The University of Iowa Writers Workshop along with the University of Iowa's departments of Dance, Music, Theatre, Art, and Film, help foster a widespread appreciation for creative expression. When the 2008 flood severely damaged the arts campus—closing the facilities for the School of Music, Hancher Performing Arts Center, and University of Museum of Art—the community rallied, finding new spaces within the Downtown and elsewhere for hosting performances and housing exhibits. In doing so, the community has become even more engaged with the arts. Plans for replacing UI arts facilities will bring the Music School and its performance halls to Downtown Iowa City. There is discussion about relocating the Museum of Art within the Downtown as well.

Arts and culture also play an important role in sustaining the local economy. A 2011 study by Americans for the Arts found that nonprofit arts and culture generated \$79.8 million in total economic activity within the Iowa Cultural Corridor in 2010, where Iowa City and Cedar Rapids are the dominant players. "Within the corridor study area, nonprofit arts and culture organizations support 2,761 full-time equivalent jobs. That figure amounts to \$52.4 million in household income to local residents and delivers \$7.4 million in local and state government revenue." (Arts & Economic Prosperity IV, 2011 Americans for the Arts.)

As we move forward with planning for the future, Iowa City should continue to recognize the important role that arts and culture plays in making Iowa City a distinctive and attractive place to live and do business.



Photo by Dan Williamson © Iowa City Press Citizen.

The free Friday Night Concert Series, which runs from late Spring into early Fall, draws huge crowds, including families with children, to the Pedestrian Mall in Downtown Iowa City. Participants in the planning workshops and the on-line Good Ideas survey listed the concert series and the Pedestrian Mall as two of their favorite things about Iowa City.



Installed in Downtown Iowa City in the winter of 2012, Tree Huggers was a public art project brought together knitters of all ages and abilities from across the community. In all, 135 trees were outfitted in designs that attracted widespread attention in the media and, as its organizers intended, added a little color and fun to an otherwise long, gray season.

Vision:

Iowa City is defined by its flourishing arts and culture scene. We recognize the important role that arts and culture play in engaging our increasingly diverse population. We seek to promote arts and cultural programs and projects that educate, entertain, and inspire the public and that preserve cultural heritage and enhance economic development.

Arts & Culture Goals and Strategies:

Recognize the economic development potential of Arts and Culture for Iowa City.

- Increase visibility and awareness of Arts and Culture programs.
- Explore opportunities for new Arts and Culture venues that will attract visitors to Iowa City.
- Work with the Iowa City/ Coralville tourism board on new opportunities to promote Iowa City as an arts and culture destination.
- Work with the University of Iowa, the Iowa City Chamber of Commerce, and the Downtown District to raise awareness of Iowa City's arts and culture scene in recruitment efforts.

Support Arts and Culture programs that reflect and serve Iowa City's changing demographics.

- Seek the participation of diverse populations (e.g. young and old) when developing cultural programs.
- Seek representation of diverse populations on the Public Arts Committee.
- Develop an Arts and Culture plan that includes all neighborhoods.
- Continue to provide opportunities for Neighborhood Art.

Work to increase funding for Arts and Culture programs.

- Identify grants and private donations for Arts and Culture projects and programs.
- Explore new funding sources for Arts and Culture projects and programs such as Hotel/Motel tax revenue, crowd funding, a "percent for art" ordinance, and new grant funding.

Develop partnerships that build community support for and access to Arts and Culture.

- Collaborate with the University to promote development of venues that provide students with alternatives to alcohol use.
- Collaborate with the school district, businesses, and other organizations to expand the reach of Arts and Culture resources in our community.
- Explore the creation of a community arts center with A Home for the Arts (AHA) or other organizations.
- Support non-profits involved in arts programming, such as the City of Literature and Summer of the Arts.



Public art projects, such as the Iowa City Literary Walk celebrate Iowa City's unique culture. Above, a bronze panel installed in the sidewalk along Iowa Avenue celebrates the work of Paul Engle, long-time director the world renowned Iowa Writers Workshop and founder of the International Writing Program at Iowa.



Iowa City's designation as a world City of Literature has brought much attention to the important role that the arts play in Iowa City's history and culture.