

RAPID CITY CULTURAL PLAN

First Impressions: Summary Report of Initial Assessment Interviews

Report by Craig Dreeszen, Dreeszen & Associates, May 5, 2015

First Set of Interviewees: Jeffrey L. Viken, Chief Judge, United States District Court; Peter Anderson, MAC Construction Co. and Arts Rapid City Board President; Lia Green, President/General Manager, Rushmore Media Co.; Steve Flanery, Board Member, John T. Vucurevich Foundation; Dan Senftner, President and CEO, Destination Rapid City; Pepper Massey, Executive Director, Rapid City Arts Council and the Dahl Arts Center; Ruth Brennan, community leader; Jim Scull and Mary Scull, J. Scull Construction Services; Sam Kooiker, Mayor of Rapid City; Ritchie Nordstrom, City Councilor Ward 2; and Steve Allender, former police chief/mayoral candidate.

First Artist Focus Group: Tyler Read, Emma Rivers, Katie Adkins, Denise Du Broy, Sandra Newman, and Sheena Meyers

SUMMARY FINDINGS: The assessment is in its early stages and we have talked with just a few people so far. Still, patterns are emerging that are reinforced by survey results and Steering Committee observations. The consultant takes sole responsibility for the following interpretation of conversations with this first group of community leaders and artists. We will test and refine our assessment of the state of arts and culture in Rapid City as the Steering Committee members and planning consultant talk with more people throughout the community.

CULTURAL ASSETS: Interviewees were proud of many cultural resources in Rapid City and the surrounding area.

Beautiful Environment - Rapid City is blessed with an inspiring location at the edge of the prairie and Black Hills. These landscapes have inspired generations of artists and writers. The City enjoys ample parks and open spaces and attractive downtown architecture and landscaping. Aesthetics matter to the people of Rapid City.

Native American Heritage - The art and cultural traditions of the Lakota people give Rapid City a distinctive character and another good reason for cultural tourists to visit. Northern Plains Indian art and artists are well represented at Prairie Edge and other galleries and shops, the Black Hills Pow Wow, the Journey Museum and Learning Center, the Gathering Native Art Market, Lakota Emergence Exhibit, and more. Nearby are the Heritage Center at Pine Ridge and the Crazy Horse monument.

History and Pioneering Heritage - Rapid City is also distinctive for its many historic sites, historic districts, restored historic buildings, and pioneering heritage. The Journey Museum and Learning Center and the Minnilusa Historical Association preserve and present this history.

Art In Public Places - Rapid City is known for public art including the nation's most visited sculpture at Mount Rushmore, the Sculpture Project at Main Street Square,

presidents' sculptures, Art Alley and other murals, memorial sculptures, and more (Arts Rapid City lists 21 public art projects).

Arts and Cultural Programs and Organizations - There is an abundance of opportunities in the visual and performing arts in Rapid City - more than one would expect from a city its size. Interviewees noted galleries and exhibitions of visual art, strong theater programs, good museums, frequent music performances, a great library, and bookstores. Rapid City is the cultural center of the region. Main Street Square has created a central hub for community gatherings and helped inspire more optimism about the community and pride of place.

Cultural Facilities and Infrastructure - Citizens and visitors are well served by a good mix of cultural facilities including: the Dahl Arts Center, Performing Arts Center, Main Street Square, the Journey Museum and Learning Center, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City Public Library, Suzie Cappa Art Center, several commercial galleries, a cinema, bookstores, and more. Three art service organizations, the Rapid City Arts Council, Allied Arts, and Arts Rapid City, help coordinate, market, and support the cultural sector.

Arts Education - Interviewees cited a strong music program in the high school and dedicated teachers throughout the school system. Cultural organizations in the community including the Dahl, Journey, Library, Suzuki, BH Dance Theatre, and Sculpture Project offer out-of-school time arts and humanities instruction, field trips, school visits, and teaching artists. Children and families are appreciative of these programs. Many are concerned though about cuts to arts education in the schools.

Artists - Many talented visual and performing artists, craftspeople, writers, and other creative sector workers live and work in Rapid City and surrounding communities. These include full-time professionals, part-timers, and avocational artists in all disciplines. Visual arts, music, and theatre seem particularly strong.

Creative Businesses - Rapid City residents and visitors enjoy a great selection of food and drink establishments; galleries and gift shops; art and craft instructions and suppliers; specialty food producers, craft brewers and vintners; and private dance studios. Rapid City is home to many creative workers and creative businesses in fields such as writing, publishing, radio, television, design, and architecture. Several interviewees echoed Ritchie Nordstrom who said, "Economic development is a priority. We need to attract businesses and for that we must be competitive with good schools, shopping, and cultural attractions. Arts and culture are economic drivers."

Funding - Nonprofit cultural organizations are sustained with earned revenue from loyal patrons, funding from generous individuals and businesses, the Vucurevich and Bush foundations, First People's Fund, City grants and facility support, and some state and national funding.

Public Support - Arts and culture are cited as priorities within four of seven core values defined in the City's Comprehensive Plan indicating public support for good design, historic districts, public art, cultural facilities, creative economic development, cultural tourism, welcoming diversity, cultural programming, and opportunities for citizen participation in creative activities.

Individual Initiative and Collaborative Spirit - Interviews cited numerous generous individuals and many civic-minded business owners and who make a difference for their community. Rapid City is small enough and welcoming so that one person or a small group can make a real impact. Several described a collaborative approach that gets things done.

A Sense of Optimism - Interviewees were largely optimistic about the city and the potential for arts and culture to make even more of a difference. Mayor Kooiker observed, "The changes are positive. We're attracting and keeping young people. We're changing yet not losing our personality in the process." Dan Senftner said, "There is a changing attitude of community, now a happier place. I have a strong belief that a vital arts sector will raise the level of the community." Jim Scull reflected, "Our community's values are good; we're expanding, we understand what community building is all about."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CULTURAL PLANNING: Interviewees identified broad issues that should be addressed as we develop a cultural plan for Rapid City.

Public Awareness and Advocacy - Many people value the arts, humanities, history, good design, and arts education for their intrinsic worth and for their capacity for improving the City's quality of life and economic development. Others may not yet understand these as priorities. Community leaders, business owners, philanthropists, and other opinion leaders have many pressing concerns. Economic development, public safety, human services, and public infrastructure all demand attention and resources. While public art is important to Rapid City, there is no systematic review of public art proposals or maintenance. This plan should position the arts, culture, and creative enterprises as central to the interests of Rapid City citizens as a way to improve lives, sustain livability, attract and retain talent, and create and sustain businesses and jobs.

Education For Creativity - Interviews reinforced survey findings that K-12 students in Rapid City do not get a sequential program of arts education taught by arts specialists. Budget pressures have eliminated visual arts and music in elementary schools. Strong high school music programs depend upon a few dedicated teachers. A preoccupation with testing limits time for creativity. Many young people are growing up without learning the skills of creativity and innovation that they will need to thrive. Audiences for some arts programs are aging as generations leave school without having significant visual and performing arts experiences.

Cultural Equity - Northern Plains Indian art is generally held as an important cultural heritage and key attraction for visitors. However, significant tensions remain between Native and non-native populations. Unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, mistrust, and racism fragment the community. Arts and cultural programs provide a common ground and can be part of solutions built on economic development, reconciliation, and renewal. Sharing cultures is a way to know one another and build a stronger community. It is a journey we take together. This plan can help by strengthening Native American artists, cultural organizations, and public appreciation of Native American culture.

Nonprofit Organization Support - Much of Rapid City's arts and culture is produced or presented by nonprofit organizations. Guidestar.com lists 39 federal-tax-exempt nonprofit arts and humanities organizations in the city. Survey results from nonprofit leaders indicate generally stable conditions and optimism. Sustaining funding however, is a pressing need as government grants have trended downward and most private funding tends toward immediate social problems. Earned revenue is constrained by the relatively low income of much of the population. Interviewees had differing opinions about the local capacity for philanthropy, some described an abundance of generous individuals and businesses while others described a "culture of poverty." More clarity about how cultural programs advance municipal priorities, clear City criteria for arts funding, and evidence of impact will help protect local public funding. The programs of nonprofit cultural organizations can be strengthened with sustainable funding and help with marketing, audience development, and volunteer recruitment. Arts service organizations should coordinate as each evolves in response to changing needs and opportunities.

Artists/Creative Workers - One interviewee estimated 40 visual and performing artists living within two miles of downtown Rapid City and many more nearby (110 professional artists responded to the cultural assessment survey). The First People's Fund provides assistance to Native American artists. The Dahl Arts Center provides an Emerging Artist series and manages the Teaching Artists' Program. In interviews, visual artists stressed the importance of marketing, sales to local and national markets, the need for affordable housing and studio space, and the wish for more local exhibition space. Landscape and traditional visual artists have a more receptive audience than abstract artists. Art prices are low. The survey defined other important needs including: networking, validation of their work, and access to grant funding.

Creative Economic Development - Nearly 14% of Rapid City workers are employed in the creative sector and allied industries¹ (defined by the US Census as arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services). In addition to nonprofit cultural organizations, there are a significant number of creative businesses: galleries, frame shops, arts instruction and supply shops, gift shops, bookstores, cinema, restaurants, designers, architects, publishers, etc. In addition to direct employment, interviewees

¹ US Census 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

indicated that a lively arts scene, attractive downtown, public art, fine dining, and community events help employers like the hospital recruit doctors and the School of Mines recruit faculty. "As Rapid City develops more amenities of interest to recruit and retain professionals and business owners, we are ready for the next level of development." Some urged designation of a cultural corridor to link major cultural facilities from the Performing Arts Center to the Journey Museum. The Cultural Plan should advance the City's Comprehensive Plan, coordinate with the pending Downtown Development Plan, and advance opportunities in neighborhoods. Even civic leaders who do not see themselves as arts people value arts and culture as important economic drivers -- a sector worth cultivating.

Audience Development and Cultural Tourism - A viable cultural sector depends upon audiences, both local and tourist. Healthy audiences depend upon awareness of opportunities and marketing. Some audiences are aging. Audience behaviors are changing as people have more demands on their time and more options for in-home entertainment. New communications media are changing how people learn about opportunities and consume entertainment. Even though there are now more sources of information (Arts Rapid City event calendar, Rapid City Arts Council ArtMail and email blasts, Visit Rapid City events calendar, Rapid City Journal Black Hills To Go, etc.), the survey found the greatest perceived barrier to cultural participation was the lack of information. A planning calendar or regular gathering of arts leaders may help reduce scheduling conflicts. More "way-finding" is needed. Given many people's low or modest incomes, affordability can be a barrier to participation.

Rapid City Interview and Focus Group Questions

Cultural Resources - What are the principal cultural assets in Rapid City and surrounding communities? (Think about: arts, humanities, heritage, and creative workers and industries).

Successes - What is working particularly well and should be protected?

Current Conditions and Future Trends - What are some current conditions (opportunities, threats, or limitations) that impact the cultural and creative community here? (e.g., economic, political, social, technological, etc.) Can you think of other trends with potential to impact the cultural sector in the future in either a positive or negative way?

Other Initiatives and Plans - Are you aware of proposals, plans, or projects that could affect or benefit from the cultural/creative sector?

Needs - Can you think of significant cultural opportunities or support systems that are missing or should be improved?

Opportunities For Action - How should we use this opportunity of cultural planning to capitalize on cultural resources and respond to emerging possibilities and needs?