



ARTS, ENTERTAINMENT, HISTORY & CULTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Dayton is an arts community.

This is obvious by the numbers: Local arts groups generate approximately \$122 million every year in economic impact for our region. An estimated seven million people come downtown every year to be entertained. According to the 2007 *Cities Ranked and Rated*, Dayton ranks No. 1 in arts and culture among mid-sized U.S. cities.

It's also obvious by the spirit of this city: Numerous arts spaces and organizations have sprouted in recent years throughout Greater Downtown, and the Oregon District has been transformed into an arts destination. Nearly all this has happened thanks to the handiwork of volunteers motivated by a passion to create and cultivate the innovative. Dayton is a city where people with ideas find ways to fulfill them.

At the center of it all is Greater Downtown, the region's longtime undisputed center of arts, entertainment, culture and history. The center city is home to the majority of this area's abundant attractions and events, making it *the* place to be for an entertainment experience that can only be found in Dayton.

Yet, like anything, this position can be fragile. Safeguarding Greater Downtown as Dayton's cultural bull's-eye is important not only for quality of life reasons but for economic ones as well: Studies show the arts are the third most important factor, behind the economy and schools, considered by businesses and employees in relocation discussions. Arts, entertainment, culture and history are the crux of creating a sense of place attractive to employers, residents and visitors. Nurturing and growing this Greater Downtown cornerstone can do much to bolster Dayton's competitive position.

Still, doing so will be challenging in today's economy, when many organizations are struggling even to tread water. Therefore, it's critical Greater Downtown create a network that allows all arts, entertainment, cultural and historic organizations to function as a comprehensive district — and work smarter, more collaboratively and more strategically.

All this and more is possible in Dayton, where an artistic, independent psyche runs through the very veins of its people. Add this to an extremely affordable quality of life and available development opportunities. The result? A unique, walkable, community-minded urban center with an artsy vibe and quirky character. A city rich with history and abundant with locally owned restaurants, taverns and retail establishments. A thriving place where the challenge is deciding what to do and where to go next. This is what arts, entertainment and culture can help Dayton become.

Overall goals

Leverage and strengthen established and emerging arts, entertainment, cultural and historic assets to create a unique entertainment destination and experience to attract new audiences. Create a network that allows Greater Downtown to function as a single, comprehensive entertainment district.

Core objectives

- Position Greater Downtown as *the* premier arts, entertainment, cultural and historic destination for the region.
- Increase the audience for downtown's arts, entertainment, cultural and historic assets, with a focus on attracting new audiences.
- Create a more walkable downtown with a unique sense of place that improves Greater Downtown's quality of life and ties together key destinations.
- Collectively work to more effectively use resources and allow Greater Downtown to better function as a comprehensive entertainment district.
- Provide the necessary resources for Greater Downtown's arts, entertainment, cultural and historic assets to be successful economic development catalysts.
- Increase the depth and breadth of public programming, particularly in public spaces.
- Promote the health, stability and growth of local arts, entertainment, cultural and historic organizations, artists and business owners.
- Encourage the development of and nurture new and emerging arts, entertainment, cultural and historic venues, businesses and events.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Create a network that allows all arts, entertainment, cultural and historic organizations and other assets to function as a comprehensive district.

On any given day, Greater Downtown is host to a number of events — this in addition to the stable of places to visit on any day, such as restaurants, fitness studios and shops. Yet too often, downtown patrons come for one reason. Then they leave. By positioning Greater Downtown as a comprehensive entertainment district, it's more likely visitors will have dinner before seeing a show or stay after for a drink. Creating a network allowing for more seamless collaboration and promotions does not involve creating a new physical district. Rather, it involves implementing cohesive strategies that allow the public to think of Greater Downtown as the premier arts, entertainment, cultural and historic destination in the region. Now more than ever, all of Dayton's organizations, businesses and community members must work smarter and more collaboratively to safeguard, nurture and grow this distinctive aspect of Greater Downtown that's crucial to its ongoing success.

1) Ensure this entertainment network encompasses all Greater Downtown offerings and includes representatives from:

- established and emerging arts, entertainment, cultural and historic organizations
- restaurants, bars and clubs
- destination retail
- historic venues, such as Carillon Park and Wright-Dunbar
- major venues, such as RiverScape, Fifth Third Field and the Schuster Center
- destination districts, such as the Oregon Arts District and the Cannery

2) Establish concentrated, collaborative marketing and promotions to promote and safeguard Greater Downtown's claim as *the* premier arts, entertainment, cultural and historic destination in the Dayton region. Strategies include coordinating schedules and maintaining a comprehensive marketing and promotions calendar, as well as more aggressive cross-promotions, such as "dinner and a show" promotional campaigns.

3) The arts community currently is addressing the financial challenges faced by some organizations. With the help of a consultant, arts groups are considering how organizations might work more collaboratively. Once these recommendations are completed, they will be folded into this plan.

4) Establish additional cooperative programming, such as Urban Nights and First Friday, and continue to grow existing programming to attract new audiences. Focus on programming events with a variety of offerings that appeal to a diverse audience, and seek sponsorships and other funding sources that will allow such events to be free to the public.

5) Coordinate and centralize responsibility and accountability for overseeing implementation of projects and initiatives related to arts, entertainment, culture and history. *This does not involve the creation of a new organization* but, rather, a collaboration of existing organizations and individuals committed to strengthening arts, entertainment, culture and history in Greater Downtown.

- Convene a committee comprised of representatives from key organizations and businesses (public and private sectors) that will meet monthly to guide the implementation of these recommendations, adjust them as needed, and oversee the work of an arts, entertainment, culture and history network.

Develop an urban design strategy to create a walkable downtown that connects existing and emerging arts, entertainment, cultural and historic assets.

Greater Downtown is home to many wonderful arts, entertainment, cultural and historic destinations that bring people from throughout the Dayton region downtown. However, in too many cases, these hotspots are surrounded by voids of activity that make visitors uncomfortable traveling from place to place. Establishing connections between hotspots will not only make downtown easier and more inviting to navigate, it will increase street activity and make downtown a more vibrant, enjoyable place.

- 1) Examine the design of Greater Downtown and identify barriers to connectivity. Prioritize the pathways to improve first, with a focus on connecting such key destinations as the Schuster Center, RiverScape and Fifth Third Field, as well as such pathways as those between the Oregon Arts District, the Cannery and the downtown core. Strengthen connections between these and other Greater Downtown destinations and area colleges and universities.
- 2) Use easy, low-cost beautification efforts to make those areas more attractive, clean and well-lit, such as putting holiday lights in trees; dressing up vacant storefronts with lighting, art and fabric; and putting planters along sidewalks. Consider developing an “adopt a block” program in which volunteers, businesses, students and other organizations help in this beautification effort, as well as an annual beautification award program to serve as an incentive.
- 3) Work in tandem with the Dayton Police Department’s Project Gateway effort, in which lighting, tree and bush trimming, and sidewalk repair improve not only aesthetics but safety.
- 4) Establish a process that will allow for, encourage and fund the creation of public art. Identify key locations on priority pathways and identify grants and other funding (such as private sponsorship of public art).
- 5) Create street banners with a consistent visual design to hang throughout Greater Downtown that will make streets more attractive and inviting, as well as identify priority pathways for visitors and enhance the pedestrian experience. Work with local artists to design the banners, and work with Greater Downtown businesses to have banners printed and installed.
- 6) Develop a Greater Downtown wayfinding system directing visitors to major destinations, thoroughfares and parking. Focus on a system that will make Greater Downtown easy to navigate and enhance the visitor experience. Research possible systems, determine which is best suited for Dayton’s needs, and apply for grants and/or raise funds to complete the project.
- 7) Determine the feasibility of offering free or low-cost service from key destinations on the Wright Flyer or a similar shuttle to make it easy and convenient for people to get from one place to another. Provide transportation to bring college students downtown. Identify strategic locations for stops throughout Greater Downtown and the best hours/days for service to run, such as weekend nights and during special events. Use the Urban Nights transportation system of Wright Flyer and regular buses as a model.

Coordinate more effective cross-promotions and collective public relations efforts, with a focus on attracting new, diverse and targeted audiences to Greater Downtown's arts, entertainment and cultural life.

Young people are the lifeblood of any community. Yet Dayton, like much of the industrial Midwest, is contending with an exodus of young people, in large part because place matters to this group. Studies show that 25- to 34-year olds are society's most entrepreneurial, educated and mobile group. Many of these young professionals look first for a cool place to live then find a job there. Therefore, cities are incorporating new economic development strategies focused on creating a community that attracts these young workers. Arts, entertainment and culture play a pivotal role in creating such a community, and Dayton must do so if it is to successfully recruit and retain the talented workers employers seek. At the same time, Greater Downtown must ramp up its efforts to more effectively communicate with other targeted audiences, such as suburban dwellers and the thousands of people who work at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and such other key institutions as universities and hospitals. An aggressive public relations campaign and marketing to reach all these targeted audiences can go a long way — without exorbitant costs — to building and diversifying Greater Downtown's audience.

- 1) Clearly identify targeted audiences, including college students, young professionals and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base employees. Develop a data-collection mechanism, such as an online survey, to determine how best to reach them.
- 2) Create new and compelling ways for these audiences to experience and be engaged in arts, entertainment, culture and history in Greater Downtown. Work with area colleges and universities and professional groups to develop new, innovative ways to engage them in the community, such as through volunteer opportunities and community projects.
- 3) Form strategic partnerships with such organizations as Dayton Campus Connect, updayton and Generation Dayton to host events and other programming attractive to college students and young professionals. Work with professional and networking organizations to reach other targeted audiences.
- 4) Identify the organizations that are key partners to work together on promotions, get a commitment from these organizations to contribute human and financial resources, and develop a mechanism for creating and implementing these collaborative promotions.
- 5) Position and promote downtown as the region's premier destination for arts, entertainment, recreation, culture and history through (a) an aggressive public relations campaign, (b) better use of such technology as social media, and (c) work with an existing website to be a comprehensive resource of information and include the Web address in all promotional efforts.
- 6) Establish ways to communicate with people while they're downtown about other entertainment opportunities. Strategies might include (a) establishing kiosks/bulletin boards at strategic locations that include directions; information about events, venues and parking; places to eat, drink, shop and be entertained or educated; parks and recreation; and more; and (b) using the home page of the comprehensive website mentioned above to provide information about things happening on a day-by-day basis. Both these strategies would make it easy for visitors to learn about other things to do downtown on any particular day.

Encourage more activity on streets and in other public spaces.

Much of a city's energy comes from its streets. People generate much more than outdoor foot traffic: They animate a city and provide its character. They create an urban pulse. City streets teeming with people feel alive — and safe. However, Greater Downtown's streets too often feel vacant and stark, precisely because this street traffic is missing. While other recommendations in the Greater Downtown Plan are focused on increasing the number of pedestrians and cyclists on the streets, arts and entertainment also can do much to enliven Dayton's walkways. A city's cultural life often is played out on its streets. People are more likely to take to the streets if they can relax on an outdoor patio or enjoy an outdoor performance. Making it easier for these and similar activities to take place can go a long way toward making Greater Downtown's streets jam-packed.

- 1) Develop a busker's license for street performers, as well as a user-friendly process for obtaining one. Establish clear, easy-to-understand guidelines for street performances, including hours and noise levels. Promote the availability of this program to artists to encourage more street performances.
- 2) Establish a process that will allow for, encourage and fund the creation of new outdoor performance and gathering spaces, such as pedestrian plazas, at strategic locations that link existing destinations. Develop a process for programming and funding these spaces.
- 3) Transform Courthouse Square, which hasn't been renovated in 25 years and is in need of a significant upgrade, into a central gathering place. Create new programming for Courthouse Square.
- 4) Develop strategies to fill underutilized street space on the priority pathways. Engage individuals and organizations to conduct short-term, low-cost installations, public programs and performance events.
- 5) Develop a strategic re-use plan for formerly active but now unused/under-used entertainment venues in Greater Downtown, including Memorial Hall, the former Foundry building and other targeted venues. Examine the possibility of developing one of these facilities into a music hall for mid-sized concerts, such as those held at Cincinnati Music Hall and Newport Music Hall in Columbus.
- 6) Examine the feasibility of car-free weekends, when activities would take place on streets closed to motor vehicles. Work with the cycling community and Five Rivers MetroParks to develop programming during such events. Use Portland Sunday Parkways as a model (www.portlandcarfreeday.org).
- 7) Identify city and state codes and regulations that might make it difficult for businesses to expand activity into the street, such as patio requirements and the cost of street closures. Partner with the appropriate agencies to find and implement solutions.
- 8) Create additional programming throughout Greater Downtown. Add to the existing mix of festivals, concerts and such events as Urban Nights, with a focus on mid-size events and those that attract targeted audiences, such as young professionals. Revive after-work parties, organize additional pub/restaurant crawls, and create other events that are easy to organize and manage, yet still draw crowds. Work with Greater Downtown businesses and other partners to collaboratively plan events.

Encourage the development and growth of arts, entertainment, cultural and historic assets in Greater Downtown.

Dayton is known as a city of invention, and it's no different when it comes to the arts. In recent years, Greater Downtown has seen the birth of several small, upstart arts groups and spaces. They've hosted events new to Dayton, attracted diverse audiences, and encouraged more community participation in arts and culture — all while returning previously vacant spaces to productive use. Indeed, Greater Downtown's stock of inexpensive, vacant post-industrial space presents a real opportunity for existing grassroots groups to thrive and for new ones to form. Such space is either unavailable or unaffordable in most larger cities, giving Dayton a competitive advantage. Yet to fully realize this potential, it must be easy for new and emerging groups to capitalize on these opportunities. Removing obstacles to doing so would not only nurture existing ventures, but also allow Greater Downtown to entice new ones to the city and help it flourish as an arts mecca.

- 1) Identify city and state codes and regulations that inhibit the development of arts, entertainment, cultural and historic ventures and organizations. Partner with the appropriate agencies to find and implement solutions.
- 2) Create a virtual arts incubator modeled after Cincinnati's Virtual Arts Incubator (www.artsincubator.org). This incubator will connect arts and entertainment organizations and business ventures with available resources and provide online training in such areas as fundraising, public relations, planning, organizational management, mentoring and business development.
- 3) Develop projects, programs and incentives that encourage and support productive use of vacant buildings downtown for arts, entertainment, recreation, cultural and historic ventures. Focus on uses for the space that nurture microenterprise and/or allow artists to practice their craft.
- 4) Continue the work that began in 2009 to determine the feasibility of an events center in Greater Downtown. If such a center is going to be built in the Dayton region, aggressively advocate for it to be located in the center city.
- 5) Continue to closely work and collaborate with the owners and developers of the Arcade complex to develop strategies that will ensure a successful transition of this well-known and key Greater Downtown destination to productive reuse. While plans are not yet finalized, development of the Arcade would revitalize a pivotal Greater Downtown area.
- 6) Establish financial incentives for artists and arts, entertainment and cultural ventures to locate downtown, especially along priority pathways. Examine best practices in other cities, and work closely with local economic development and planning professionals to develop an incentive program specific to Dayton's needs.
- 7) Create portable kiosks for microenterprise businesses. These would be covered, easily constructed and transported booths that could be used by business start-ups, crafters, artists and other microenterprises. This will strengthen the retail component downtown, as these kiosks will be used on weekends and during special events. Work with local contractors and businesses, and possibly such schools as ISUS, to construct the kiosks.
- 8) Target and aggressively recruit commercial companies with the capacity to redevelop vacant properties for arts, entertainment, recreation, cultural and historic uses. Develop a business attraction program focused on arts- and entertainment-related ventures in an attempt to attract a development similar to Fourth Street Live in Louisville.
- 9) Create affordable live/work housing and studio space for artists, students, and emerging arts, entertainment, culture and historic-related businesses, organizations and other assets. Identify properties suitable for such development, assess costs, evaluate market needs and identify potential developers.

Implementation

Lead Organization Downtown Dayton Partnership

Supporting Partners

City of Dayton
Dayton Police Department
Greater Dayton RTA
University of Dayton
Victoria Theatre Association
Culture Works
Sinclair Community College
Wright State University
Generation Dayton
Dayton Campus Connect
Greater Downtown arts, entertainment, culture and historic venues & organizations
DaytonCREATE and its affiliated groups

Potential Funding Sources

Ohio Arts Council
Federal funding through Priority Development and Advocacy Committee (PDAC) priority funding process
Reallocate and pool existing human and financial resources
Naming rights
Colleges and universities
Private foundations and corporations
Sponsorships
Grants

Supporting Materials

Lists of Greater Downtown events, venues and organizations