



January 24, 2019

Texas Commission on the Arts
Cultural District Designation
Jim Bob McMillan, Deputy Director
PO Box 13406
Austin, TX 78711-3406

Dear Mr. McMillan:

The City of Denton is pleased to submit its letter of intent to apply for designation of “The Original Denton District” in 2019. The drivers behind seeking a Cultural District designation for Denton are to generate cultural tourism, stimulate economic development, support community revitalization, and enhance cultural experiences for both visitors and residents.

History

Various Denton organizations and residents have discussed the concept of a Cultural District for several years. In February 2018, staff from the City of Denton’s Department of Economic Development presented a work session to the Denton City Council describing the Cultural District Program, its potential benefits to the City, and the application process. Councilmembers directed staff to proceed with the steps necessary to seek Cultural District Designation in 2019.

Following that direction, staff took the following steps:

- Researched Cultural Districts in other communities
- Gauged interest of key stakeholders in participating in the Cultural District planning and application process
- Determined level of funding, funding sources, and staff resources necessary to form and maintain the Cultural District
- Developed an initial plan and timeline for application

From May through August of 2018, an ad hoc advisory group of stakeholders including artists, musicians, business owners, developers, historic property owners, and representatives from the University of North Texas, Texas Woman’s University, the Greater Denton Arts Council, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and City departments met to brainstorm and discuss various aspects of a Denton Cultural District, including:

- Two potential boundaries for the Cultural District;
- A cultural asset inventory and map of cultural organizations, facilities/venues, festivals/events, cultural industries, cultural heritage, artists, public art/art in public places, natural heritage, and culinary art/food;
- Concepts of what identifies Denton;

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- Possible names, vision, and mission statement for the Cultural District;
- Possible structure of a Cultural District Committee;
- Discussion of a pre-application needs assessment;
- A SWOT analysis;
- Budget considerations.

In November 2018, City staff submitted a written Informal Staff Report to City Council to update councilmembers on progress and next steps. On February 4, 2019, City staff will present a second work session to City Council to seek further direction on the district boundaries, committee structure, and a budget to engage a consultant to assist with various aspects of the application process.

Cultural District Description

The word “original” can mean *first* or *earliest*. It also can mean *unusual* or *eccentric*. The Original Denton District is centered where our community first began, and it encompasses the creative people, unique places, and authentic cultural resources that make Denton unusual and eccentric in the best way.

Denton is fortunate to have a wealth of cultural assets, and this cultural district would be a new way to embrace and showcase those assets for economic development and cultural tourism, as well as opening up a new avenue for grant funding for projects supporting arts and culture in the community.

The ad hoc advisory group discussed two potential boundaries for the district, both of which include the historic Denton County Courthouse-on-the-Square in the heart of Downtown Denton. The larger district (1.8 square miles) roughly follows the city limits as they existed in 1917. The smaller district (0.35 square miles) follows the boundaries of the City’s Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone. The final boundaries of the district will be determined by the City Council prior to the June 2019 application deadline.

Many gifted artists and musicians live and/or work in both the potential districts. In addition to the historic Denton County Courthouse-on-the-Square, both the potential districts contain several municipal buildings designed by renowned architect O’Neil Ford. Both the districts are home to live music venues, performance spaces, art galleries, museums, public art/art in public places, and festivals/events. Some examples include:

- Dan’s Silver Leaf, Harvest House, Rubber Gloves Rehearsal Studio (music venues)
- Campus Theatre, Black Box Theatre, Fine Arts Theatre, Patterson-Appleton Arts Center (performance spaces/art galleries)
- Courthouse-on-the-Square museum, Denton Firefighters Museum (museums)
- Murals and sculpture (public art/art in public places)
- Arts & Jazz Festival, Day of the Dead Festival, Arts & Autos, Denton Community Market, Thin Line Film Festival, Denton Black Film Festival, Holiday Lighting, Tejas Storytelling Festival (festivals/events)

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Strategic Plan

While the City has conducted recent citizen engagement activities (surveys, planning committees) related to the arts in Denton, the current plan is to engage a consultant to assist with cultural district planning for purposes of the application. The consultant would assist with the assessments of the general public, stakeholders, and artists living and working in the district. Through focus groups, open houses, surveys, or other engagement tools, we will gather both quantitative and qualitative data that will allow us to craft a vision, mission, and detailed cultural district strategic plan. Since we have not yet undertaken the full public input process, we do not have specific strategic goals at this time. However, we plan to develop three to five strategic goals with completion timeframes ranging from one to five years that will be included in the detailed cultural district strategic plan submitted with the application.

Marketing Plan

The City's Public Communications Office will be developing a detailed cultural district marketing plan for submission with the application. One of the first activities under the plan will be to design a visual identity for the district and create design guidelines to support that identity. Design and launch of a district web site and the creation of social media accounts will also occur early on. Coordination with local arts organizations to promote shows, exhibitions, and other events will be a critical component of the district's marketing plan. Again, drafting of a detailed marketing plan will be driven in part by the vision, mission, and strategic goals developed after the full public engagement process.

Management Structure

Two options are being considered for the governance and management structure of the district: integrating it into the City's existing Council-appointed Public Art Committee or creating a new Council-appointed committee specifically for the district. In either case, committee members will be approved by action of the City Council and will serve for two-year terms with a limit of three terms. The Department of Economic Development will serve as the liaison department to the committee in either case. The City's Public Communications Office will provide marketing, social media, and web site support for the district. The final management structure of the district will be determined by the City Council prior to the June 2019 application deadline.

The City of Denton's Department of Economic Development will be coordinating the application for The Original Denton District. Please feel free to contact me at 940-349-7751 or Caroline.Booth@cityofdenton.com if you have questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Caroline Booth
Director of Economic Development

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