



City of Denton

City Hall
215 E. McKinney Street
Denton, Texas
www.cityofdenton.com

AGENDA INFORMATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Economic Development

CM/ DCM/ ACM: Bryan Langley

DATE: February 4, 2019

SUBJECT

Receive a report, hold a discussion, and give staff direction regarding the City of Denton's application to the Texas Commission on the Arts Cultural Districts Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2018, Council directed staff to look into Denton's participation in the Texas Commission on the Arts' (TCA) Cultural Districts Program. Between May and August, an informal group of stakeholders met several times to discuss the idea of a cultural district in Denton and some of the details necessary for formation. The 2019 cultural district application cycle began in January with the submission of a letter of intent and ends in June with submission of the full application. While staff can complete portions of the application, a consultant will need to be engaged to assist with certain critical components. Prior to work beginning on the application, staff needs further direction from Council on the boundaries of the cultural district, the composition and structure of the cultural district committee, and a budget for startup costs.

BACKGROUND

In February 2018, staff presented a work session to Council regarding the TCA's Cultural Districts Program. Council expressed interest in the program, and directed staff to begin next steps, including:

- Researching cultural districts in other communities
- Gauging interest of key stakeholders in participating in the cultural district planning/formation process
- Determining possible boundaries of a cultural district
- Determining level of funding, funding sources, and staff resources necessary to form and maintain district
- Developing an initial plan and timeline for application

Staff researched eight existing cultural districts in DFW and other areas of the state. The formation process, funding, management, and goals of these districts vary widely.

Between May and August, an informal group of stakeholders met several times to discuss the idea of a cultural district in Denton and some of the details necessary for formation. These stakeholders included artists, musicians, business owners, developers, historic property owners, and representatives from UNT, TWU, Greater Denton Arts Council, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau. Staff from Economic Development led the meetings, and Development Services staff also attended.

The first meeting involved a discussion of the statewide cultural district program, possible boundaries for the district, and a brainstorming session on a cultural asset inventory within the proposed boundaries. The

second meeting covered possible district names, along with potential mission and vision statements. The third meeting concerned the structure and composition of a cultural district committee, pre-application community engagement, a SWOT analysis, and budget considerations.

The cultural district application cycle requires a letter of intent due January 30, 2019. The completed application is due June 17, 2019. The application form is attached as Exhibit 2. While staff can complete certain portions of the application, a consultant will need to be engaged to facilitate the necessary public meetings and focus groups, develop a detailed cultural district plan, and assist with the development of a detailed cultural district marketing plan, all of which are necessary for the application. Staff estimates the consulting and other startup costs will not exceed \$25,000.

Staff is seeking Council direction on the boundaries of the cultural district (Exhibit 3) and whether the cultural district governance should be handled by the existing Public Art Committee or a new cultural district committee.

Background on the Cultural Districts Program

The 79th Texas Legislature authorized the Texas Commission on the Arts to designate cultural districts in cities across the state. Cultural districts are special zones that harness the power of cultural resources to stimulate economic development and community revitalization. These districts can become focal points for generating businesses, attracting tourists, stimulating cultural development, and fostering civic pride. Designated cultural districts are eligible for grant funding from TCA for cultural tourism projects.

Cultural districts are formed around an *existing concentration* of “cultural assets” clustered in a *walkable area* that a city wants to promote to visitors and residents. Cultural assets include performances and exhibitions, creative activity, architecture, and historical offerings. Cultural districts do not obligate property owners within the district to any type of additional regulations.

Thirty communities – ranging in size from Houston to Alpine – have cultural districts. The application process through TCA is done on an annual basis, and not every application is approved. In-depth planning is required prior to the application being submitted, and support from local political and arts leaders is critical. The application requires that the community’s capacity for ongoing funding and management of the district be clearly demonstrated. If a community’s application is approved, an annual report on the district must be submitted to TCA and reapplication is required every 10 years.

Some communities designate cultural districts at the local level instead of through TCA, which negates the need for the application and annual reporting process. This could be accomplished via a Council resolution designating the district. However, a cultural district with a local designation alone is not eligible to apply for TCA grants. Two communities, Texarkana and Dallas, designated local cultural districts first and then applied to the TCA in later years.

The TCA’s Cultural District Project Grant Program is designed for projects that focus on significant cultural tourism projects. Requests up to 50 percent of a project’s budget, not to exceed \$250,000, will be considered; a dollar-for-dollar match is required. Eligible categories include:

- High-quality arts programming that will attract a significant number of visitors from 50 miles or more outside the community
- Enhancements to the cultural district to make it more accessible, attractive, cohesive-looking, and safe for visitors
- Improved signage and wayfinding for the district
- Promotion of the district; this may include the district’s website, branding, and marketing
- Organizational support for the management and operations of the district

TCA administrators have identified the following common traits among successful cultural districts that may serve as indicators of potential success in new districts:

- Unique and authentic identity
- Political and community support
- Strategic partnerships
- Inclusive cultural strategic planning
- Artists are partners
- Sustainable artist live/work spaces
- Anchor institutions and special events
- Strong amenities
- Local developer/s committed to the cultural district
- Marketing and promotion efforts

ESTIMATED SCHEDULE OF PROJECT

The following is an approximate timeline of the steps needed to complete the application:

- January 30, 2019 – deadline to submit letter of intent (COMPLETE)
- Mid-February – consultant engaged
- March – public meetings and focus groups
- April/May/June – development of cultural district plan and marketing plan; completion of application
- June 17 – deadline to submit completed application
- July – TCA evaluation panel reviews applications
- August – City is notified of evaluation panel’s recommendation to the TCA Commissioners
- September – TCA Commissioners hold final vote to create new districts; official public announcements of new districts
- Post-announcement – local recognition of district; local governance begins

PRIOR ACTION/REVIEW (Council, Boards, Commissions)

February 2018 – work session with Council on the Cultural Districts Program.

FISCAL INFORMATION

Staff estimates consultant fees and other startup costs will not exceed \$25,000.

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1 – Agenda Information Sheet

Exhibit 2 – TCA Cultural Districts Program Application

Exhibit 3 – Cultural District boundary options map

Exhibit 4 – Letter of Intent

Exhibit 5 – Presentation

Respectfully submitted:
Caroline Booth
Director of Economic Development