



## REGULAR MEETING – ARTS AND CULTURE COMMISSION AGENDA

DECEMBER 2, 2025, 6:00 PM  
BY ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING

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Members of the public may call in to participate. Callers will not be able to see the meeting participants. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, dial \*9 on the phone and you will be called on by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide "live comments" may also use the Zoom meeting platform. All participants will be muted upon entering the meeting. To speak, click the "raise your hand indicator" and you will be called by the host of the meeting during the public comment section. All speakers must state their name and address. Comments must be on a topic on the agenda, and are limited to three minutes. Anyone disrupting the orderly conduct of the meeting, including by using threatening, hateful, or sexually-explicit language, will be removed. Please find the information using the link above.



Members of the public who wish to provide public comment are encouraged to submit those via email in advance of the meeting. For these comments to be included into the record, they must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. the day of the meeting. Please email Sabrina Godeski at [sgodeski@norwalkct.gov](mailto:sgodeski@norwalkct.gov) with the subject line "Public Comment" to provide written public comment prior to the meeting.

- I. **CALL TO ORDER**
- II. **ROLL CALL**
- III. **ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**
  - A. **Regular Meeting: October 7, 2025**
- IV. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- V. **NEW BUSINESS**
  - A. **Endorse the Arts and Cultural Plan for inclusion in the Plan of Conservation and Development.**
  - B. **2026 Events Discussion.**
  - C. **Review of Merchandise Design Competition.**

- D. Authorize the sponsorship of the Norwalk Film Festival - CT TV Fest in the amount of \$5,000.

Acct: 01-1450-5623

VI. OLD BUSINESS

- A. Adopt and approve the Arts and Cultural Commission Partnership Guidelines and Application.
- B. Events Recap - Nightfair and Thrown Stone Event.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

**CITY OF NORWALK  
ARTS & CULTURE COMMISSION  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 7, 2025  
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

**ATTENDEES:** Brian Kaspr (Chair), Robert Abriola, Marc Alan, Naomi Clark, Nori Grudin, Kevin Huffman, Danny Loftus George, Melissa Matuska, Steven Rust, Janay Sylvester.

**STAFF:** Sabrina Godeski

**OTHERS:** Heather Dunn

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Kaspr at 6:00 PM

**II. ROLL CALL**

Roll call was conducted by Mr. Kaspr, confirming a quorum. Mr. Abriola joined at 6:06 PM. Danny Loftus Goerge & Steven Rust joined at 6:16 PM. Heather Dunn joined at 6:23 PM.

**III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES**

**A. Special Meeting: September 10, 2025**

**\*\*MS. CLARK MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 10, 2025 SPECIAL MEETING.**

**\*\*MR. ALAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\*THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. ABRIOLA).**

**IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

**Ms. Diane Lauricella, residing at 21 Little Fox Lane:**

Expressed support for the Commission's work on a draft public partnership policy, noting it was not yet ready for approval. She referenced the West Avenue mural project, advocating for private business sponsorships to fund murals, sculptures, events, and trainings without quid pro quo, provided the partner's mission aligns with the Commission's and city's. She criticized the draft as overly bureaucratic and wordy, suggesting it discourages simple donations by requiring excessive involvement from the Commission. Ms. Lauricella proposed a simpler donation stream, citing the West Avenue and Ely Avenue murals as examples where private funding could have helped without Commission takeover. She also noted the absence of residency requirements in the Ely mural voting process in the minutes and requested its addition to the agenda, invoking Robert's Rules of Order for commissioners to propose a vote.

**Ms. Romney Donald, residing in District A:**

Echoed Ms. Lauricella’s request to add the Ely Avenue mural to the agenda. She connected his comments to the Partnership Request Application, emphasizing the need for verified Norwalk resident feedback, especially from neighborhoods directly impacted like Ely Avenue, which has a historical Black and Brown population. Ms. Donald stressed the importance of preserving history and representation, particularly for her young Black artist child, arguing that local artists’ work inspires and connects the community. She urged sensitivity in public art processes to avoid silencing affected voices.

**Mr. Steve Ferguson, residing at 7 Roosevelt Street in Norwalk:**

Acknowledged the sensitivity of the Ely Mural topic, respecting the Commission’s efforts. He criticized the voting process as inaccurate, suggesting it should better reflect local residents and proposing a redo with careful oversight.

**Ileana, representing Unidos Norwalk:**

Addressed the Ely Mural Project, not on the agenda. She thanked Ms. Diane and Mr. Romney for raising the issue, emphasizing its significance beyond a mural, focusing on fairness, transparency, and equity. She highlighted the exclusion of local artist Five Fingers without investigation and the lack of residency verification in the public survey, urging future processes to verify residency and prioritize community participation to reflect the diversity, history, and pride of neighborhoods like Ella Avenue.

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. Approve the allocation of \$1,270 from the Arts and Cultural Commission budget for the Halloween Nightfair Glow-in-the-Dark Art Installation and related activity**

Mr. Kaspr proposed allocating \$1,270 for a children’s glow-in-the-dark art installation at the Halloween Nightfair on Main Street in Sono, using black lights, paint, and markers. He noted his unlikelihood to attend and stressed the need for two commission members to assist Ms. Godeski and Ms. Anna. Ms. Clark confirmed the date as October 25, 2025, from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM (vendors until 6:00 PM), and Ms. Godeski suggested promoting the Commission with a booth or brochures, offering volunteers. Ms. Clark agreed to attend most of the day, and Mr. Kaspr appointed her to lead, encouraging others to help.

Ms. Dunn, a volunteer leader with the Red Cross in Connecticut supported the Halloween Nightfair Glow-in-the-Dark Art Installation idea. She inquired about having a Red Cross table for outreach, particularly targeting children during the Halloween event which Mr. Kaspr approved.

**\*\* MR. ABRIOLO MOVED TO APPROVE THE ALLOCATION OF \$1,270 FROM THE ARTS AND CULTURAL COMMISSION BUDGET FOR THE HALLOWEEN NIGHTFAIR GLOW-N-THE-DARK ART INSTALLATION AND RELATED ACTIVITY.**

**\*\* MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION. \*\***

**\*\*THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **B. Approve the Partnership Request Application and Guidelines**

Mr. Kaspr introduced the draft Partnership Request Application and Guidelines, clarifying it was not a donation form but a process for organizations to apply for Commission support, inspired by a Thrown Stone Theater request. He noted it needed revision and encouraged input.

Mr. Loftus George offered to review and organize edits, leveraging his contract law background. Mr. Kaspr tabled the item. Ms. Godeski agreed to share it via Google Doc for feedback by October 20, 2025, with final edits due by October 30, 2025. Mr. Rust inquired if it was reviewed by Thrown Stone, and Ms. Godeski confirmed it was not.

**\*\*MR. LOFTUS GEORGE MOTIONED TO TABLE THE DISCUSSION FOR NEXT MEETING.**

**\*\*MR. ALAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\*THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

## **VI. OLD BUSINESS**

### **A. Authorize the sponsorship for Thrown Stone Theater in an amount not to exceed \$2,600**

Mr. Kaspr initiated the discussion on authorizing a sponsorship for Thrown Stone Theater not exceeding \$2,600, expressing initial concerns about the content of the proposed event and its potential public reception. He drew parallels to previous mural controversies, highlighting the need for careful consideration. Ms. Grudin supported the idea of sponsoring existing nonprofit arts projects rather than initiating new ones, suggesting alternatives such as poetry readings, musical performances, or theatrical plays.

Ms. Matuska reinforced the Commission's responsibility to vet art, citing examples from Washington Avenue events where Mr. Alan and others had carefully selected and approved artists to align with city values. She acknowledged art's subjectivity but stressed the Commission's governmental role, urging due diligence to ensure funded art reflects appropriate standards. Mr. Kaspr responded by affirming Thrown Stone's reputation as a reputable organization with publicly demonstrated values, framing the sponsorship as a collaborative effort that leverages this trust.

Mr. Alan expressed confidence in Thrown Stone's curation, particularly trusting Jonathan Winn's judgment in selecting a suitable event. He saw no necessity to review specific plays, viewing the partnership as a collaborative trust-based endeavor, and supported moving forward without additional scrutiny. Ms. Clark reflected on the Commission's adoption of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy and the structured guidelines for the Eli Avenue mural process. She suggested making this information accessible online to counter misinformation and proposed ongoing discussions about how the Commission supports art, beyond the current vote.

**\*\* MR. ALAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPONSORSHIP FOR THROWN STONE THEATER IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$2,600.**

**\*\* MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**\*\* ABSTENTIONS MS. MATUSKA AND MR. LOFTUS GEORGE.**

**\*\*THE MOTION CARRIED 7-2.**

**VII. ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MS. MATUSKA MOVED TO ADJOURN.  
\*\* MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION.  
\*\*THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned around 7:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
**Courtney Baldwin**  
**Recording Secretary**



# City of Norwalk Arts & Cultural District Plan

DECEMBER 2025



CULTURAL  
PLANNING  
GROUP





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# INTRODUCTION



The Norwalk Art Space  
Patrick Sikes, 2021

## WHY THE NORWALK ARTS DISTRICT

Vibrant communities have those special places that draw people in with their distinctive cultural character. Arts and cultural districts serve as community anchors—destinations where people gather for memorable performances, discover unique finds, or simply enjoy the energy of a place that truly comes alive. While each cultural district has its own personality, successful ones share important elements:

*Cultural districts are defined as well-recognized, labeled areas of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities and programs serve as the main anchor of attraction. They help strengthen local economies, create an enhanced sense of place, and deepen local cultural capacity. (Americans for the Arts).*

Norwalk's Arts District, officially designated by the State of Connecticut in 2023, authentically embodies this definition. Artists, entrepreneurs, business owners, and residents are naturally drawn to the District's neighborhoods, particularly Wall Street and SoNo. Early momentum is already evident—the District is attracting fresh talent, generating investment, welcoming new residents, and gaining regional recognition. This foundation creates an exceptional opportunity to develop a fully realized arts and culture district.

With thoughtful stewardship, the District can become a driving force that strengthens local businesses and educational institutions, supports artists, builds cultural organizations, enhances tourism, and celebrates historic assets. It can establish Norwalk as a sought-after regional destination—a community recognized for its history, culture, and diversity. The District can improve perceptions of safety, accessibility, and livability while supporting the city's broader goals of sustainability, equity, economic growth, and quality of life.

For Norwalk's creative community—artists, cultural nonprofits, arts businesses, and creative professionals—strategic District management offers significant opportunities for growth. It promises greater visibility, expanded recognition, new collaborative possibilities, a creative hub, and strengthened community connections. Many in Norwalk's arts community have been working toward this moment and are ready to contribute to its success. The District also provides valuable support for the diverse small businesses that have chosen to locate here—restaurants, cafes, boutiques, services, and professional firms that give the area its character. Foot traffic along Wall Street and Washington Street is already growing, and focused District development can make it a compelling destination for both Norwalk residents and regional visitors.

For residents, the District offers the promise of more vibrant neighborhoods, engaging family destinations, stronger community connections, and improved public spaces.

All the elements are in place for the Norwalk Arts District to flourish. This plan provides a community-supported roadmap to realize that potential.



Norwalk Mural Park  
Scott Chiappetta, 2021



# BENEFITS OF AN ARTS DISTRICT

There are numerous direct and indirect benefits to fully realizing the Norwalk Arts District. Those benefits include:

Serving as an economic engine that increases property values, attracts new businesses, creates jobs, and boosts local spending through cultural tourism and increased foot traffic.

Becoming a hub for innovation and supporting entrepreneurship of creative businesses.

Serving as a community connector and community cross-roads, bridging diverse neighborhoods and demographics through shared cultural experiences and programming.

Supporting youth by connecting those seeking creative outlets and careers with mentorship opportunities, creative career pathways, and engaging activities that keep young talent in Norwalk.

Positioning Norwalk as a weekend destination, attracting visitors from surrounding communities, the NYC metro area and beyond.

Being a catalyst for historic preservation by incentivizing adaptive reuse of historic buildings while honoring Norwalk's architectural heritage.

Strengthening a sense of place by promoting walkability, outdoor programming, and a range of arts and creative engagement.

# PLANNING PROCESS

The Norwalk Arts District plan was developed by the City of Norwalk in collaboration with stakeholders, the broader community, a Steering Committee, the Norwalk Arts & Culture Commission, and a consulting team. Preplanning began in January 2025, community engagement and additional research were conducted between April and September, and the first draft of the plan developed in September.

## Community Engagement

### Norwalk Arts District Plan Steering Committee

Composed of community leaders and stakeholders from diverse sectors and backgrounds – arts, city government, historic preservation, education, Arts Commission, and business. The committee met four times to advise on the planning process, provide information and input, and review the draft plan.

**Marc Alan**  
Factory Underground/NACC  
Member

**Brian Bidolli**  
Norwalk Redevelopment  
Agency

**Anna Breault**  
City of Norwalk

**Tod Bryant**  
Norwalk Preservation Trust

**Alex Cross**  
City of Norwalk

**Heather Dunn**  
Council Member/Arts  
Advocate

**Sabrina Godeski**  
City of Norwalk

**Danny Loftus George**  
Norwalk Conservatory of the  
Arts/NACC Vice Chair

**Jay Habansky**  
City of Norwalk

**Amy Holomakoff**  
Factory Underground

**Stephen Ivan**  
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency

**Diane Jellerette**  
Norwalk Historical Society/Mill Hill

**Brian Kaspr**  
Flat Vernacular/NACC Chair

**Steve Kleppin**  
City of Norwalk

**Carly Kramer**  
Norwalk Redevelopment Agency

**Duvian Montoya**  
Norwalk Art Space

**Steve Rust**  
Theater Projects/NACC Member

**Jalin Sead**  
Council Member/District Rep

**Erika Wesley**  
Fairfield County Cultural Alliance

**David Westmoreland**  
Mathews Mansion/Historical

**Darlene Young**  
Council Member/District Rep

## Stakeholder Interviews and Group Discussions

### Interviews

**Marc Alan**, Factory Underground  
**Tod Bryant**, Historic Preservation Trust  
**Danny Loftus George**, President & Founder, Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts  
**Josh Goldstein**, Common Council Member  
**Jay Habansky**, Chief of Economic Development, City of Norwalk  
**Rabbi Yehoshua S. Hecht**, Beth Israel Chabad of Westport/Norwalk  
**Brian Kaspr**, Chair, Norwalk Arts & Cultural Commission  
**Steve Kleppin**, Director, Planning and Zoning  
**Tom Livingston**, Chief of Staff, City of Norwalk  
**Jason Milligan**, Milligan Realty  
**Diana Muller**, Director of Marketing & Development, Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts  
**Mayor Harry W. Rilling**, City of Norwalk  
**Daniel Shlayan**, AGW Partners  
**Robert Stowers**, Director, Parks & Recreation  
**Darlene Young**, Common Council Member

### Group Discussions

**Artist & Creatives Roundtable Mixer**, Spacecat Whisker Room

## Restaurant Roundtable Breakfast

**Robert Lee**, Dippin' Chicken  
**Alan Heron**, Flying Scotsman  
**Chris Hickey**, Spread  
**Blanca Restiano**, Coals Pizza, Mr. Mango  
**Keith Mahler**, District Music Hall

## Developer/Property Owner Lunch & Chat

**Clay Fowler**  
**Todd McClutchey**, JHM Financial  
**Kim Morque**, Spinnaker  
**Emmy Sasaki**, Tom Rich Co.  
**Daniel Schlayan**, AWG

## Arts and Cultural Businesses

**Mark Alan**, Factory Underground  
**Elizabeth Fort**, Senior Administrator, Lockwood Matthews Mansion  
**Wendy Gerbier**, Board Member, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra  
**Kimberly Henrikson**, Executive Director, Center for Contemporary Printmaking  
**Amy Holomakoff**, School Director, Factory Underground  
**Diane Jellerette**, Norwalk Historical Society.  
**Keith Mahler**, District Music Hall  
**Sandra Miklave**, Executive Director, Norwalk Symphony Orchestra  
**Kyla Pitruzzello**, District Music Hall  
**Zuri Soto**, Director of Outreach and Media, Factory Underground  
**Robert Townes**, Stepping Stones for Children Museum

## Artists Discussion Group

**Robert Abriola**, Norwalk Arts & Culture Commission  
**Kimberley Henrickson**, Executive Director, Center for Contemporary Printmaking  
**Kevin Huffman**, Norwalk Arts & Culture Commission, Norwalk Film Festival  
**Duvian Matoya**, Executive Director, Norwalk Art Space  
**Janay Sylvester**, Norwalk Arts & Culture Commission  
**Oksana Tanasiv**, Oksana Tanasiv Gallery

## Staff Work Session/Business Development & Tourism

**Anna Breault**, Special Event Coordinator  
**Alex Cross**, Business Development Manager  
**Sabrina Godeski**, Director

## Resident's Open House

The planning team produced an open, community drop-in session at the Norwalk SoNo Collection on July 29, 2025. Graphically displayed information on the Norwalk Arts District and questions regarding the plan were provided to stimulate and collect community members' ideas. An art-based table offered children and adults an opportunity to create paper leaves for a Wishing Tree, a creative mode of engagement in planning.

## Business Mixer

The planning team produced a business mixer for business and property owners and other stakeholders at Space 67 Studios, co-hosted by Space 67, on July 31, 2025. Similar to the Residents' Open House earlier that week, the Mixer provided attendees opportunities to learn and register opinions about the Norwalk Arts District, as well as the art-based Wishing Tree table.

## Community Survey

A bilingual community survey was distributed widely to city and partner agency lists between July 30 and September 15, 2025, garnering 390 responses. The survey introduced the Norwalk Arts District and asked what respondents would like to see in both the Wall Street and SoNo/Washington Street areas, what the District should strive to accomplish, how people would like to find out about cultural activities that interest them, and where they currently attend cultural events.

## Community Tour

Walking and driving tours of the District and its subareas.

## Background Document Review

Review of relevant plans, studies and other documentation, including:

- Norwalk Citywide Plan of Conservation and Development
- Wall Street/West Avenue Neighborhood Plan:
- South Norwalk TOD Plan
- Various additional planning efforts and redevelopment specific plans
- Norwalk Arts District Cultural District / Application to State of Connecticut

## Comparison Districts Study

A comparison of six cultural districts in cities with specific relevance to Norwalk (see Appendix: Cultural Districts Comparison Study).



## Norwalk Citywide Plan: 2019-2029

Plan of Conservation & Development



Norwalk Citywide Plan: 2019-2029 Title Page



Norwalk Cultural District Application Package Front Page



River Street Mural by Javier Eastman  
Victoria Urso, 2025

# NORWALK'S CREATIVE ECONOMY

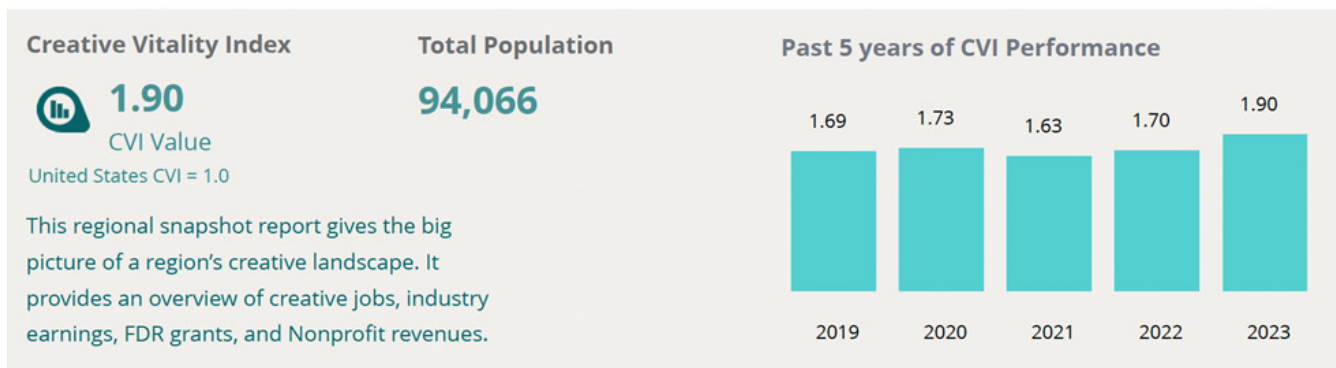
Understanding Norwalk's creative economy is essential to effective arts district planning and management. The creative sector represents a significant economic force in the city, encompassing creative occupations, cultural industries, and nonprofit arts organizations that collectively contribute to Norwalk's economic vitality and quality of life.

## Economic Impact and Creative Vitality

Norwalk demonstrates strong creative vitality with a Creative Vitality Index (CVI)<sup>1</sup> of 1.90 in 2023—nearly double the national baseline of 1.0. This indicates that Norwalk has almost twice the per capita concentration of creative activity compared to the United States as a whole. The city's CVI has shown steady growth over the past five years, rising from 1.69 in 2019 to its current level, representing a 12% increase and signaling a strengthening creative economy.

This creative vitality translates into substantial economic activity. In 2023, Norwalk's creative sector generated:

- \$328.3 million in creative industry earnings
- Nearly \$985 million in creative industry sales
- \$50.2 million in cultural nonprofit revenues (a 49% increase from 2022)
- 4,653 creative jobs



<sup>1</sup>Creative Vitality™ Suite is an industry standard data solution for measuring the for-profit and nonprofit arts, culture, and creative sectors provided by Western States Arts Federation.

# Creative Workforce

Norwalk's creative workforce of 4,653 jobs in 2023 represents diverse occupations spanning technology, design, media, arts, and cultural management. The sector has shown modest but consistent growth since 2022.

The top five creative occupations by employment are

- Software Developers – 888 jobs (19% of creative workforce)
- Marketing Managers – 358 jobs
- Writers & Authors – 310 jobs
- Graphic Designers – 245 jobs
- Musicians & Singers – 179 jobs

Beyond these leading occupations, Norwalk's creative workforce includes significant concentrations in:

- Visual Arts & Design: Art directors (138), fine artists and illustrators (172), interior designers (115), craft artists (75), special effects artists and animators (63), and various specialized designers totaling over 600 jobs
- Media & Communications: Editors (147), interpreters and translators (150), producers and directors (134), public relations specialists (119), and broadcast/media technical positions
- Performing Arts: Musicians, singers, actors, dancers, and other performers totaling approximately 340 jobs
- Cultural Heritage: Curators (15), museum technicians (14), archivists (9), and librarians (42)
- Architecture & Related: Architects (73), landscape architects (20), and interior designers (115)

The creative workforce commands strong wages, with median hourly earnings of \$29.80 and average hourly earnings of \$39.95 across all creative occupations. High-wage occupations include marketing managers (\$76.83 median hourly), public relations managers (\$73.02), software developers (\$66.06), and architects (\$48.52).



## Location Quotient Analysis

Several creative occupations show exceptional concentration in Norwalk compared to national averages, as measured by location quotient (LQ). An LQ above 1.0 indicates higher-than-average concentration. Occupations with the highest concentration include:

- Museum Technicians and Conservators (LQ 2.30)
- Advertising and Promotions Managers (LQ 2.28)
- Interior Designers (LQ 2.27)
- Lighting Technicians (LQ 2.24)
- Marketing Managers (LQ 2.10)
- Curators (LQ 2.11)
- Editors (LQ 2.03)
- Writers and Authors (LQ 2.01)
- Designers (various specializations, LQ 1.91-2.00)
- Film and Video Editors (LQ 1.95)
- Graphic Designers (LQ 1.91)
- Archivists (LQ 1.89)
- Special Effects Artists and Animators (LQ 1.71)
- Web Developers (LQ 1.68)
- Landscape Architects (LQ 1.61)

These concentrations suggest Norwalk has developed particular strengths in design, publishing, advertising/marketing, museum services, and digital media—sectors that benefit from and contribute to the arts district ecosystem.

## Creative Industries

Norwalk's creative industries generated \$985 million in sales and \$328 million in earnings in 2023, supporting 4,038 industry jobs. The top five creative industries by earnings are:

1. **Advertising Agencies** – \$71.3 million in earnings
  - 482 jobs
  - Location Quotient 4.65 (exceptional national concentration)
  - Average earnings per job: \$148,003
2. **Content Providers (Media Streaming, Social Networks)** – \$35.8 million in earnings
  - 209 jobs
  - \$198 million in sales
  - Location Quotient 2.43
  - Average earnings per job: \$170,714
3. **Motion Picture and Video Production** – \$29.6 million in earnings
  - 159 jobs
  - \$107.5 million in sales
  - Location Quotient 1.59
  - Average earnings per job: \$185,490
4. **Graphic Design Services** – \$23.0 million in earnings
  - 281 jobs
  - \$37.6 million in sales
  - Location Quotient 3.52 (strong concentration)
  - Average earnings per job: \$81,458
5. **Public Relations Agencies** – \$17.4 million in earnings
  - 128 jobs
  - \$41.0 million in sales
  - Location Quotient 3.08
  - Average earnings per job: \$135,386



## Cultural Nonprofit Sector

Norwalk's cultural nonprofit sector showed remarkable growth in 2023, with revenues reaching \$50.2 million—a 49% increase from 2022 (\$24.5 million growth). This surge indicates strong community support for arts and culture, increased programming, and potentially significant capital campaigns or major gifts.

The cultural nonprofit landscape includes balanced representation across theater companies, symphony orchestras, museums, arts education, visual arts, music organizations, historical organizations, and community cultural programming.

## Economic Context for the Arts District

This creative economy data reveals several important considerations for arts district planning and management:

**Established Creative Hub:** With a CVI of 1.90 and high location quotients across numerous creative occupations and industries, Norwalk functions as an established creative economy hub. The arts district builds upon—rather than attempts to create—this existing foundation.

**High-Wage Creative Sector:** Creative occupations in Norwalk command above-average wages, with median hourly earnings approaching \$30 and many positions significantly higher. This indicates the creative sector attracts and retains skilled professionals who contribute to the local economy as both producers and consumers.

**Diverse Creative Ecosystem:** Norwalk's creative economy spans traditional arts (visual arts, performing arts, museums), creative services (design, architecture, advertising), digital/media production, and cultural heritage. This diversity creates opportunities for cross-sector collaboration and innovation within the arts district.

**Strong Commercial Creative Services:** The concentration of advertising agencies, graphic design firms, public relations agencies, and marketing services indicates a robust business-to-business creative services sector that could engage with and benefit from arts district initiatives.

**Growing Nonprofit Cultural Sector:** The dramatic growth in cultural nonprofit revenues (49% in one year) demonstrates strong and increasing philanthropic support for arts and culture in Norwalk, providing a foundation for arts district programming and development.

**Real Estate Considerations:** The presence of 799 independent artists, writers, and performers, along with hundreds of other creative professionals, creates demand for affordable workspace, exhibition venues, performance spaces, and creative retail opportunities—all key components of successful arts districts.

**Tourism and Cultural Economy Links:** Industries such as museums (\$2.1M earnings), theater companies, dance companies, and performing arts presenters (\$3.2M earnings) directly support cultural tourism, complementing the district's potential as a regional cultural destination.

**Retention and Attraction:** Norwalk's high concentration of creative talent (nearly 5,000 creative jobs) represents both an asset to retain and a competitive advantage for attracting additional creative businesses and professionals. Arts district development should address workspace affordability, networking opportunities, and quality of life amenities that keep creative professionals in Norwalk.

**Regional Positioning:** Location quotients above 2.0 for advertising, marketing, design, publishing, and museum services indicate Norwalk serves regional and potentially national markets in these sectors—positioning the arts district as more than a local amenity but as a driver of regional creative economy development.

This economic foundation provides the arts district with an established creative workforce to engage and serve; strong commercial creative sectors that can partner in district initiatives; a growing cultural nonprofit sector with increasing capacity and resources; high-wage creative professionals who support local businesses and services; diverse creative specializations that enrich the cultural landscape; and regional competitive advantages in specific creative industries.

Effective arts district management should leverage these economic strengths while addressing the needs of creative workers and businesses for affordable space, networking infrastructure, business support services, and an enhanced quality of place that attracts talent and investment.



Washington Street  
Jeff Klein, 2019

# LESSONS FROM OTHER DISTRICTS

What lessons can we draw from cultural districts in other places? Cultural districts are distinct from one another, based on their unique characteristics, history, and arts presence. Nonetheless, comparisons demonstrate strong throughlines and models for the Norwalk Arts District. The planning team identified six US cities that share both similarities and differences to Norwalk and are aspirational (for full study report, see Appendix: Cultural Districts Comparison Study).

Boulder, CO Pearl Street District  
Fort Worth, TX Cultural District  
Knoxville, TN Arts District

New Orleans Warehouse Arts District  
Philadelphia Avenue of the Arts  
Portland, ME Arts District



Boulder Bookstore, Boulder, CO Pearl Street District



New Orleans Warehouse Arts District

Points of comparison include:

- Identity
- Area
- Goals
- Key Assets
- Programs
- Management
- Funding
- Population
- Observations

**Overall Conclusion:** The most successful cultural districts combine professional management, stable funding, consistent programming, and compact geographic scale. Norwalk's challenge will be adapting these proven models to work within its larger geographic footprint while leveraging its unique creative community, maritime heritage, historic properties, multicultural character and strong presence of residents to create a differentiated regional arts destination.

## Observations

• **Goals and Functions:** All districts have marketing and promotion as a primary goal and an essential function. Most districts also focus on the visitor experience and physical environment - cleanliness, safety, and walkability. Also, most districts have a primary function to produce a wide variety of public programming, much of it free.

• **Management:** All but one district have a management entity with professional staff and ongoing operational funding. Boulder and Knoxville have two organizations that collaborate, dividing responsibility between an arts agency and a business improvement district.

• **Geographic Area:** Four districts have “compact, walkable areas” that are strongly associated with successful districts, since they provide a concentration of assets and visitor experience. By contrast, Norwalk is much larger, extending approximately 1.5 miles from Wall Street through West Avenue to Washington Avenue, and nearly 4.5 miles from its northern to southern boundaries. Philadelphia and Fort Worth were selected as comparable districts in part because they also have larger areas. Philadelphia extends approximately 1 mile and Fort Worth 2.1 miles.

• **Connectivity:** Larger geographic areas pose significant challenges with connectivity and coherence. The larger districts – Philadelphia and Fort Worth – have made specific efforts to enhance connectivity. Philadelphia has the advantage of a corridor (a ten-block area of Broad Street) served by a subway line; it has made long-term and ongoing efforts to improve the pedestrian experience and

create public spaces with streetscaping and urban design improvements. Fort Worth has relied primarily on mixed use real estate developments to provide infill and connectivity.

• **Programming:** In every district, the arts organizations and businesses provide a rich array of public programming. In addition, the districts themselves produce regular and special event programs to provide consistent activation and define the character/attraction of the area. The most common program is a monthly art walk, which provides continuity and creates connections within the district. All districts produce large, signature events. Most also produce a range of smaller-scale activations, programs, and events throughout the year.

• **Residential Population:** Norwalk is distinguished in part by its large resident population. Several comparison districts also have significant residential populations and have supported residential/mixed use real estate development. Philadelphia has an active “Friends of” organization that produces networking, social, and community service events. The presence of residents – those who live in the district or in the city – influences the character of programming and marketing, as distinguished from districts focused primarily on tourism.

• **Key Assets:** Each district has a unique mix of cultural assets that help define its identity. That said, there are different emphases that inform programming and other activities. Philadelphia is focused primarily on performing arts and Fort Worth on its major museums and entertainment venues. Boulder, Knoxville and Portland rely on smaller-scale, community-oriented events, shopping,

restaurants, and arts venues. New Orleans is heavily influenced by its long history and NOLA cultural traditions that predated the formation of the district.

• **Funding:** All districts except New Orleans have ongoing sources of operating funds that support a level of organizational capacity for management, marketing, programming and other functions. Sources include business improvement district revenues, city funding, grants, contributions, sponsorships, fundraising events, program revenues, and state and federal funding.



Norwalk Oyster Festival  
Patrick Sikes, 2021



"Welcome to Norwalk" Mural  
Ernesto Maranje, 2024

## WHAT WE HEARD: NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Norwalk Arts District stands at a pivotal moment with the opportunity to fully capitalize on the recent formal designation by the Connecticut Office of the Arts Cultural Districts program. The success potential for the District is significant if built on clear strategies. Through extensive community engagement, a clear picture emerges of both the remarkable opportunities and pressing needs that will shape the District's future.

### Connectivity: Bridging a Dynamic But Dispersed District

The District's expansive geography—spanning from the historic charm of South Norwalk through contemporary Waypointe development, to the emerging vitality of Wall Street and West Avenue—presents both its greatest asset and its most significant challenge. Engagement participants emphasized the critical importance of "connecting all areas under a unified identity" while maintaining each area's distinctive character. This geographic breadth requires intentional efforts to weave

together sub-districts for both residents and visitors

The community has identified several promising solutions that address connectivity of each of the natural sub-district areas. Examples include an art trail along West Avenue that could create a cultural corridor, building on the existing Norwalk River Valley Trail infrastructure and streetscape improvements, and consistent wayfinding to help visitors navigate between the District's diverse offerings, from South Norwalk's restaurant scene to Wall Street's emerging creative spaces. The concept of a trolley or shuttle system was suggested, reflecting recognition that physical connectivity is essential for the District's success—particularly given that improved transportation ranked among top infrastructure priorities.

Programming and street-level activation would offer additional tools to enhance connectivity. The community's enthusiasm for

for "First Friday open house events" and art walks with QR codes linking to local businesses demonstrates appetite for experiences that naturally draw people across District boundaries. As one participant in the business mixer noted, the goal is to "distinguish Norwalk from other towns while ensuring all areas feel connected under one vibrant identity."

## Infrastructure and Basic Needs: Foundation for Success

Across all engagement opportunities, three infrastructure themes emerged with striking consistency: cleanliness and maintenance, parking and wayfinding, and lighting and addressing safety perceptions. These logistical concerns are fundamental to creating the welcoming, safe environment that cultural districts require to thrive and were a top priority among engagement participants.

The universal concern about visibility and access reflects the District's current challenge in showcasing its assets. A consistent theme was the difficulty in communicating events to both residents and visitors, and the challenge in discovering events by the public, "especially for those not on social media." There is a need for strong promotion through multiple channels. This aligns directly with wayfinding needs—both physical signage and digital promotion that helps people find and navigate the District's offerings.

The community highly ranked the desire for "street performers and outdoor live arts," while indicating the success of this programming would depend on successfully addressing lighting and safety perceptions. The strong support for enhanced lighting isn't just about actual safety—it's about creating the comfortable atmosphere where families

feel welcome to attend evening events and where the District can extend its activity hours.

There were numerous suggestions for consistent and reliable transportation infrastructure, particularly a trolley/shuttle concept. This was cited as both practical and an opportunity for branding or distinguishing boundaries of the District and addressing the large geography. Such a system could become a signature feature that sets Norwalk apart while solving real connectivity challenges between District areas.

## Artist Support and Anti-Displacement: Sustaining Creative Community

The District's authenticity depends on supporting the artists and creative entrepreneurs who are essential to the purpose and character of the District, yet who face mounting pressure from rising rents and limited support systems to build and expand their practices. A range of issues were identified by engagement participants including the desire for city-owned affordable housing for artists—specifically noting it should not be "developer-controlled"—and rent subsidies for businesses that generate street traffic.

The need for affordable space extends beyond housing to include studio and workspace needs. The community's suggestion to "work with existing organizations like Space 67 Studio and Factory Underground to provide affordable creative spaces" recognizes that solutions should build on established creative infrastructure rather than starting from scratch. Live/work options emerged as particularly

important, reflecting artists' need for integrated spaces that support both their creative practice and residential needs within the District they help animate.

that provide sustainable livelihoods, not just exposure. There is an opportunity for the District to take the lead on marketing, branding and promotion that stimulate work opportunities for artists.

Artists need more than affordable space—they need economic opportunities

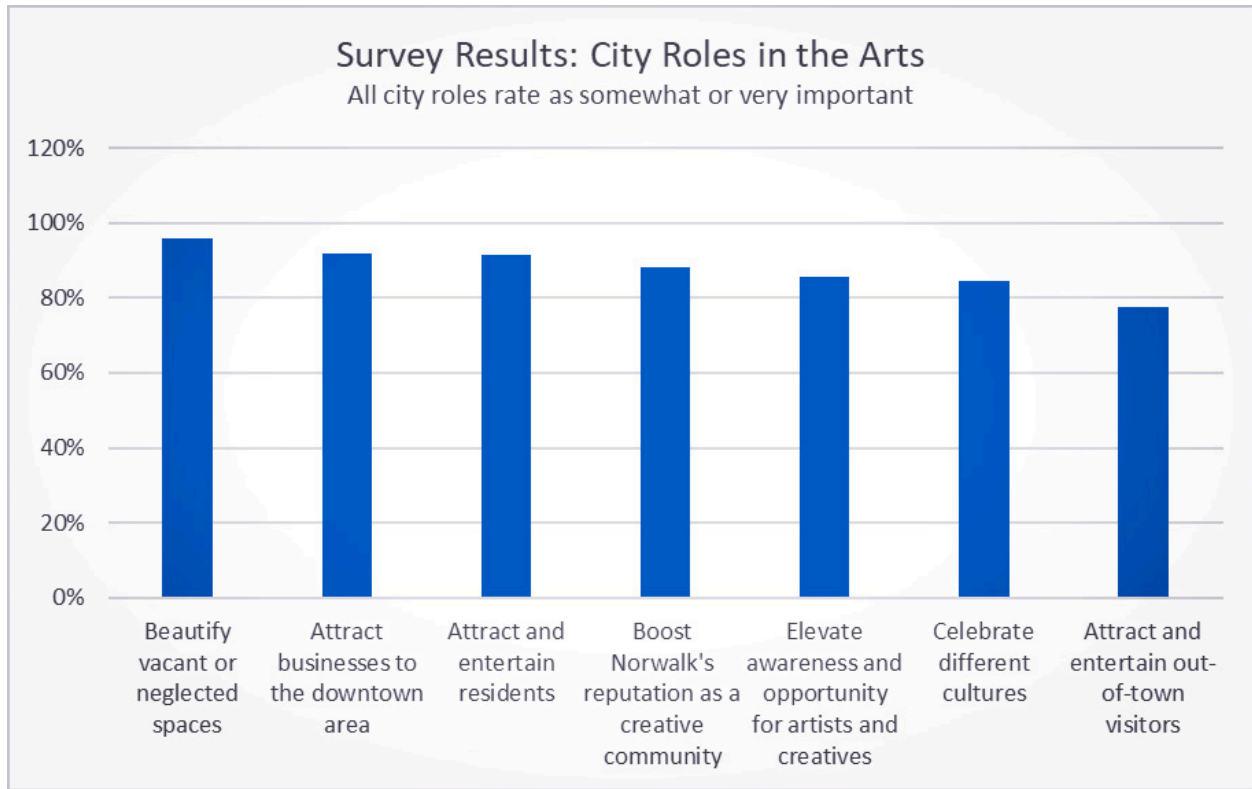


Figure 1 How IMPORTANT is it that Norwalk utilizes arts and cultural experiences and events to...

## Historic Preservation

The District is distinguished by its major concentration of historic structures and accompanying history and heritage. Stakeholders consistently acknowledged with pride the city's history and historic building stock and view the District as a new way to promote preservation and maintain a sense of place. Preservation is a recognized function of the City through its Historical Commission and the nonprofit Historic Preservation Trust provides community leadership and advocacy in Norwalk. There are many opportunities for the District to support the work of preserving historic structures as well as

legacy businesses, programs, and others that embody and reflect the city's remarkable history. Renovating the 1914 Palace Theater, now closed, is but one preservation opportunity. Supporting development of design standards for the District will also help assure that new construction is appropriate for its historic environment.

## Arts & Culture

Norwalk's racial, ethnic, and economic diversity are celebrated as fundamental to the area's appeal and future potential. While the District is named the "Arts District," it must reflect Norwalk's culture as well as its arts community. This means producing and supporting cultural activities as well as arts events. It also means assuring diverse representation in District governance, leadership, management, community engagement, and programming.

## Community Engagement

Stakeholders, many of whom work and/or live in the District, emphasize the need for ongoing stakeholder and community engagement in the workings of the District. They view engagement as necessary to assure District management and governance remain connected to community realities and opportunities, and to generate community support for District initiatives. There should be multiple channels for stakeholder and community engagement, such as elections, advisory bodies, feedback opportunities, and evaluations.

## Organizational Structure: Building Management Capacity

The consensus on needing professional management reflects the District's readiness to evolve from organic growth to strategic development. The strong support for a Business Improvement District (BID) model among stakeholders indicates understanding that sustainable funding requires buy-in from property owners and businesses who benefit from District improvements

The recommended transition approach—beginning with the City Business Development & Tourism Office as manager before evolving to a BID—offers

a practical pathway that builds capacity while developing community support. This model provides accountability through its revenue structure while ensuring community connection through its governance approach.

There was a strong theme of recognizing the importance of collaboration with existing organizations, suggesting that effective management should coordinate rather than replace current creative initiatives. The District management entity should serve as a connector and amplifier for the community's existing energy and expertise.

## Navigating Areas of Tension

Several productive tensions emerged from community conversations, reflecting the District's complexity and the need for nuanced approaches to its development.

**Geographic Scope and Identity:** While some feel the current District boundaries are too expansive and unfocused, others recognize the economic development potential of the larger geography. A consistent theme to "connect all areas" while maintaining distinct identities suggests a both/and approach. The District can embrace its geographic diversity as a strength while developing sub-area programming that celebrates each neighborhood's unique character.

**Development Balance:** The tension between encouraging growth and preventing displacement requires careful attention to development scale and type. There were strong preferences expressed to focus on developing more opportunities for small "organic" businesses, particularly encouraging local entrepreneurs. This approach can distinguish and strengthen the local identity and appeal of the District.

**Programming Philosophy:** The community's top ranking of street performers and outdoor live arts, combined with their emphasis on community-focused events, suggests a preference for programming that serves residents first while naturally attracting visitors. However, their recognition of major signature festivals as important indicates openness to larger-scale programming when it aligns with community values.

## Opportunities for Transformation

The identified needs point toward significant opportunities for positive change. The community's enthusiasm for programming, evidenced by detailed suggestions ranging from historical reenactments to community festivals and celebrations to programming that provides opportunities for all ages, reveals deep engagement and creative energy ready to be channeled.

The strong preference for family programming and youth offerings—particularly the call for "more offerings for children, especially young kids"—indicates opportunity to position the District as a multigenerational community asset. The suggested activities and programming for various age groups demonstrate an appetite for programming that brings different demographics together.

The community's vision extends beyond programming to encompass District identity, with calls for merchandise that lets residents show community pride. This reflects understanding that the District should be something residents claim and celebrate, not just a destination for outsiders.

The overwhelming sentiment from community engagement reflects a population ready for authentic, inclusive

arts programming that celebrates Norwalk's unique character while supporting local businesses and fostering genuine connections. This readiness, combined with the District's official designation and existing creative infrastructure, creates a foundation for transformative development that honors community values while achieving ambitious goals.



# THE PLAN



"Wall Street Is On the Rise" Mural  
Victoria Urso, 2025

## INTRODUCTION

This plan provides a comprehensive framework for developing the Norwalk Arts District into a thriving cultural and economic hub. Building on extensive community engagement, comparative research, and analysis of successful districts nationwide, the plan addresses the unique opportunities and challenges facing Norwalk's geographically expansive district. The following sections outline the strategic components necessary for the District's success:

**Identity of the District** establishes the authentic character and distinctive positioning that will differentiate Norwalk in the regional cultural landscape, building on its post-industrial heritage, diversity, and creative energy.

**District Geography** addresses the District's larger-than-typical footprint and presents strategies for organizing it as a collection of connected sub-districts—Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo—each functioning as walkable mini-districts within the larger whole.

**Functions of the District** defines four core strategic priorities that will guide management efforts: Connectivity and Unification, Marketing and Branding, Economic Development, and Programming and Activation. These interconnected functions create a comprehensive framework for cultural and economic development.

**Management, Operations and Governance** recommend a phased approach beginning with City-led management and transitioning to an independent Business Improvement District (BID) structure, ensuring professional capacity and sustainable operations.

**Funding** outlines diverse revenue streams necessary to support District operations, from special assessment districts to grants, sponsorships, and earned income.

**Consolidated Recommendations** and Implementation Grid provide a prioritized roadmap organized by timeline and function, with clear actions, priorities, and resource requirements to guide implementation over the coming years.

Together, these elements create a practical pathway forward that honors Norwalk's authentic character while building the infrastructure, programming, and community connections necessary for long-term success



Lockwood-Mathews Mansion Museum  
Jeff Klein, 2019

## IDENTITY OF THE DISTRICT

The Norwalk Arts District's identity emerges from a compelling blend of authentic realness and creative transformation that sets it apart in Fairfield County's cultural landscape. Unlike the polished affluence of neighboring communities, Norwalk embraces what stakeholders consistently describe as its "gritty, authentic" character—a post-industrial edge that artists and developers recognize as a genuine differentiator rather than a limitation to overcome.

### Historic Foundation, Contemporary Vision

The District's identity is anchored in the historic authenticity of Wall Street and Washington Street, where stakeholders see opportunity to honor the past while boldly shaping the future. This isn't about museum-piece preservation but rather about leveraging historic character as a foundation for contemporary creativity. The area's industrial heritage, evidenced in its sturdy brick buildings and authentic urban texture, provides the kind of substantial creative spaces that artists seek and the atmospheric backdrop that makes cultural districts memorable.

Norwalk has evolved from its industrial origins into something new: a post-industrial landscape where, in early stages of redevelopment, "lower rents and commercial properties made it possible for extraordinary and unique assets like the

Factory Underground" and similar creative enterprises to take root. This economic accessibility, rare in the region, has enabled organic artistic development that feels authentic rather than manufactured. There were strong sentiments expressed that though this was the basis for the current character, it will be challenging to expand given the rise in rents and realities of development occurring within the District.

### Diversity as Distinguishing Strength

Perhaps most significantly, the District's identity is defined by Norwalk's racial, ethnic, and economic diversity—a characteristic that multiple community groups celebrated as fundamental to the area's appeal and future potential. This diversity isn't incidental to the District's cultural identity; it is the cultural identity. In a region where many communities struggle with homogeneity, Norwalk's

multicultural character provides both creative richness and market differentiation.

This diversity extends beyond demographics to encompass the range of artistic expression, business types, and community needs that the District must serve. The substantial and growing residential population ensures that the District's identity will always be shaped by people who call Norwalk home, creating natural balance against purely tourism-driven development.

## Building on Established Assets

The District's identity builds on substantial existing assets that provide both credibility and momentum. The Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts, which is expanding its real estate footprint, student body, and degree programs, establishes the area's educational credentials while Factory Underground and associated music venues give it contemporary creative authenticity. The Maritime Aquarium serves as a proven regional draw, while the growing concentration of arts businesses on Wall Street demonstrates market validation of the District's creative potential.

The Norwalk River Valley Trail represents both literal and metaphorical connection—linking the District to broader regional recreation networks while embodying Norwalk's relationship with its natural environment. The area's historic architecture provides the substantial, character-rich spaces that creative enterprises require and that visitors find memorable.

The District has multiple transportation assets offer multiple current and future potential benefits. The South Norwalk station, which is served by the Metro-North Railroad and is an Amtrak stop, is located just two blocks south

of Washington Street and provides walking access to the broader District. The station will also become a greater transportation hub, since the City plans to move its Norwalk Transit bus hub to the station in about two years. These connections will directly benefit connectivity within the District, linking rail and bus service in Norwalk. In addition, the station is the focal point of a Transit Oriented Development (TOD) Redevelopment Plan, which calls for mixed use development in the area that could encompass affordable artist housing, live/work, and arts spaces. The TOD Redevelopment Plan also calls for sidewalk, streetscape, and bike lane improvements to enhance mobility.

## Regional Differentiation

In the competitive Fairfield County cultural landscape, the District's identity offers clear differentiation from more sanitized destinations. Where Stamford presents corporate sophistication and other regional communities offer suburban charm, Norwalk provides urban authenticity with genuine creative energy. The District's post-industrial character and economic accessibility attract artists and creative entrepreneurs who might be priced out of more gentrified areas, ensuring ongoing creative vitality.

## Evolutionary Pathway

The District's identity will likely evolve along the trajectory from "gritty but changing" to "authentically creative"—maintaining its industrial character and economic accessibility while adding layers of artistic sophistication and cultural programming. This evolution should enhance rather than replace the characteristics that currently attract creative residents and businesses.

The key to successful identity evolution lies in celebrating what makes Norwalk distinctive rather than trying to

replicate what works elsewhere. The District's identity should amplify its diversity, honor its industrial heritage, and leverage its authentic urban character as assets that differentiate it in an increasingly homogenized regional market.

As the District matures, its identity will be measured not just by what it offers visitors but by how well it serves as a creative home

for the diverse community that gives it life. This residential grounding ensures that the District's identity remains authentic and sustainable rather than merely performative—a crucial distinction that will determine its long-term success and regional significance.

"Art Capital of the World" Mural  
Scott Chiappetta, 2021





South Norwalk  
Patrick Sikes, 2021



Main Street Mural  
Unknown, 2025

## DISTRICT GEOGRAPHY

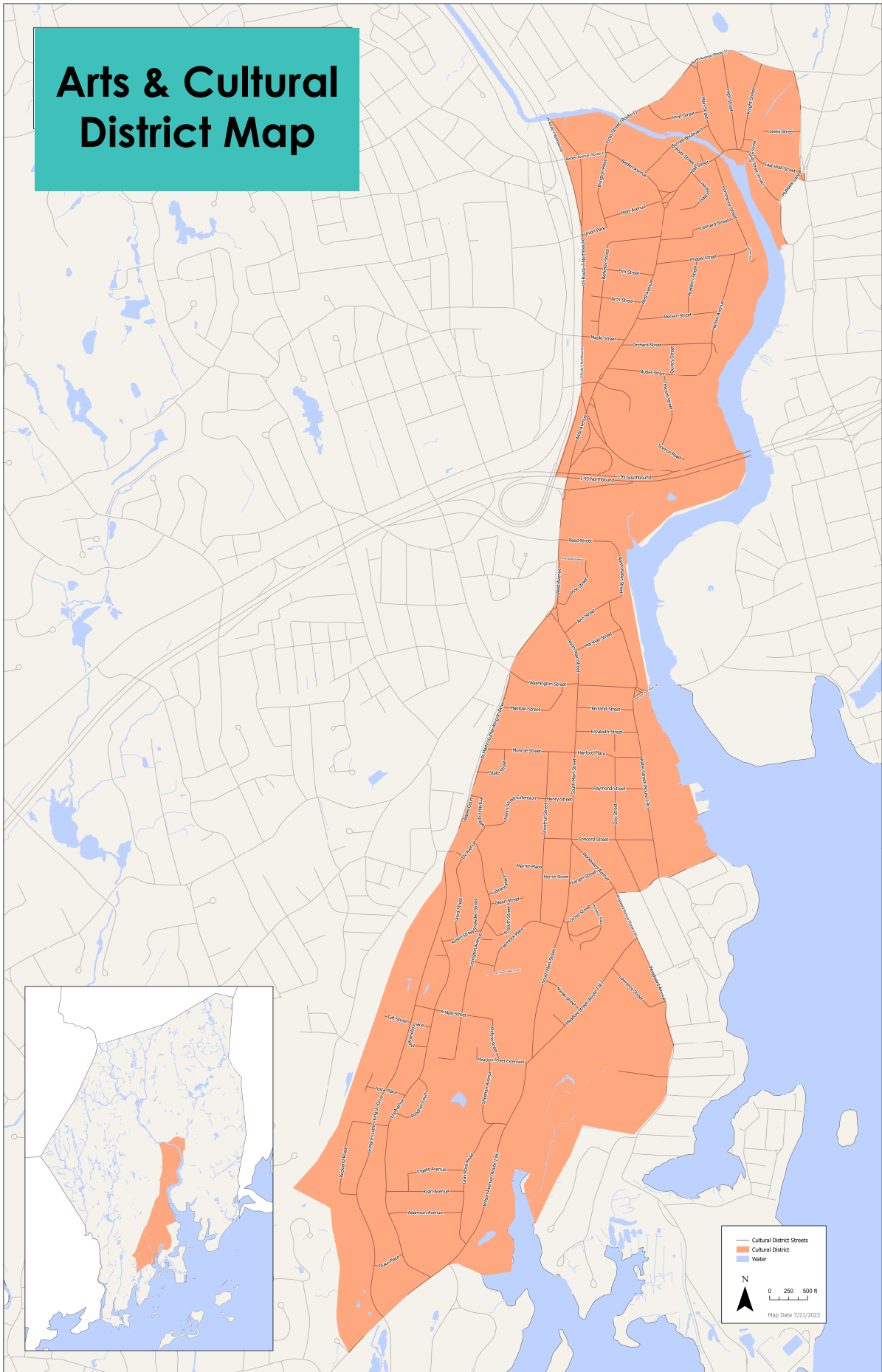
The Norwalk Arts District encompasses a larger-than-normal geographic area, offering both challenges and advantages. Its core area extends approximately 1.5 miles from Wall Street through West Avenue to Washington Street, and nearly 4.5 miles from its northern to its southern boundary with an average width of about a half-mile wide. In addition, the northern and southern areas are bifurcated by I-95. This does not match the classic definition for a district to be “compact and walkable.” Smaller areas have the benefit of concentrating the visitor experience, encouraging strolling and exploration, and strengthening the sense of place. Accordingly, Norwalk’s sprawling size is a distinguishing feature requiring specific adaptations to compensate but also to capitalize on its advantages.

For example, the large geographic area has multiple overlays with other districts and zones providing economic and other benefits. There are an Opportunity Zone and an Enterprise Zone offering incentives and other resources for targeted economic activity. There are also three historic districts that offer designation and incentives and .

underscore the community’s history and architecture: Washington Street, Whistleville, and Wall Street. In addition, the Redevelopment Area, encompassing a Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) District and the Lexington Avenue Neighborhood, is contained within the District boundaries in South Norwalk. See Building on Established Assets, above, for more information on transportation and connectivity related to the TOD and the South Norwalk train station

The Norwalk Arts District can best be seen and organized as a collection of sub-districts that each function as “compact and walkable” mini districts. The most recognizable are Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo. The District management can address the diversity and complexity of places and identity with clear programming and marketing that differentiates and promotes each. The District’s size also underscores the need to provide connectivity among its sub-areas, through programs, public art, urban design, transportation, and wayfinding.

# Arts & Cultural District Map





Halloween Nightfair  
Lori Hillsberg, 2025

# FUNCTIONS OF THE DISTRICT

The Norwalk Arts District serves multiple interconnected functions that together create a comprehensive framework for cultural and economic development. Through extensive community engagement, four core functions emerged with remarkable consensus, each addressing fundamental needs while building toward a unified vision for the District's future. The four core functions that should serve as the strategic priorities of a management entity are:

- Connectivity and Unification
- Marketing and Branding
- Economic Development
- Programming and Activation

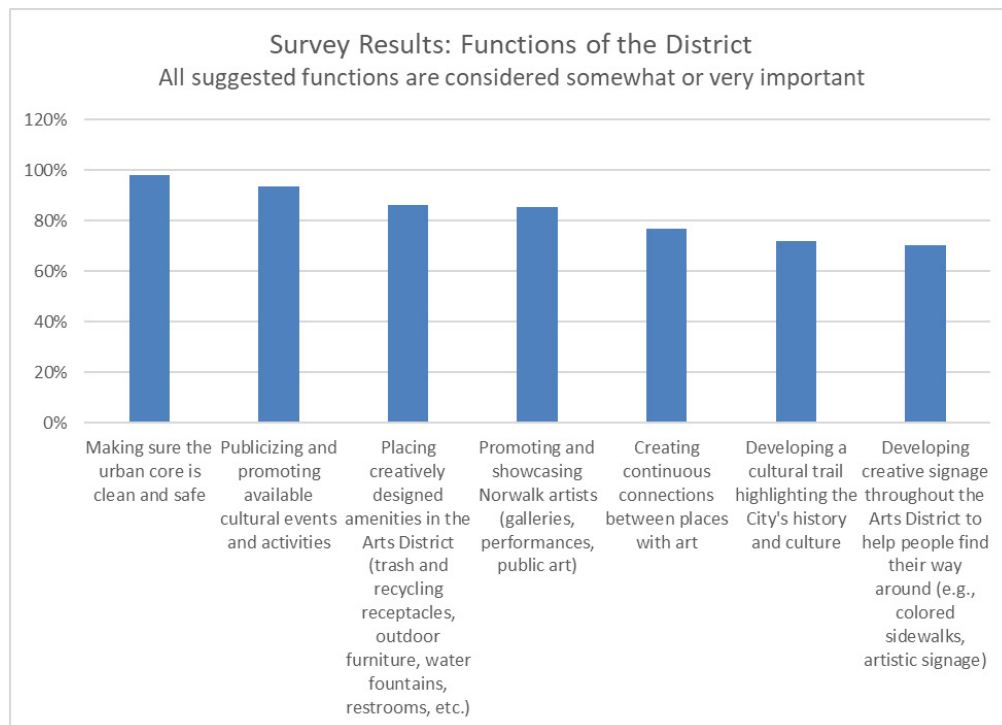


Figure 2 How IMPORTANT are the following to include in the Norwalk District plan?..

In addition to the four core functions, the District will need to address issues common to business improvement districts, such as street and sidewalk cleaning, safety patrols, lighting that promotes security, street concierge services, and the like.

## Connectivity and Unification: Bridging Divided Communities

Perhaps the most critical function of the District is serving as a unifying force that connects its sub-areas, for example the Wall Street corridor and South Norwalk—communities historically divided by the I-95 barrier. This physical separation has created not just logistical challenges but psychological distance between neighborhoods that share common interests and complementary assets. The District functions as both a literal and symbolic bridge, creating reasons for residents to move fluidly between areas while developing a shared identity that transcends geographic boundaries.

This connectivity function extends beyond overcoming highway barriers to encompass the broader challenge of linking diverse neighborhoods, demographic groups, and economic sectors under one cultural umbrella. Three primary sub-areas are Wall Street, Waypointe and Washington Street/SoNo. The District also serves as common ground where East Norwalk residents can connect with South Norwalk businesses, where longtime residents can engage with newcomers, and where different cultural communities can find shared celebration and expression.

## Marketing and Branding: Establishing a Unified Identity

The District functions as Norwalk's primary vehicle for developing and projecting a coherent cultural identity both locally and regionally. This branding function addresses the consistent community call for unified identity, comprehensive wayfinding, and coordinated promotion that helps residents and visitors alike understand what Norwalk offers and how to access it.

**Wayfinding<sup>2</sup>** : Wayfinding includes signage but, in an Arts District, may also express and augment the creative identity of the place. It is an opportunity to create distinction between each of the three sub-districts – Wall Street, Waypointe, SoNo – as well, that may include color coding, graphic images, and other tools in the design of a wayfinding 'brand book.' Wayfinding for the District should be about navigating the resources, venues, assets (e.g., murals, designated busker points, studios and galleries, etc.) and businesses in each sub district. One set of wayfinding issues concerns helping people find the District's assets – informing them about its different theatres, hotels, arts organizations, parks and other spaces, as well as its historic buildings, and directing people to them. A second set of issues is helping people coming for a performance or event navigate from parking or mass transit to their destination. A third set of issues relates to the entry and exit pathways to the District and guiding people into or through it. It is an opportunity to show intersection with the Norwalk River Valley Trail. A fourth is the creative possibilities of engaging people in an arts experience as they explore or navigate the District. It is recommended that a priority step when management is in place is to develop a wayfinding plan, in connection with the brand, that can explore and develop these ideas.

<sup>2</sup>An example of a wayfinding project in Berea, KY, funded through the NEA's Creative Placemaking program

**Branding:** Rather than simply promoting individual businesses or events, the District can develop an umbrella brand that elevates the entire area's profile. This includes developing visual identity systems, creating consistent messaging, and ensuring that the District's authentic character translates clearly to different audiences. The marketing function encompasses both digital promotion and physical wayfinding that makes the District's assets discoverable and accessible.

**Marketing:** There is a great deal of marketing "noise" in the environment and consumers now receive and seek out information in many more and distinct channels than in previous generations. The District's marketing task is more complex and must be nuanced and nimble to be effective. This suggests a robust digital and social media effort supplemented by advertising in traditional media, printed materials (e.g., flyers, postcard, posters), a word-of-mouth effort, and other tactics. District management should partner with and build on current marketing efforts for Norwalk, and supplement its work with research to measure and refine the outcomes of its marketing. District marketing should be based on a comprehensive marketing plan and program that is developed as an initial step once management is in place. Key issues and opportunities for the marketing plan and program are to:

- Establish a brand and identity for the District
- Develop an audience for the District that builds upon existing efforts for each sub area of the District (Wall Street, SoNo and Waypointe).
- Establish partnerships and clarify roles with marketing partners, such as the Wall Street Business Alliance.
- Create a process for achieving consensus on and coordination of

marketing messages and approaches beginning with the Advisory Board and in directing marketing efforts with constituents across the District

- Create promotions and cross-promotions with businesses and other entities within the District.
- Create promotions for Norwalk residents that "invite" the community to experience the District.
- Create promotions and experiences designated for the large population of residents of the District.
- Create and maintain a District website.
- Create a mobile app to support district marketing and activities, perhaps with a geolocation function.
- Establish and manage an ongoing and robust social media program.
- Create an internal communications platform for District stakeholders.
- Establish communications with street ambassadors (clean-and-safe staff), concierges and other people in the District.
- Establish success metrics and an assessment program to monitor progress and adjust the plan as appropriate and in relation to assessment findings.



## Economic Development: Catalyzing Sustainable Growth

The District should function as an economic engine that supports existing local businesses while attracting new investment, visitors, and residents. Economic development here operates on multiple levels: generating foot traffic for retail businesses, creating market conditions that support creative enterprises, and establishing Norwalk as a destination that retains educated workforce and attracts creative professionals. The District contains overlapping zones for Enterprise, Redevelopment, Opportunity and Transit, each of which offers economic benefits and incentives that can align with District objectives.

This function recognizes that cultural districts succeed economically when they create authentic value for multiple stakeholders. Local businesses benefit from increased visibility and customer base, property owners see enhanced values, and the broader community gains from increased tax base and job creation. The District's economic function balances support for existing enterprises with attraction of new businesses that complement rather than displace established community assets.<sup>3</sup>

## Programming and Activation: Creating Continuous Vibrancy

*"In creative placemaking, partners from public, private, non-profit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities. Creative placemaking animates public and private spaces, rejuvenates structures and streetscapes, improves local business viability and public safety, and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired."*

The District functions as a platform for regular programming that keeps public spaces active and provides ongoing reasons for people to visit, linger, and return. This activation encompasses everything from street-level performers (buskers), weekly farmers markets, to annual signature festivals, creating a calendar of activities that serves different demographics and interests while maintaining consistent energy throughout the District. It also serves to tie each sub-district together as a coordinated geography.

Programming serves multiple subfunctions: providing performance and exhibition opportunities for local artists, creating family-friendly activities that build community connections, generating economic activity for local businesses, and establishing Norwalk's reputation as a place where interesting things happen regularly. Programming should build on community preferences for street performers, outdoor live arts, and community-focused events while creating space for larger signature festivals that attract regional attention.



SoNo Saturday Market  
VisitNorwalk.com, 2025

<sup>3</sup> Examples of economic development, programs to support creative practices and businesses will be referenced here. An example of professional development opportunities is [Assets for Artists – A4A](#).

<sup>4</sup> Creative Placemaking, Markusen, Ann; Gadwa, Anne; National Endowment for the Arts White Paper, 2010.



Scott Chiappetta, 2021

**Creative Experiences:** Providing creative experiences on the street expresses the identity and heart of the District. The field of possibility is substantial, with opportunities to activate public spaces throughout Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo. These experiences celebrate Norwalk's post-industrial character, maritime heritage, and diverse creative community. Note that these experiences overlap with and support the programming priorities discussed earlier in this section.



Lori Hillsberg, 2025

**Performance Activation Outside Venues:** Creative opportunities exist to extend performances beyond traditional venues. This might include lunchtime performances in parks and public spaces near cultural institutions like the Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts, Factory Underground, and District Music Hall, as well as pre- and post-performance activities that encourage audiences to linger and explore the District. Outdoor spaces like Irving Freese Park and areas along the Norwalk River Valley Trail offer natural gathering points for these activations.



Biking in Norwalk, John Vorhees III, 2025

**Art Trail and Wayfinding Integration:** The Norwalk River Valley Trail and West Avenue corridor provide natural pathways for an art trail concept that could include permanent and temporary installations, performance spaces, and interactive elements. This art trail could connect the District's sub-areas while celebrating Norwalk's industrial heritage and natural environment. QR codes at installations could link visitors to artist information, local businesses, and digital content, creating an integrated physical and virtual experience.



capitoloutdoor.com

**Electronic Information Points:** As the District develops its wayfinding system, consideration should be given to including digital information kiosks at strategic locations. These could serve the dual purpose of providing promotional content about upcoming events and venues while also displaying rotating digital art pieces by local artists. Integration with the District's broader digital marketing strategy would ensure consistent messaging and user experience.



Lori Hillsberg, 2023

**Parks and Public Spaces:** The District contains several parks and public gathering spaces that can serve as venues for regular programming. Irving Freese Park, spaces along the Norwalk River Valley Trail, and pocket parks throughout the District offer opportunities for yoga and fitness sessions, mini-performances, noontime concerts, and community gatherings. Programming these spaces approximately 60% of daytime hours would provide consistent activation while maintaining their character as public gathering places. Collaborative festivals and events produced in partnership with District organizations could activate larger areas seasonally.



Scott Chiappetta, 2021

**Street Activation Throughout the District:** The District should embrace street-level creative experiences including busking, temporary art installations, food trucks, and pop-up performances on sidewalks, parks, and other public spaces. Multiple walls and buildings throughout the District could serve as canvases for murals, digital

projections, and temporary artworks. The District management should work with the City to develop streamlined permitting processes that encourage rather than restrict creative expression, building on the successful mural policy advocated by the Arts and Culture Commission. Designated busking points with clear guidelines could provide performance opportunities for local musicians and artists while enhancing the District's vibrancy.



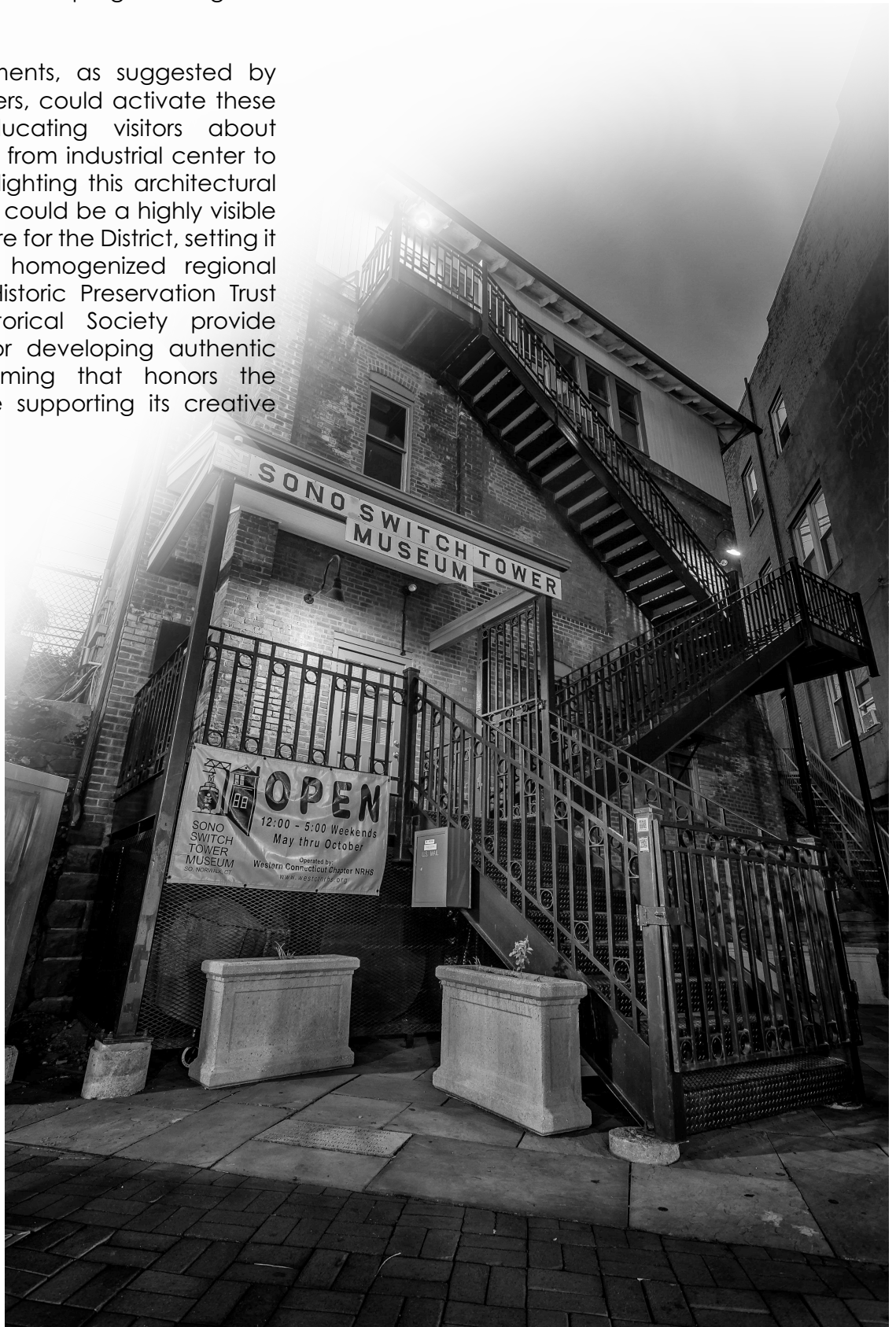
Patrick Sikes, 2021

**Digital and Virtual Experiences:** While the District focuses on authentic, in-person creative experiences, digital components can enhance visitor engagement and accessibility. The District's mobile app and digital presence could include self-guided tours of historic buildings, public art walks, and location-based storytelling experiences. Geolocation services could serve as a digital docent for visitors exploring the District. Some public art installations might incorporate augmented reality components that reveal additional layers of meaning or historical context.

**Historical Experiences and Heritage Activation:** The District is distinguished by significant historic structures including the Lockwood-Mathews Mansion, historic buildings along Wall Street and Washington Street, and the currently closed Palace Theater. Maritime heritage sites and industrial-era buildings throughout the District provide rich opportunities for historical interpretation. These assets offer

possibilities for engaging visitors through digital storytelling, interpretive signage, architectural tours, historic lighting installations, and creative programming that brings history alive.

Historical reenactments, as suggested by community members, could activate these spaces while educating visitors about Norwalk's evolution from industrial center to creative hub. Highlighting this architectural and cultural history could be a highly visible distinguishing feature for the District, setting it apart from more homogenized regional destinations. The Historic Preservation Trust and Norwalk Historical Society provide natural partners for developing authentic historical programming that honors the District's past while supporting its creative future.



SoNo Switch Tower Museum  
Jeff Klein, 2019

**Public Art Integration: Enhancing Visual Identity:** The District functions as a canvas for public art that enhances visual appeal while expressing community character and values. This function can operate through multiple mechanisms: requirements or incentives for private developers, expansion of existing city programs, and individual project opportunities that arise organically.

Public art serves both aesthetic and practical functions—creating landmarks that aid wayfinding, generating social media content that promotes the District, providing platforms for local artist expression, and contributing to the authentic creative atmosphere that differentiates Norwalk from more sterile destinations.

The development of public art guidelines and processes ensures that artistic interventions align with community values while maintaining high quality standards.

The District's public art can build on existing storefront improvement programs, supporting small-scale temporary interventions like creative signage and storefront exhibits that allow individual businesses to contribute to the District's overall creative character while expressing their own identity.



"Welcome to Norwalk" Mural  
Ernesto Maranje, 2024

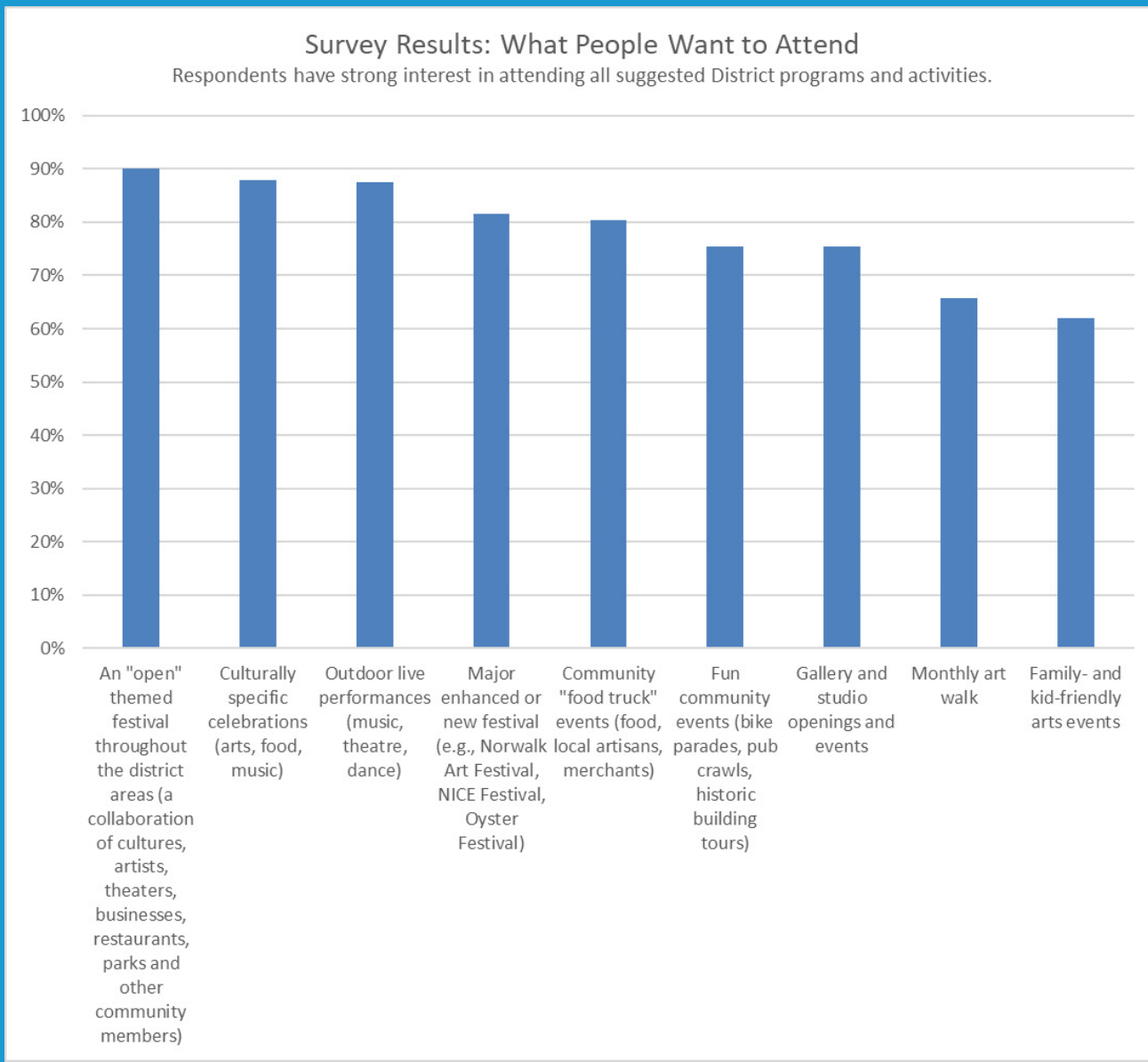


Figure 3 How interested would you be in visiting the Wall Street/West Avenue and South Norwalk districts to attend each of these events or activities?

**Festival and Signature Events: Establishing Regional Presence:** The District functions as host for major festivals and signature events that establish Norwalk's regional cultural presence while celebrating its unique identity. These larger-scale events complement regular programming by creating annual moments of concentrated activity that attract visitors, generate media attention, and provide economic impact that supports year-round operations.

Signature events should emerge from and express Norwalk's distinctive characteristics—its diversity, maritime heritage, post-industrial character, or creative community. Rather than importing generic festival concepts, the District's signature event function should develop programming that could only happen authentically in Norwalk, creating competitive advantage in the regional cultural marketplace.

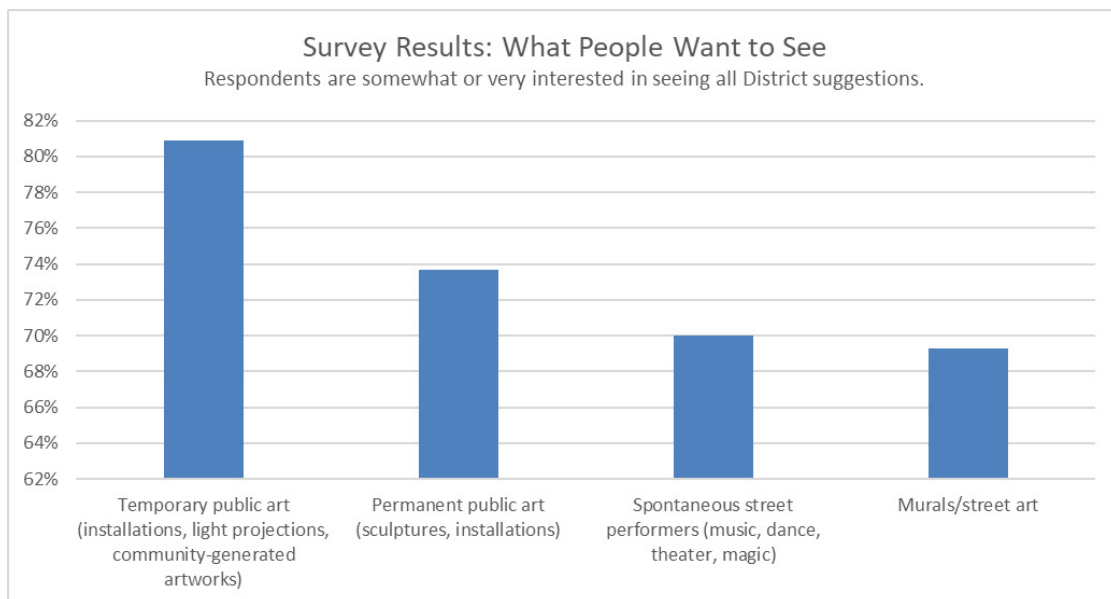


Figure 4 How interested would you be in visiting the Wall Street/West Avenue and South Norwalk districts to see the following?

## Integrated Function Framework

These core functions work synergistically rather than independently. Connectivity enables more effective marketing by giving visitors coherent experiences to promote. Economic development provides resources for programming and public art. Programming creates content for marketing while generating economic activity. Public art enhances the District's marketability while providing venues for programming.

The District's success will be measured not by excellence in any single function but by how effectively they reinforce each other to create a comprehensive cultural and economic development platform that serves residents, supports businesses, and attracts visitors while maintaining the authentic character that makes Norwalk distinctive.



The Norwalk Art Space Performance  
Patrick Sikes, 2021

# MANAGEMENT, OPERATIONS, AND GOVERNANCE

To fully realize the potential of the District will require establishing a governance structure that reflects the range of stakeholders and creating a management structure for comprehensive operations that has the authority, capacity and resources necessary for implementation of this plan.

## Management

Stakeholders agree that an effective and efficient management structure for the District is critical and must be led by a capable, consolidated organization. There are several options that emerged through the planning process that include integrating management within the City or creating a new entity whose sole purpose is District management. While the option of embedding District management within an existing organization was suggested, no clear or obvious organization was identified through the planning process.

It is recommended that for the greatest impact and efficiency that a sequential approach be considered, beginning with integrating management within the City, and transitioning over a period of three to five years to a structure under an independent business improvement district (BID).

**Step 1:** The Business and Tourism Development Office (BTDO) already manages most arts and cultural initiatives within the District and has demonstrated community-oriented effectiveness. There will be considerable effort needed to create and manage the District, requiring dedicated staff whose sole function is District management and development.

It is important that this not be seen as simply an extension of existing city services but a distinct function within BTDO. It would be best for the City to commit to multiyear funding for District operations and activities during start-up, while the BID is being planned, to provide a more stable base of implementation of this plan. BTDO would act as the District's initial fiscal agent and would provide policy direction, personnel management, programmatic oversight and organizational direction during the startup phase. BTDO has the existing relationships and experience to launch the District effectively. This initial phase would minimally take two to three years but may be up to five years. The department will need

qualified staff to oversee all aspects of District formation and initial programming. The first step in launching the District is for the Common Council and Economic and Community Development Committee to review this recommendation and authorize the department to serve as the incubating agency.

**Step 2:** Based on stakeholder input, there is strong interest in establishing a special services district, more commonly termed a Business Improvement District (BID), covering the District area. Property owners have expressed willingness to participate in such a structure. The BID should be a single entity that manages the Arts District, along with other BID responsibilities, for efficiency and minimal duplication of effort. This organization would be responsible for maintaining the brand and vision of the District, working with appropriate City departments regarding development and programming, and building capacity to raise private funds to support operations. The BID model would provide sustainable funding through property assessments while allowing for additional revenue through grants, sponsorships, and earned income. As it matures, this entity might also play a role in raising capital dollars to develop needed cultural facilities and artist housing.

Given the scale and geographic scope of the District, it may be advisable to establish two subdistricts within the BID – one from Wall Street to I-95 and a second in SoNo. The BID can be structured from the start to accommodate subdistricts and serve their differing interests..

The BID would assume the Arts District functions initiated by the BDTO but could continue to partner on specific initiatives. City staff or contract positions could transfer to the BID, in a negotiated process becoming employees of the BID.

For more detail on creating a BID, please see Business Improvement District section.

## Priorities

When District management is established, it is recommended that their work plan include:

- Establish design standards for the District and serve as steward of the brand, including public art guidelines, streetscape improvements, economic development priorities, marketing and promotion, and signage/wayfinding systems.
- The management entity should work closely with Planning and Zoning, the Arts and Culture Commission, and the Historic Preservation Trust to ensure that development and improvements enhance the District's authentic character while supporting arts and cultural uses. This includes developing guidelines that encourage rather than restrict creative expression, as demonstrated by the successful mural policy advocated by the Arts and Culture Commission.
- District staff should maintain formal liaison relationships with the Arts and Culture Commission, Planning and Zoning, the Special Events Committee, Parks and Recreation, Historic Preservation Trust, and business associations whose work directly affects the District.

The success of the District will depend on high levels of communication, coordination and collaboration among the various stakeholders that operate within the District boundaries. The District Manager can provide a key coordination point that supports the activities of each partner while advancing the overall vision for the arts and culture District. Regular quarterly meetings should be established to ensure ongoing alignment and collaborative problem-solving.

The District should prioritize hiring staff with demonstrated experience in arts administration, economic development, marketing/promotion, and community engagement.

Given Norwalk's diversity and the District's commitment to authentic community representation, staff should reflect the community's demographics and have proven ability to work across cultural and economic differences. Initial staffing should include a District Manager and a Programming Coordinator, with expansion based on revenue growth and programming success. There will eventually be need for marketing, development, and other positions.

## Business Improvement District

Since a Business Improvement District, known technically as a Special Services District, is the recommended management and governing entity for the Arts District, following a start-up period, it's useful to outline how a BID is formed and what it can do. A BID provides substantial authority and capacity, which will greatly assist the Arts District to fulfill its goals and promise. A BID has taxing authority, can own property, borrow money, provide municipal services, and/or own and operate public improvements.

BIDs in Connecticut are governed by state as well as municipal law. Creating a BID involves significant planning and preparation, plus voter approval by a majority of property owners in the district.

Steps to create a BID are:

1. Municipal ordinance: Norwalk's Common Council formally initiates the process by adopting an ordinance establishing the district. While, Norwalk has designated the Arts District, the BID would require a separate action. Note that while the common Council must take action, a BID is typically initiated by property owners seeking extra public services and willing to pay for them through higher property taxes.
2. Property owner approval: The ordinance takes effect only if the affected property owners vote within 60 days to approve it.
3. Voting requirements: A district is formed if a majority of the taxpayers within each grouping approves it in a referendum and the assessed value of their property exceeds half the assessed value of all property within their grouping.

Different types of properties and property owners can be treated differently within a BID, to reflect the benefits they receive. The BID can define groupings of properties, such as by land use (commercial, residential, industrial) and/or subdistrict within the overall geography of the district (Wall Street, SoNo). These groupings may be taxed at different rates, or at a zero rate, since they may receive different levels of benefits. This means, for example, that individual residential properties (houses, condos) can be effectively included in the BID but not taxed or taxed at a lower rate. Voter approval in forming the district is adjusted accordingly, so each grouping of property owner must approve the district formation with a majority of taxpayers and at least half of the assessed value of all property in the grouping.

It is important to note that a BID formed under Connecticut law is a public entity with governmental authority, not a nonprofit organization. State law requires that a BID be governed by an elected Board of Commissioners, elected every two

years. There may also be ex officio Board members. Board composition and selection is set by the municipality within certain state guidelines but, for example, can include tenants as well as property owners in elections of Commissioners. This provides an important mechanism for community responsiveness and political accountability.

A BID clearly provides a powerful platform for Arts District leadership and management, while facilitating community engagement and accountability.

## Governance

The City should establish a District Advisory Board to assist in the formation and ongoing guidance of the District. This advisory body should be drawn from the existing Steering Committee that participated in this planning process, augmented by additional stakeholders who can bring resources, policy knowledge, and community representation. It is recommended that the Advisory Board be initiated as a sub-committee of the Arts and Culture Commission. The board should include members from the Arts and Culture Commission, Wall Street Association, business and property owners, artists, cultural organizations (such as the Norwalk Conservatory of the Arts, Factory Underground, Art Space), and community representatives. This advisory body can transition at a later date into an oversight Board of a Business Improvement District (BID) when launched, as a sub-committee of the BID Board of Commissioners..





Miracle on Wall Street  
Scott Chiappetta, 2022

## FUNDING

Successful districts require a management structure with strong organizational capacity. Capacity is necessary for the myriad tasks of District management, to lead, program, and market the District, develop and promote its identity, manage relationships, and fulfill the District's goals. All of this, of course, requires sufficient operating funds and human resources. In addition, having diversified revenues is desirable, providing greater financial stability and buffering downturns in one or more sources of revenue.

Norwalk is in the process of considering creation of a special services district (SSD or business improvement district) for areas within the Norwalk Arts District. SSDs require a majority of property owners in the district to agree to an additional property tax to fund agreed-on benefits. This is a strong possibility for providing at least some of the needed funding and management for the Norwalk Arts District. There is strong precedent for this approach. A number of Connecticut cities, including Stamford, New Haven, New Britain, Danbury, and Manchester have special services districts, although none are organized to fund an arts district. Several of the comparison cultural districts elsewhere in the U.S. rely on business

improvement districts at least in part for funding and management. The key advantages are that an SSD provides a stable source of basic operating support, organizational capacity, and direct accountability to property owners. An SSD for Norwalk would presumably encompass valuable functions in addition to the arts, such as clean and safe streets, marketing of local businesses, and programming, all of which would align with and benefit the Norwalk Arts District.

It will clearly be important to integrate funding for the Norwalk Arts District into planning for a potential SSD in Norwalk. Also, the larger geographic area of the Norwalk Arts District suggests considering a similarly large geographic area for an SSD, which would generate substantially more revenues and benefit a larger group of stakeholders. It will also be imperative to articulate the benefits of the Norwalk Arts District for property owners to justify their support for including it in an SSD.

In addition to potential SSD property tax revenues, the Norwalk Arts District can cultivate diversified funding. Sources include sponsorships, contributions, City funding, program revenues, private grants, state and federal funding, fundraising events, and memberships.

### **City Funding**

The City can finance the cost of launching the District for an initial period of time, while an SSD is developed and a managing organization stood up. In the future, the City be a funding partner for ongoing operations and special projects. The City can also continue to leverage its infrastructure improvements, as it has been doing in the Wall Street area, and other City spending to benefit the District.

### **Program Revenues**

These can be generated through vendor fees, admissions, concessions, and other income generated by District activities involving sales.

### **Private Grants**

Grants from foundations and corporations will be dependent on an alignment of the donor's fields of interest with District needs.

### **State and Federal Grants**

These grants are currently in a state of disruption and uncertainty but have in the past been valuable sources for arts projects, capital projects, and other initiatives (as opposed to general operating support).

### **Fundraising Events**

Events generally require a large outlay of resources, human and financial, but can generate significant community support.

### **Memberships**

A "Friends of" organization can generate membership fees and contributions to support the District, particularly among District residents.

**Diversifying funding will require the Norwalk Arts District to have an active fund development office with qualified staff and to manage multiple donor and grantor relationships.**



Norwalk Art Festival  
Patrick Sikes, 2021

## CONSOLIDATED RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Norwalk Arts District is at a pivotal moment, ready to capitalize on the recent designation from the State of Connecticut, with significant potential to become a driving force for economic development, cultural vitality, and community connection. This plan, built on extensive community and stakeholder engagement, and an analysis of successful district models nationwide, identifies a clear pathway forward that builds on Norwalk's distinct character while addressing its unique challenges as a geographically expansive district.

The recommendations prioritize establishing professional management capacity, creating sustainable funding mechanisms, and implementing programming that serves both residents and visitors while supporting local artists and businesses. Success will depend on taking a phased approach that builds momentum through early wins and lays the groundwork for long-term sustainability and growth.

# Foundation Building (Years 1-3)

## IMMEDIATE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

- **ESTABLISH CITY LED MANAGEMENT:** THE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM DEPARTMENT SHOULD SERVE AS THE INITIAL DISTRICT MANAGEMENT ENTITY, HIRING DEDICATED STAFF WHOSE SOLE FUNCTION IS DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT AND OPERATIONS. RECRUIT A DISTRICT MANAGER AND PROGRAMMING COORDINATOR WITH DEMONSTRATED EXPERIENCE IN ARTS ADMINISTRATION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT. IDEALLY, THE DISTRICT MANAGER (AND OTHER DISTRICT STAFF) IS IN PLACE AS A CITY EMPLOYEE IN THE FIRST PHASE AND TRANSITIONS TO WORKING FOR THE BID WHEN ESTABLISHED.
- **COMMIT MULTI-YEAR CITY FUNDING:** A COMMITMENT OF MULTI-YEAR FUNDING WILL BE NECESSARY TO BUILD THE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE DISTRICT. THE CITY SHOULD PROVIDE STABLE FUNDING FOR DISTRICT OPERATIONS DURING A 3-YEAR STARTUP PHASE WHILE A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID) IS DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED, AND THERE IS A RAMP-UP OF RESOURCES TO OPERATE THE DISTRICT.
- **CREATE A DISTRICT ADVISORY BOARD:** FORM AN ADVISORY BODY DRAWING FROM THE CURRENT STEERING COMMITTEE, AS WELL AS IDENTIFYING OTHER REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ARTS AND CULTURE COMMISSION, BUSINESS OWNERS, PROPERTY OWNERS, ARTISTS, CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS THAT WOULD PROVIDE GUIDANCE IN DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT.
- **ESTABLISH A BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT:** WHEN IN PLACE, A PRIORITY FOR MANAGEMENT IS TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN INDEPENDENT BID STRUCTURE WITH SUSTAINABLE PROPERTY ASSESSMENT FUNDING.
- **DIVERSIFY REVENUE STREAMS:** DEVELOP THE CAPACITY IN THE FIRST THREE YEARS FOR SEEKING GRANTS, SPONSORSHIPS AND PROGRAM REVENUES. THIS WILL CREATE A PLATFORM THAT CAN TRANSITION TO THE BID.

## Essential Infrastructure Improvements

- **Commission Design of a Comprehensive Wayfinding System:** Install consistent signage and digital wayfinding that connects Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo sub-districts, establishes a system for geographic differentiation and enhances the brand of the District.
- **Address Basic Infrastructure Needs:** Focus on cleanliness and maintenance, improved lighting for safety perceptions, and enhanced parking solutions.
- **Develop Transportation Connectivity:** Explore development of a trolley or shuttle system to physically connect District sub-areas and serve as a branding opportunity. Consider building on the City's existing Wheels 2U on-call transportation service as an alternative to a dedicated trolley/shuttle. Leverage the upcoming relocation of the City's Norwalk Transit hub to the South Norwalk train station as an opportunity to address District transportation needs. Support increased mobility improvements called for in the South Norwalk TOD Redevelopment Plan (sidewalks, streetscape, bike lanes, arts spaces)

## Quick Win Programming

- **Launch Monthly Art Walks:** Establish First Friday or similar regular programming to create consistent District activation and visitor expectations.
- **Initiate Public Art Projects:** Begin small-scale, temporary public art installations and expand existing mural programs. Consider community-involved projects to increase public engagement.
- **Activate Street-Level Programming:** Establish a program to encourage and support street performers (e.g., create designated areas with guidelines or policies for permitting, hours, use of electronic amplification, etc.), outdoor live arts, and pop-up activations that

enhance liveliness throughout the District.

- **Considerations in Programming:**
  - Maintain a regular programming calendar that serves multiple demographics and interests.
  - Create family-friendly activities that build community connections while attracting visitors.
  - Provide performance and exhibition opportunities for local artists.
  - Balance community-serving events with larger signature festivals for regional attraction.

## Ongoing Priority Considerations

### Expanded Programming and Identity

- **Develop Signature Annual Events:** The process of developing one or more signature events should begin in Phase 1. It may be an opportunity to build upon/expand existing events that have the potential for growth. Large-scale festivals would ideally celebrate Norwalk's unique identity—diversity, maritime heritage, and post-industrial character and leverage the distinct nature and geography of the District.
- **Strengthen Sub-District Programming:** Develop distinct programming for Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo while maintaining a unified District brand.
- **Support Artist Community:** Address the needs of Norwalk's artist community, such as facilitating opportunities to increase or maintain affordable space and live/work projects. Also, developing artists' funding programs and work opportunities, promoting local artists and productions, and incentivizing artist residencies. Artists should be engaged in leadership and decision making for the District on an ongoing basis. The District can also set standards to assure professional compensation for artists' work in the District.
- **Expand Public Art:** Continue and expand the initial focus on temporary, community-engaged, and mural projects to include add larger and

iconic artworks. Look for opportunities to use public artworks to reinforce connectivity (on trails, as wayfinding, and for gateways).

### Marketing and Branding

- **Implement Design Standards:** Establish District design guidelines in collaboration with Planning and Zoning and the RDA that enhance authentic character while supporting arts and cultural uses and establish a cohesive visual identity and messaging that authentically represent Norwalk's character.
- **District and Event Marketing:** Implement a multi-channel marketing strategy including digital, traditional media, word-of-mouth, and other creative efforts that reflect the multiplicity of ways people now access information. Partner with existing marketing efforts while developing District-specific promotional capacity.

### Community Centered Approach

- **Prioritize Residents:** Prioritize programming and development that serves residents first while naturally attracting visitors.
- **Build on Norwalk's Authenticity:** Maintain authentic character by building on the existing creative community and preventing displacement.
- **Community Representation:** Ensure diverse community representation in governance and programming decisions.

The success of these recommendations depends on recognizing that the Norwalk Arts District's geographic scale and diversity are assets to be leveraged rather than problems to be solved. By embracing its authentic character, supporting its existing creative community, and building professional management capacity with sustainable funding, the District can become a unique regional destination that genuinely serves its community while driving economic development and cultural vitality.

# Implementation Grid

**Year 1** focuses on establishing the management foundation; establishing the District brand and a master marketing plan; launching quick-win programming and beginning the BID development process.

**Year 2** emphasizes building momentum through infrastructure improvements including installation of wayfinding and geographic demarcation of the District and subdistricts, expanding programming, and formalizing the BID structure.

**Year 3** centers on completing the transition to independent BID management, launching major signature programming, and achieving marketing maturity.

**Years 4-5** target sustainable operations, physical development projects, and regional leadership.

Each phase builds logically on the previous one, with early actions creating the foundation for later developments. The plan balances immediate visible wins (like First Friday events) with longer-term capacity building (like BID establishment), and includes specific metrics for tracking progress. The structure allows for flexibility while maintaining clear priorities and accountability timeframes.

Function/Strategy	Action	Resources
<b>YEAR 1: Foundation Building (Months 1-12)</b>		
Immediate Priority Actions (Months 1-3)		
Establish Management Structure		
	Common Council Economic and Community Development Committee reviews and authorizes ECDD to serve as incubating agency	Staff and committee time
	Secure multi-year City funding commitment (minimum 3 years)	Funding required for specific line items below. Focus is on city supporting the District operations for a period of up to 3 years until the BID (special services district) is established and providing operating funds.
	Hire District Manager (full-time position)	Est. \$100-125K annually for salary, benefits and related costs
	Establish District Advisory Board drawing from Steering Committee and additional stakeholders	Staff and committee time

Launch Quick Win Programming		
	Initiate monthly First Friday Art Walk (or similar regular event)	Staff time in organizing along with resources invested in promotional materials
	Begin street performer/busking pilot program with designated locations and guidelines. Additionally, identify infrastructure improvements to create designated busking areas/zones.	Establish guidelines and review with Advisory Board and internal city departments as required
	Activate existing public spaces with small-scale temporary programming	See appendix section on links to small-scale activation examples and suggestions and approaches and budget ranges to consider.
Begin Infrastructure Planning		
	Identify priority lighting and safety improvement locations	Coordinate with public works and develop a capital needs budget
	Survey parking and transportation connectivity challenges	Staff time and potential consultant cost
Short-Term Actions (Months 4-12)		
Build Management Capacity		
	Hire Programming Coordinator	Estimate salary and related costs of \$75-85,000 annually.
	Establish formal liaison relationships with Arts & Culture Commission, Planning & Zoning, Historic Preservation Trust, Parks & Recreation	Staff time
	Create quarterly stakeholder coordination meetings	
	Develop District operations manual and brand guidelines framework	

Initiate BID Development Process		
	Convene property and business owners to introduce BID concept	Staff time
	Present benefits analysis and funding projections	
	Begin informal polling of property owner support	
	Research Connecticut BID models and legal requirements	
Develop Brand and Marketing Foundation		
	Issue RFP for brand identity and marketing plan development	Staff time and research
	Commission brand identity system (logo, visual standards, messaging)	Est. consulting and related costs in a range from \$40,000-\$60,000. Refer to the appendix section for resources for branding and wayfinding design firms
	Launch basic District website and social media presence	Design and consulting fees
	Create initial promotional materials and event calendar system	Design and consulting fees
	Conduct comprehensive wayfinding needs assessment	Consulting fees for design firm specializing in wayfinding and placemaking. Estimate fees in the range of \$30,000-\$50,000 for assessment. Refer to section the appendix on resources for wayfinding design firms.
Expand Programming		
	Establish 2-3 additional recurring programs (outdoor concerts, family activities, etc.)	Refer to appendix section on examples and approaches to activation
	Launch small-scale temporary public art projects	
	Pilot weekend street activation in one sub-district	

Community Engagement		
	Host quarterly community forums to build resident and business connection to and a sense of ownership of the District	Staff time
	Establish artist/creative community advisory group	
	Create business owner networking events	
	Survey residents and visitors on programming preferences to establish ongoing assessment and evaluation processes of District activities	

**YEAR 2: Building Momentum (Months 13-24)**

**Priority Actions (Months 13-18)**

**Complete Essential Planning**

	Finalize and adopt comprehensive wayfinding plan	Consulting fees for design firm specializing in wayfinding and placemaking. Estimate fees in the range of \$50,000-\$90,000 – this may include the assessment indicated above. Refer to section the appendix on resources for wayfinding design firms.
	Complete marketing strategy and implementation roadmap	Engage a marketing firm to develop a comprehensive marketing master plan. Estimate fees in the range of \$50,000 - \$75,000
	Develop public art guidelines and installation procedures	Engage a firm specializing in public art master planning and program design to develop procedures and program guidelines. Estimate range of \$40,000 - \$70,000.
	Create design standards for District development	Integrated with branding and/or wayfinding design projects

**Implement Infrastructure Improvements - Phase 1**

	Install priority wayfinding signage at major entry points and key intersections	Capital expenditure. Costs will depend on design, fabrication and materials costs
	Complete lighting improvements in highest-priority areas	Capital expenditure, to be determined
	Launch improved parking information system (signage, digital, maps)	Capital expenditure, to be determined

**Formalize BID Structure**

	Develop BID petition and secure property owner signatures	Staff time, legal and professional costs of BID approval and formation
	Common Council adopts ordinance establishing special services district	
	Plan and advocate for, and conduct, the required property owner voter referendum	
	Designate District Advisory Board as BID oversight body	
	Establish BID operational budget and assessment structure	

**Expand Marketing and Promotion**

	Launch comprehensive digital marketing campaign	Staff time and expenses to be determined with marketing plan
	Develop partnerships with regional media outlets	Staff time
	Create District mobile app or enhanced digital presence	Engage app design firm. Cost and fees to be determined
	Implement multi-channel event promotion system	Staff time

Ongoing Actions (Months 13-24)

Programming Expansion

	Develop first signature annual festival concept and plan	Year one is likely to require significant investment in key components and testing revenue models to build into an annual event. Recommend budget up to \$300,000 for initial event
	Expand monthly programming to all three sub-districts	To be determined. Utilize guide on small scale activation for budget development
	Launch public art installation series	Staff time plus project costs TBD
	Establish artist-in-residence or artist showcase program	Establish an annual budget for artist in residence fees with a range of \$12,000 - \$18,000 annually per residency plus allocation for project costs (materials, etc.)

Artist and Creative Community Support

	Identify and catalog affordable space opportunities	Staff time
	Launch small grant or microgrant program for artists	Budget to be determined based on the number of microgrants available in the program. Recommend minimum microgrants of \$5,000 with 10-12 available annually
	Create artist directory and promotional platform	Staff tome

Revenue Development		
	Hire or contract for development/fundraising capacity	Costs will vary depending on if engaging hourly or on standing retainer. Anticipate hourly minimum of \$50 - \$75 an hour for grant writers
	Secure first major corporate or business sponsorships	Staff and/or contract time
	Apply for state and federal grants	Staff and/or contract time
	Launch "Friends of Norwalk Arts District" membership program	Staff time for program design, launch and ongoing management
Community Engagement		
	Host quarterly community forums to strengthen resident and business connection to and a sense of ownership of the District	Staff time
	Continue artist/creative community advisory group	
	Continue business owner networking events	
	As needed, survey residents and visitors on programming preferences to establish ongoing assessment and evaluation processes of District activities	

**YEAR 3: Consolidation and Growth (Months 25-36)**

**Priority Actions (Months 25-30)**

**Complete BID Transition**

	Transfer District management from City to independent BID structure	Staff and Advisory Board time
	Transition District Manager and staff to BID employment	
	Establish BID Board of Commissioners with formal governance structure	
	Implement full BID revenue collection and operations	

**Infrastructure Improvements - Phase 2**

	Complete comprehensive wayfinding system installation	Capital expenditure budget to be developed as needed
	Implement additional lighting and safety improvements	
	Launch trolley/shuttle feasibility study or pilot program	
	Complete streetscape improvements in priority areas	

**Major Programming Launch**

	Debut first major signature annual festival	Staff time and program budgets for each item as developed during planning
	Establish full calendar of recurring monthly/weekly programs	
	Launch substantial public art commissions (temporary or permanent)	
	Implement historical interpretation/heritage activation projects	

Ongoing Actions (Months 25-36)

Organizational Capacity Building

	Add Marketing Director position	Estimate salary and related costs between \$90,000 - \$110,000
	Expand programming and operations staff as needed	To be determined based on available fund through newly established BID
	Develop volunteer program structure	Staff time

Evaluate and Refine

	Conduct comprehensive program evaluation	Staff time
	Survey stakeholders, residents, and visitors	
	Assess economic impact and foot traffic data	
	Refine strategies based on performance data	

Long-Term Planning

	Develop 5-year strategic plan for BID	Staff time if managed internally. Estimate \$45,000 - \$70,000 if consulting/external planners are engaged
	Identify capital project priorities (Palace Theater, public spaces, etc.)	Staff time
	Plan affordable housing/live-work space development strategies	Staff time. Integrate with strategic planning
	Expand artist support programs and anti-displacement initiatives	Staff time. Integrate with strategic planning

Deepen Community Integration

	Expand multicultural programming reflecting Norwalk's diversity	Staff and Advisory Board time
	Strengthen youth and family programming	
	Enhance accessibility and inclusion across all programs	
	Build neighborhood-specific programming in each sub-district	

Community Engagement		
	Host quarterly community forums to strengthen resident and business connection to and a sense of ownership of the District	Staff time
	Continue artist/creative community advisory group	
	Continue business owner networking events	
	As needed, survey residents and visitors on programming preferences to establish ongoing assessment and evaluation processes of District activities	

**YEARS 4-5: Maturation and Expansion. - Strategic Goals for Measuring District Success**

**Sustainable Operations**

- Achieve stable diversified revenue streams (BID assessments, grants, sponsorships, earned income)
- Demonstrate measurable economic impact (property values, business growth, job creation)
- Maintain robust programming calendar year-round

**Physical Development**

- Support adaptive reuse of historic buildings (Palace Theater priority)
- Facilitate artist housing and live-work space development
- Implement major public space improvements
- Complete connectivity improvements between sub-districts

**Program Excellence**

- Establish signature events with regional/national recognition
- Maintain diverse programming serving multiple demographics
- Support thriving local artist community with opportunities and resources
- Create model for equitable cultural district development

**Regional Leadership**

- Position Norwalk as Connecticut cultural district model
- Share best practices with other communities
- Attract state and national attention/awards
- Generate cultural tourism economic impact



# ATTACHMENTS

# SMALL SCALE ACTIVATIONS

Following are examples of small-scale activations and approaches to placemaking for consideration in developing a program for the Norwalk Arts District.

Examples:

- Sebastopol, California's temporary parklets using plywood and OSB walls, customized by adjacent businesses for a successful one-day activation
- Nashville's Civic Design Center using PARK(ing) Day parklets to demonstrate value of public space before transitioning to permanent installations
- Minneapolis' Cultural Districts Pop-up Art & Cultural Activations Program providing grants up to \$5,000 for temporary projects including dance, drumming, performance, interactive installations, and hands-on activities
- Seattle's Arts in Parks program commissioning site-specific outdoor temporary artworks lasting 45 days to eight weeks
- Three New York City BIDs partnering to display art in vacant storefronts and create gallery walks
- Downtown Orlando's activation program expecting over 850 experiences programmed annually with \$1.189 million in funding
- Boston's Neighborhood Activation Grant program supporting community-focused arts activations in public spaces
- Covington, Kentucky's themed parklets including a life-size xylophone outside a toy shop and a boxing ring near a barber shop

## Quick Win Programming: Small-Scale Temporary Activations

### Street-Level Pop-Up Installations

**Parklets (Temporary Public Spaces)** Parklets transform one or two parking spaces into vibrant community gathering places, typically measuring 8 feet by 18 feet, with elevated platforms that create seating areas, greenery, and bike parking. In Sebastopol, California, community members constructed three temporary parklets using plywood floors and OSB walls, which were then customized by adjacent businesses with seating and artwork for a one-day activation that demonstrated strong community interest. Nashville's Civic Design Center used temporary parklets on PARK(ing) Day to advocate for permanent public space, eventually leading to their first permanent parklet installation.

**For Norwalk:** Wall Street and Washington Street could host temporary parklets outside restaurants, galleries, or music venues like District Music Hall, creating instant gathering spaces that test community interest before committing to permanent installations.

**Pop-Up Parks and Play Spaces** Moveable and pop-up installations can be deployed flexibly, including locating freestanding play installations on sidewalk corners, creating "pop-up parks-within-parks" at existing parks, or housing installations in repurposed shipping containers that transport between locations. The Bethel Revitalization Initiative hosted a two-day "Bethel Better Block" event with multiple pop-ups in the downtown area, incorporating a temporary multimodal lane for walking, bicycling, and wheelchairs.

**For Norwalk:** Irving Freese Park or spaces along the Norwalk River Valley Trail could host weekend pop-up play installations or interactive art experiences, particularly family-friendly activations that address community requests for more children's programming

## Community Arts Activations

**Temporary Art Installations and Interactive Projects** Minneapolis' Cultural Districts Pop-up Art & Cultural Activations Program provides grants up to \$5,000 for temporary projects including dance, drumming, songwriting, performance, improv theater, poetry, puppetry, interactive installations, hands-on activities for youth and families, and storytelling through film and visual art. Seattle's Arts in Parks program commissions artists to create site-specific outdoor temporary artworks or social practice activities lasting 45 days to eight weeks, with projects designed to activate spaces, engage pedestrians, and create unique sense of place through creative practice.

**For Norwalk:** District management could launch a small grants program (starting with \$1,000-\$3,000 awards) for local artists to create temporary installations at rotating locations throughout the three sub-districts, building on Norwalk's existing creative community at spaces like Space 67 Studios and Factory Underground.

**Vacant Storefront Activations** Three New York City BIDs partnered with an arts nonprofit to display art and create gallery walks in vacant storefronts, creating themes, putting together calls for submissions to artists, and recruiting property owners. Downtown Orlando's activation program, managed by United Arts with \$1.189 million in funding, focuses on public spaces, sidewalks, storefronts, and buildings, expecting over 850 experiences programmed throughout the year.

**For Norwalk:** Empty storefronts along Wall Street could become rotating artist showcases or community exhibition spaces, with simple window installations visible 24/7 and occasional open-studio hours on First Fridays.

## Performance and Cultural Programming

**Street Performance and Busking Programs** Minneapolis Downtown Improvement District produced live streaming shows from street performers and specially recorded "Street Show Gems" taped at quintessential downtown locations, with artist payments matched by contributions to social justice organizations.

**For Norwalk:** Launch a designated busking program with permitted performance spots at key locations (outside Factory Underground, along Washington Street restaurant row, at the Waypointe plaza) with clear guidelines for hours, amplification, and tip collection. Start with weekend programming and expand based on community response.

**Social Practice and Community Engagement** Activities Boston's Neighborhood Activation Grant program supports community-focused arts and cultural activations including site-specific performance art, immersive arts installations, community celebrations, interactive theater productions, film screenings with conversation, cultural festivals, and community dialogues that center the arts. Funded activations emphasize community engagement and site-specific responsiveness, incorporating hands-on activities that respond directly to community needs while centering community-driven cultural practices.

**For Norwalk:** Host monthly community art-making events in public spaces (similar to the successful "Wishing Tree" engagement used during planning), outdoor film screenings on building walls, or storytelling circles that celebrate Norwalk's diverse immigrant communities and multicultural heritage.

## Tactical Urbanism and Demonstration Projects

**Quick-Build Street Transformations** Pop-up designs and activations use a "do-it-yourself" approach to temporarily transform public space, using examples like converting parking spaces into parklets and using alleys for community events, with planning consisting of engaging community members, building demonstration projects, and hosting events. In Covington, Kentucky, a group called Curb'd created temporary parklets as fun reflections of neighboring areas—including a life-size xylophone outside a toy shop, a boxing ring themed parklet near a barber shop, and a huge igloo where visitors could hang personal handwritten wishes.

**For Norwalk:** Create themed temporary installations that reflect neighborhood character—maritime-themed parklets near the waterfront in SoNo, music-themed installations near District Music Hall, or industrial-heritage designs along Wall Street's historic corridor.

**Pilot Programming** Before Permanent Investment Pop-up parklets in Sebastopol used lightweight, moveable furniture that residents could easily reconfigure for different group sizes, and umbrellas that could be repositioned for shade, demonstrating that flexible design elements invited more visitors and led several businesses to express interest in permanent parklets.

**For Norwalk:** Test concepts like the proposed trolley/shuttle with a weekend pilot using rented vehicles before committing to permanent infrastructure. Try temporary protected bike lanes with paint and cones before permanent installation. Host a one-day "open streets" event closing part of Wall Street or Washington Street to cars.

## Implementation Strategies for Quick Wins

**Low-Cost Materials and DIY Approach** Start with simple, affordable materials: plywood platforms, potted plants, folding chairs, string lights, paint, and chalk. Partner with local businesses, artists, and community volunteers for design and construction.

**Lending Library of Materials** Communities can reduce expenses associated with pop-ups by creating a lending library of materials that community members can use to host events, and by creating resources to help build safer pop-up installations including guidance for quick-build parklets and pedestrian plazas.

**Streamlined Permitting** Work with the City to develop expedited permit processes for temporary activations lasting one day to several months, similar to approaches used during COVID-19 for outdoor dining.

**Seasonal and Event-Based Timing** Launch initial activations during warmer months (May-October) and tie them to existing events (farmers markets, First Fridays, festivals) to build on existing foot traffic.

**Evaluation and Documentation** Photograph all activations, count participants, gather informal feedback, and track social media engagement. Use data to demonstrate impact and build support for permanent installations or expanded programming

## Budget Considerations

### Micro-Activations: \$500-\$2,000

- Chalk art installations
- Temporary window displays
- Small pop-up performances
- Community art-making stations

### Small-Scale Activations: \$2,000-\$5,000

- Simple parklets (one weekend)
- Temporary mural projects
- Pop-up artist showcases
- Interactive installations

### Mid-Scale Activations: \$5,000-\$15,000

- Multi-day events
- Multiple simultaneous activations
- More substantial temporary structures
- Artist residencies or extended programming

These quick wins generate immediate visibility, test community response, demonstrate District momentum, and create content for marketing—all while building toward more substantial long-term programming and infrastructure investments.



Norwalk Mural Park  
Scott Chiappetta, 2021



Washington Street  
Jeff Klein, 2019

## RESOURCES FOR WAYFINDING PROGRAMS

MIG is a comprehensive multidisciplinary firm offering Environmental Graphic Design and Wayfinding as part of broader planning and design services including Cultural Places, Downtown Planning and Design, Placemaking, and Public Art Consulting.

RSM Design specializes in well-designed wayfinding systems that add value to cultural centers, galleries, museums, and entertainment districts.

Corbin Design has proven experience with Fort Worth's Cultural District, creating systems that differentiate districts while trailblazing between them using color logic incorporated into signage

Two Twelve is a minority- and women-owned New York firm with extensive performing arts experience including the Perelman Performing Arts Center and David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center

Mijksenaar has 35 years of experience with museums and cultural environments, focusing on creating identity through wayfinding

Gensler is a global architecture, design, and planning firm with extensive wayfinding experience with MoMA, Cedars-Sinai Hospital, San Francisco Airport, and other clients.



Sheffield Island Ferry  
Patrick Sikes, 2021

# CULTURAL DISTRICTS COMPARISON STUDY

The purpose of the comparison study is to inform planning and management choices for the Norwalk Arts District. Six districts were selected based on having one or more relevant characteristics to Norwalk: mixed arts/history focus; significant residential population; nearby competition; strong business/property owner presence; and/or similar city population size (~92,000). To be clear, arts and culture districts are highly individualized and distinct from one another, reflecting their unique mix of cultural assets, history and culture, objectives, and many other factors. Therefore, this comparison is best viewed as a collection of insights from across places that share both similarities and differences to Norwalk.

- Boulder CO Pearl Street District
- Fort Worth TX Cultural District
- Knoxville TN Arts District
- New Orleans Warehouse Arts District
- Philadelphia Avenue of the Arts
- Portland ME Arts District

A table with data for each district on the following is attached:

- Identity
- Area
- Goals
- Key Assets
- Programs
- Management
- Funding
- Population
- Observations

**Overall Conclusion:** The most successful cultural districts combine professional management, stable funding, consistent programming, and compact geographic scale. Norwalk's challenge will be adapting these proven models to work within its larger geographic footprint while leveraging its unique maritime heritage, historic properties, and multicultural character to create a differentiated regional arts destination.



SONO Sign  
Patrick Sikes, 2021

## Overall Observations

- **Goals and Functions:** All districts have an objective of marketing and promotion. Most focus on cleanliness, safety, and walkability – the visitor experience. Also, most produce a wide variety of public programming, much of it free. Districts with a strong presence of arts institutions rely less on district-produced programs and more on programming offered by the institutions.
- **Management:** All but one district have a management entity with professional staff and ongoing operational funding. Boulder and Knoxville have two organizations that collaborate, dividing responsibility for arts and a business improvement district. The Arts District of New Orleans is the outlier, being a small budget and all-volunteer nonprofit.
- **Area:** Four districts have “compact, walkable areas” that are strongly associated with successful districts, since they provide a concentration of assets and visitor experience. By contrast, Norwalk is larger, extending approximately 1.5 miles from Wall Street through West Avenue to Washington Avenue, and nearly 2.5 miles to its southern boundary. Philadelphia and Fort Worth were selected as comparable districts in part because they also have larger areas. Philadelphia extends approximately 1 mile and Fort Worth 2.1 miles.
- **Connectivity:** Larger geographic areas pose significant challenges with connectivity and coherence. The larger districts – Philadelphia and Fort Worth – have made specific efforts to enhance connectivity. Philadelphia has the advantage of a corridor (a ten-block area of Broad Street) served by a subway line; it has made long-term and ongoing efforts to improve the pedestrian experience and create public spaces with streetscaping and urban design improvements. Fort Worth has relied primarily on mixed use real estate developments to provide infill and connectivity.
- **Programming:** Apart from the programming provided by the arts organizations and businesses in the district, districts themselves produce regular and special event programs to provide consistent activation and define the character/attraction of the area. The most common program is a monthly art walk, which provides continuity and help creates connections within the district. All districts produce large, signature events. Most also produce a range of activations, programs, and events throughout the year.
- **Residential Population:** Several districts have significant residential population and have supported residential/mixed use real estate development. Philadelphia has an active “Friends of” organization that produces networking, social, and community services events. The presence of residents – those who live in the district or in the city – influences the character of programming and marketing, as distinguished from districts focused primarily on tourism.
- **Key Assets:** Each district has a unique mix of cultural assets that help define its identity. That said, there are different emphases that inform programming and other activities. Philadelphia is focused primarily on performing arts and Fort Worth on its major museums and entertainment venues. Boulder, Knoxville and Portland rely on smaller-scale, community-oriented events, shopping, restaurants, and arts venues. New Orleans is heavily influenced by its long history and NOLA cultural traditions that predated the formation of the district.
- **Funding:** All districts except New Orleans have ongoing sources of operating funds that support a level of organizational capacity for management, marketing, programming and other functions. Sources include business improvement district revenues, city funding, grants, contributions, sponsorships, fundraising events, program revenues, and state and federal funding.

# Considerations/Options for Norwalk

## **BID or Dual Management Structure (Boulder & Knoxville)**

- Business Improvement District managing infrastructure/services
- Potentially partnering with separate Arts Alliance for cultural programming and advocacy
- Professional staff with volunteer board governance
- Stable special assessment funding from property owners

## **Portland's Nonprofit Partnership Model**

- Creative Portland Corporation as official nonprofit arts agency
- City partnership with grant funding leverage
- Professional management with community engagement focus

## **Programming Success Patterns**

**Monthly Programming Anchors:** Every successful district features **First**

**Friday/Saturday Art Walks** as their cornerstone:

- Consistent 5-8 PM timeframe across all districts
- Free, self-guided format with 15-30 participating venues
- 1,000-30,000 attendance depending on district size

**Annual Signature Events:** Large summer festivals (20,000-30,000 attendance) serve as economic drivers:

- New Orleans: White Linen Night (August) - 20,000-30,000 attendees
- Knoxville: Recognized as #2 "Best Arts District" nationally
- Portland: First Friday model operating since 2000

**Unique Positioning:** Norwalk can leverage its distinctive assets:

- Annual Art Festival
- Maritime heritage (Oyster Festival model)
- Multicultural population (NICE Festival approach)
- Historic architecture and waterfront location

## **Promotion of Programs Produced by Arts Organizations and Venues in the District:**

Coordinating and promoting programs without having to produce them.

**Additional Programs, Projects & Activities:** Provide ongoing, continuous activity and granularity:

- Gallery openings, small-scale music performances
- Street performers/busking
- Public art, temporary installations, and community-involved arts projects
- Bike parades, dog events

**Program Norwalk as Two Areas:** Brand and program Wall Street and SoNo as distinct areas.

## CULTURAL DISTRICT DATA TABLE

DISTRICT	BOULDER CO PEARL STREET DISTRICT	PORTLAND ME ARTS DISTRICT	NEW ORLEANS WAREHOUSE ARTS DISTRICT	KNOXVILLE TN ARTS DISTRICT	FORT WORTH TX CULTURAL DISTRICT	PHILADELPHIA AVENUE OF THE ARTS
<b>IDENTITY</b>	<p>40+ year old historic district with strong mix of arts venues, retail, and dining in pedestrian-friendly environment. Not a formal arts district, rather a de facto arts district within the downtown area.</p>	<p>Designated in 1995, it is a formal arts district within downtown Portland.</p>	<p>THE AREA DATES TO THE 19TH CENTURY AS STORAGE AREA FOR THE PORT BUT WAS DESIGNATED IN THE 1990S FOR REVITALIZATION AND REMAINS AN AUTHENTIC NOLA CULTURAL DISTRICT. GROWING RESIDENTIAL POPULATION</p>	<p>Not a formally designated arts district, rather a downtown managed by a business improvement district with a strong arts partner.</p>	<p>State-designated cultural district west of downtown Fort Worth. Strong residential population (4,000+) and significant growth and mixed-use real estate development.</p>	<p>Philadelphia's premier performing arts and mixed-use downtown district with a substantial residential population (4,000+). Major urban design improvements are underway to increase connectivity and pedestrian experience and create new outdoor and pop-up performances and public art.</p>
<b>AREA</b>	<p>Compact 3- by 6-block area straddling Pearl Street.</p>	<p>Highly walkable area centered on Congress Street in downtown Portland, a few blocks from the waterfront and approximately 10-15 square blocks total</p>	<p>LOCATED ON THE 300-600 BLOCKS OF JULIA STREET AND THE IMMEDIATE SURROUNDING AREA, THE DISTRICT ENCOMPASSES A HISTORIC SECTION OF DOWNTOWN NEW ORLEANS.</p>	<p>0.67 square-mile, walkable historic downtown district (Volunteer Landing to the Southern Railway tracks north of Jackson in the Old City, and 11th Street west of the Knoxville Art Museum to Hall of Fame Drive).</p>	<p>While the museum area is 120 acres, the entire geography is much larger, extending 2.1 miles wide and including residential, entertainment, and mixed-use areas.</p>	<p>A one-mile stretch of Broad Avenue, extending alongside into the neighborhoods.</p>

<p><b>GOALS</b></p>	<p>To engage both visitors and locals through arts, culture, innovation, and inclusive, community-driven experiences in downtown Boulder</p>	<p>To promote Portland's cultural community and creative economy</p>	<p>To connect, promote and support the architecturally distinctive historic area and its diverse businesses.</p>	<p>To ensure a vibrant, flourishing downtown. The mission of the Arts &amp; culture Alliance of Greater Knoxville is to serve and support a diverse community of artists, arts organizations, and cultural institutions.</p>	<p>To invest in the success of the district; promote a cohesive and identifiable district; maintain the safety, security, and mobility of the district; and participate in dialogue with key stakeholders about promotion and preservation of the district.</p>	<p>To encourage cultural and economic development in the district.</p>
<p><b>KEY ASSETS</b></p>	<p>200+ stores, restaurants, galleries, public art, public spaces</p>	<p>Galleries, theatres, Main College of Art &amp; Portland Museum of Art, dance studios, music venues, bars, cafes, restaurants and specialty shops</p>	<p>Contemporary art galleries, National WWII Museum, Ogden Museum of Southern Art, jazz clubs, a rotating outdoor public sculpture collection, numerous cafés, bars and restaurants, including James Beard award-winning restaurants.</p>	<p>Knoxville Museum of Art, Emporium (Arts) Center, UT Downtown Gallery, Old City (historic area), Blount Mansion, James White Fort, Curio at Maker Exchange, Museum of East Tennessee History, Women/s Basketball Hall of Fame, additional art galleries, studios, murals &amp; performance spaces.</p>	<p>Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Kimbell Art Museum, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, and National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. Will Rogers Memorial Complex, Dickies Arena, and Casa Manana, and the Fort Worth Community Arts Center. Fort Worth Botanical Garden and Will Rogers Memorial (equestrian) Center, public art throughout.</p>	<p>The district is anchored by major institutions on and near Broad Street: Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, the Academy of Music, Miller Theater, Wilma Theater, Liacouras Center, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. There are 73 restaurants and 10 hotels.</p>

<p><b>PROGRAMS</b></p>	<p>Annual Pearl Street Arts Fest, "Bands on the Bricks" outdoor performances, street performers, galleries, artisan shops, public art. Programming continues in winter including a series of holiday events.</p>	<p>First Friday Art Walk, digital A/R V/R public art walk, Movies in the Park, Alive at Five Music Series, ongoing arts programs and activations, holiday events, dog events.</p>	<p>Monthly free gallery receptions, three major annual fundraisers (Jammin' on Julia, White Linen Night &amp; Art for Arts' Sake), plus programming in the institutions and businesses located in the district.</p>	<p>First Friday ArtWalk, programming by the organizations, venues, institutions and businesses in the district.</p>	<p>Programming is provided primarily by the institutions in the district.</p>	<p>Programming is provided primarily by the institutions in the district.</p>
<p><b>MANAGEMENT</b></p>	<p>Shared management structure: 1) the City manages public spaces and provides arts support, and 2) Downtown Boulder Partnership (BID) manages the overall district. In addition, the Downtown Management Commission has an advisory role.</p>	<p>Creative Portland Corporation, a nonprofit designated as the city's official arts agency.</p>	<p>Arts District of New Orleans Association, a small-budget volunteer-run nonprofit organization.</p>	<p>Downtown Knoxville Alliance is a business improvement district managing the historic downtown area. The Arts &amp; Culture Alliance of Greater Knoxville is the designated local arts agency supporting the arts community and producing programming.</p>	<p>Managed by the Fort Worth Cultural District Alliance, a nonprofit which operates as a membership-based organization. The organization manages both the cultural programming and advocates for district development and improvement.</p>	<p>Managed by Avenue of the Arts, Inc., a nonprofit that focuses on marketing, promotion, coordination, and development. In addition, Friends of the Avenue of the Arts, an associate organization of the district, is a community of residents and those who work in and around the Avenue of the Arts district. The group supports the businesses and arts organizations in the area through social, networking and community service events.</p>

<b>FUNDING</b>	1) city funding, 2) business improvement district revenues, 3) sponsorships & contributions	City funding, grants & contributions.	Fundraising events, grants, sponsorships & partnerships.	The Downtown Knoxville Alliance relies primarily on special assessment district revenues. The Arts & Culture Alliance is a nonprofit with government funding, grants, contributions, and other revenues.	The Fort Worth Cultural District Alliance operates through a membership-based funding model. The district also benefits from major private development investments, as evidenced by several luxury mixed-use projects that have opened or are under construction.	Avenue of the Arts, Inc. operates through a project-based funding model, with state grants, private donations, foundation grants, and project-specific allocations from the city. It is currently requesting a five-year funding commitment from the city to stabilize operating support.
<b>CITY POPULATION</b>	106,000	66,000	364,000	198,000	978,000	1.55 million
<b>OBSERVATIONS</b>	Strength comes from well-established and -integrated visitor experience in concentrated area: shopping, restaurants, arts, activation, community events, historic preservation, etc.	A well-established destination in a compact historic downtown area with strong arts character and activity.	This district does not have a well-funded management organization but provides a limited amount of programming and marketing.	Knoxville's arts ecosystem operates through a collaborative network of organizations within the broader downtown improvement district framework.	The district stands out as an organization focusing on and benefitting from strong partnerships with the private sector. The district is currently exploring, in partnership with the City and area business owners, the establishment of a Public Improvement District.	The district has strong connectivity along its one-mile corridor, with a subway line under Broad Street and strong walkability. Density of assets, infrastructure improvements, and infill developments have contributed to this, with a major streetscape project underway.

# GROUP EVENT ENGAGEMENT INPUT

## Artist & Creatives Roundtable Mixer

Spacecat Whisker Room  
57 Chestnut Street  
4/15/25

Overview of the event: Approximately 40 individual artists and creatives attended an evening open house session that included food and drinks, networking/socializing, and comments relevant to the Norwalk Arts District Plan. Posterboards provided information and posed questions to attendees.

*What should be the purpose of the Arts District (Wall Street and SoNo)? What should the district try to accomplish?*

*Help make a name for Norwalk - will attract visitors!*

*To act as a hub for artists to collaborate/showcase their art/work, 2) provide activated space for the community to gather that isn't eating/drinking, 3) allow a space for the community to express itself.*

*Create space for celebration of the arts.*

*Make Norwalk the arts capital of Fairfield County.*

*Inclusivity and inspire, let people know art is for everyone.*

*To make art (ripple, ripple).*

*To educate the values of culture and curiosity.*

*To improve quality of life through regular exposures, access to art as both consumers and creators.*

*Purpose: engage the community, educate, and inspire. Aim: have workshops, musical performances, dance performances and classes, affordable opportunities to learn.*

*Accomplish what schools leave out. Anyone can make art. Music is for everyone. Arts and culture fill in the gaps.*

*To create the best environment where people feel they can best express themselves.*

*Should accomplish unity. Community. Spark interest. Create space that fosters expression. Partner with local businesses interested in showcasing local artists.*

*What should the Arts District (Wall Street and SoNo) do? What should its functions be? What should it not do?*

*Do more events all year long!!*

*Do not limit the district to one type of media/medium.*

*Bring live theatre back!*

*Do: 1) celebrate the arts year round through event., 2) draw in visitors, 3) create a safe space for artists.*

Don't: 1) encourage unaffordability and gentrification, 2) create barriers to entry, 3) be exclusive to one type of business/media/medium.

More events. Be open to all artforms. Affordable open studios.

I echo my support for other comments to do more events like pop-ups, showcases and collaborations with schools, but i would also like to see more community-focused events that incorporate local artists. For example, having an art studio bring supplies for an ornament-making station at the Wall Street Xmas event.

Keep doing events, get involved in Manresa Lab Corp, offer pop-up workshops at local events and schools.

It should not drive out lower income citizens.

Improve facilities.

Operational and marketing support for arts orgs.

Provide grants.

Focus on spaces to create and connect rather than galleries which can feel inaccessible.

Showcase local creatives, host an event or events where creatives can submit event ideas or create a platform where ideas can be submitted. Possibly a forum where other creatives can see and reach out.

Create a forum where ideas can be seen by investors or people who want to sponsor ideas.

Offer grant programs and partner with local creatives who are willing to take out permits for events in public places and spaces but can't cover funds for insurance policies.

Hosting community and creative events where artists, musicians, and all others can share their gifts and talents. Awareness creates opportunities.

### What would a successful arts district (Wall Street and SoNo) look like 5-10 years from now?

A successful and revitalized Palace Theater.

Affordable artist live/work areas/opportunities.

Cohesive hub for art and artists to thrive and bloom.

The arts are essential for the town, the community and the world; especially these days.

Artist resource spaces, collaboration, educational information, grants, funding opportunities, open calls, renting space.

Look at communities that have this already. Ridgefield CT, Palo Alto CA, S. Bend, Miami. What do they have?

Create a great community environment that promotes people who share ideas and explore different opportunities.

Occupied spaces that are currently empty. Collaborative spaces that partner to share with the community.

Regular events where artists can perform and ? Do pop-ups!

*Featured artist pop-ups! Healthy kick-starts for up and coming artists.*

*Physical space to convene, collaborate, and showcase.*

### **How can the arts district (Wall street and SoNo) benefit Norwalk's creative sector? Your organization/business or creative practice?**

*Create opportunities for grant programs to support business and artists and events.*

*Help local creatives with similar events connecting different creatives.*

*Help creatives connect through events, social media.*

*Among the obvious, it could allow for collaborations among artists, businesses, schools, and city officials.*

*Second this! Make connections between working artists and businesses in need of art.*

*Demand generation.*

*Have multiple interviews on local channels and highlight Wall Street artists to show what we can do!*

*Develop a platform in which creatives can share ideas on collaborations, make connections, and have more events like these. :)*

*Providing financial opportunities for creatives and entrepreneurs to stay funded is always appreciated*

*Continue to host events like today. Spread the word of this event as much as possible. Offer suggestion boxes for ideas/events and sponsor one or more.*

### **How can the arts district (Wall Street and SoNo) benefit the community?**

*Gives the community an accepting space to explore their interests and childlike side.*

*Cohesive marketing and identity with a focus on arts and cultural assets and businesses.*

*Be fearless when sharing art with the people.*

*Lots more marketing! Many freelance marketers in the area that could help with that :)*

*Not only multicultural but multigenerations. Bring populations together.*

*It would be beneficial for the community in many ways. Positively effecting our youths and OG artists. Creating mentorships and connections.*

*Art benefits the community because art heals. Art has been proven to boost economies.*

*More independent cinema.*

*Diverse events downtown can bring our very diverse city together.*

What are the strengths of the arts district (Wall Street and SooNo)? What makes it special and what should we be building on?

*Diversity of cultures and diversity of arts assets.*

*FAM Art Studios lead by 5ivefingaz consists of a group of diverse artists. We host quarterly open studios and regular workshops. Wall Street.*

*Supporting local artists and all types of art. These events are great.*

*Open Mic Night @ EcoEvolution*

*Ask local businesses to host artists. Give them a place to show their art for a short time.*

*A strength of the Wall st. area in particular is that it already has some established corner stores in the community including Factory Underground and the District Music Hall.*

*Geographic location.*

*Norwalk Film Festival*

*Free music in Irving Freese Park!*

*I haven't heard much about the arts here and I've been here six years. More exposure!!*

*There's an abundance of local talent, skilled artists, and arbiters of taste. I don't want to be a hidden gem - artists and neighborhoods need money and exposure.*

*Great representation for visual arts - needs more space for local (original) music!*

*Celebrate immigration! N.I.C.E Festival.*

*Great music @ District Music Hall.*

## Business Mixer

Space67 Studio

7/31/25

Overview of the event: Approximately 35 stakeholders from the business and creative community attended an evening open house session that included food and drinks, networking/socializing, and comments relevant to the Norwalk Arts District Plan. Posterboards provided information and posed questions to attendees.

*Do the observations and thoughts on identity, strengths and purpose of the District resonate with you?*

*Norwalk is an amazing place to live. It just is!*

*How can we celebrate our history? Who are our heroes?*

*Love the history and diversity of Norwalk.*

*It's too easy to be anonymous these days. Give folks every excuse to feel like Norwalk is home and they're proud of it!*

*How can the Arts District support and promote businesses in the District?*

*Educational nature walks & foraging to raise awareness and incorporate art into nature*

*Art walk or murals and pieces sponsored by local businesses. QR code and optional donation to the Norwalk Public Schools.*

*Help us develop the local audience.*

*Advocate for the removal of limited commercial kitchen licenses that are driving up the restaurant rents in South Norwalk.*

*Welcome more shops. Les restaurants and bars.*

*Figureout ways to subsidize rent for businesses that will draw street traffic.*

*Have Norwalk Chamber website be better organized to separate businesses by industries to make it easy to reach others in similar fields.*

*Highlighting businesses during community events to increase awareness for businesses.*

*Provide funding (low rent) to local shops.*

*Keep highlighting us and our events online and on local flyers, etc.*

*Small business saturday/sunday highlighting different one each week - a portion of profits to go to local community nonprofit or education education health access, etc.*

*We need a place to get a healthy lunch!*

*City-owned - not developer - housing for artists at affordable rents.*

## How can the Arts District benefit the community?

*Generating a feeling of connection, belonging and pride to be in a great community*

*By differentiating Norwalk from other towns*

*Connect all of Norwalk (including East Norwalk)*

*Show what smart development looks like - arts, nature, responsible housing, culture - balanced*

*The Art District makes Norwalk a wonderful place to live, work, and visit! It helps install a sense of pride of place.*

*Recognize people in the community who have had a large impact.*

*Prevent soul-less development/architecture. We don't need more Waypointes.*

*Don't trash Norwalk institutions for short-sighted development gains*

*Develop a brand and identity and offer merch so folks can show their pride*

*Work with Space 67 and Factory Underground and other spaces to offer affordable/free spaces for clubs*

*Provide residents and guests with a safe space to share their creativity and promote collaboration*

*Tell the stories of the amazing people who live here*

*Support local gathering spaces*

*Promote clubs and groups people can join*

*Youth programs and education*

*Access to arts and education for low income families*

## Programming Ideas (a sticky dot exercise to indicate approval)

*All choices received at least 4 dots*

*Street performers and outdoor live arts (10 dots)*

*Gallery, studio and art walk events (9 dots)*

*Community-focused events (8 dots)*

*Major signature festivals (6 dots)*

*Pop-up and temporary art activations (5 dots)*

*Family-friendly arts programming (5 dots)*

*Cultural-specific celebrations (5 dots)*

*Permanent and temporary public art (5 dots)*

*Historic events and heritage resources (4 dots)*

Do the suggestions on programming resonate with you? Any thoughts or additions?

*More music, opportunities for local music artists*

*Make it easier for people to find out about events*

*They are all wonderful ways to celebrate Norwalk*

*Historical reenactments*

*Would love to see all of these - be sure to distribute activities and involve existing organizations in these areas*

*More offerings for kids! Especially for little kids!*

*Roundtables for local business owners*

*Yes to all of this! Plus more ways for citizens to get involved and volunteer*

*Connect with people who aren't on social to promote these events*

*Free classes/workshops (art, featured speaker events) - working with local businesses to sponsor*

*Long table community dinners*

*More international touring groups*

*Find some Norwalk -centric way to install multiple outdoor art projects with a musical component, artist-painted ?, chimes, etc.*

*First Friday open house events*

What activities, programs, events and projects would you like to see in the South Norwalk area?

*We used to have a paint bar that was so cool. I miss that! I think it would be really cool to see again.*

*Bring back the Palace Theater!*

*One hour segments during the week and weekend for adults and kids to have some kind of activities, scavenger hunt, experience, pass the ball.*

*Group dance meeting for different ages in a community*

*Farmers market, art festival, halloween block party, more winter-based events*

*1st Nights in Norwalk with art vendors, food vendors, and live music*

*Sip and paint in the park for adults and teens*

*Something like the St. Kate Hotel in Milwaukee – art and lodging*

*More community-involving events*

*More closed street events with music and vendors*

*Thrown Stone CT Short Play Fest*

**What activities, programs, events and projects would you like to see in the Wall Street/West Avenue area?**

*Live theater please!!!*

*More outdoor theater!*

*Rec area: ping pong, space for people to learn to paint, draw, sewing, art space, small business pop-ups, laser tag, go karts, riding bicycles, group rides*

*Book club*

*Small businesses*

*Immersive museums*

*Full moon events*

*Block party event on Orchard*

*Skate nights*

*Film, theater*

*Working artists*

*More connections to nature - clean ups, tree plantings, invasive plant removal*

*Street Fair, Halloween parade, tree lighting, small concerts in the park*

*More social events where different professionals can connect*

*Art events or exhibits that tie in with wellness*

## Tree of Hope and Connection

Creative engagement alternative provided at the Business Mixer. Paper and art materials provide to create “leaves” to attach to a freestanding tree. Prompts: Write or draw one of the following, 1) a hope or wish you have for this community, 2) a word, symbol, or image that represents your culture, identity, or roots, 3) decorate your leaf with color, pattern, or texture.”

*4th of July / Halloween doggy parade*

*Art to benefit our schools*

*Attraction lights for event lighting / theme lights*

*Community communication*

*Expand library for more gallery / meeting space*

*Extend rail trail to Wilton*

*Free dance lessons*

*Get rid of interstate lights on Wall Street*

*Historical art*

*Historical stuff*

*Incorporating proceeds to benefit our schools*

*Jazz club*

*Lunch service for visiting boaters, better access to SoNo restaurants*

*Mardi Gras parade with help from troop 429 & jazz musicians*

*More buildings converted to dorms*

*More free gatherings*

*More guest ships at marinas along harbor*

*More kids' activities*

*More public art*

*Norwalk conservatory to expand to have bachelor's & masters degree in visual arts*

*Play game nights festivals*

*Support for women artists*

*VR Experiences / art scene*

*Wish: a place to try something new*

*Wish: everyone in Norwalk feels like they belong*

*Wish: to see Norwalk thrive*

*Wish: want Norwalk to be recognized for all of the talent and deep-rooted community history it has*



# GLOSSARY

**Arts District** – A well-recognized, labeled area of a city in which a high concentration of cultural facilities and programs serve as the main anchor of attraction, helping to strengthen local economies, create an enhanced sense of place, and deepen local cultural capacity.

**BID (Business Improvement District)** – A defined area within a municipality where local businesses and property owners agree to pay an additional assessment or fee to fund improvements and services that benefit the district. These services typically include enhanced cleaning, security, marketing, beautification, events, and infrastructure improvements that go beyond what the local government provides. BIDs are managed by a nonprofit organization or public-private partnership and are designed to revitalize commercial areas, attract customers, and increase property values.

**Busking** – Street performance by musicians, artists, or other entertainers in public spaces, often in designated areas with established guidelines for permits, hours, and amplification.

**Creative Placemaking** – A process where partners from public, private, nonprofit, and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities to animate public spaces, rejuvenate structures, improve business viability and public safety, and bring diverse people together.

**Cultural District** – See Arts District.

**Enterprise Zone** – A designated geographic area that offers economic incentives and tax benefits to encourage business development and investment.

**First Friday/Art Walk** – A recurring monthly event (typically held on the first Friday of each month) where galleries, studios, and cultural venues open their doors for extended evening hours, often featuring new exhibitions, performances, and special programming.

**Opportunity Zone** – A federally designated area offering tax incentives to encourage long-term investments in low-income communities.

**Public Art** – Artwork created for and displayed in public spaces, including sculptures, murals, installations, and interactive pieces accessible to the community.

**SSD (Special Services District)** – See Business Improvement District (BID). In Connecticut, this term is often used interchangeably with BID.

**Sub-district** – A smaller, walkable area within the larger Arts District that has its own distinct character and identity. In Norwalk, the three primary sub-districts are Wall Street, Waypointe, and Washington Street/SoNo.

**TOD (Transit-Oriented Development) District** – A designated area focused on mixed-use residential and commercial development within walking distance of public transportation, designed to increase ridership and reduce car dependency.

**Wayfinding** – A comprehensive system of signage, maps, digital tools, and design elements that help people navigate and discover assets within a district, including venues, public art, historic sites, and businesses.





## **City of Norwalk Merchandise Design Competition Call for Artists and Creators**

The City of Norwalk invites local artists, illustrators, designers, and creatives to participate in the Norwalk Merchandise Design Competition — an opportunity to have your artwork featured on official City of Norwalk merchandise.

Winning designs will appear on items such as T-shirts, tote bags, hats, mugs, stickers, and other promotional products. Selected artists will be credited wherever their designs appear and will receive special recognition from the City.

### **Themes**

We are seeking original artwork that celebrates Norwalk’s creative spirit, vibrant neighborhoods, coastal heritage, and community pride. Designs can be bold, playful, modern, or nostalgic — we encourage a wide range of artistic interpretations.

### **Possible inspirations include:**

- Norwalk’s waterfront and oyster heritage
- Local landmarks and architecture
- Neighborhood diversity and culture
- Arts, food, and music scenes
- Community connection and pride
- Creative incorporation of the I <3 Norwalk Logo

### **Competition Guidelines**

1. Eligibility
  - Open to Norwalk residents and Norwalk business owners only.
  - Submissions may be made individually or by a business team.
  - Artists under 18 must have a parent or guardian sign the consent section of the application.
2. Design Requirements
  - Artwork must be original and created by the submitting artist(s). No AI will be accepted. They will be checked by industry-standard online AI checking software.
  - Designs should reflect Norwalk’s identity in a positive and creative way.
  - Up to three (3) designs may be submitted per artist or business.
  - Acceptable formats and specs:
    - High-resolution PNG, JPEG, or PDF (300 dpi minimum)
    - Transparent or solid background acceptable
    - Dimensions: Square or rectangular format preferred (at least 8 inches on the longest side).

- Avoid copyrighted material, logos, or imagery not created by the artist.
- Use of the color palette from the “I <3 Norwalk” logo is highly encouraged to ensure visual consistency across City branding and merchandise.

### 3. Selection Process

- Submissions will be reviewed by a selection panel including representatives from the City of Norwalk, the Norwalk Arts Commission, and local creative leaders.
- Designs will be evaluated based on:
  - Originality and creativity
  - Connection to Norwalk’s identity and community spirit
  - Visual impact and adaptability to merchandise
  - Alignment with the “I Heart Norwalk” color palette (encouraged but not required)

Finalists may be asked to make minor edits or adjustments for production.

### 4. Prizes and Recognition

- Winning designs will be featured on official City merchandise used at community events and sold through select outlets.
- Artists will receive:
  - Recognition on City and partner websites and social media
  - Complimentary merchandise featuring their design
  - Artist or business spotlight at a public event (date TBD)

### 5. Timeline

Competition Launch: [Insert Date]

Submission Deadline: [Insert Date]

Finalist Notification: [Insert Date]

Winners Announced: [Insert Date/Event Name]

### 6. Usage Rights

By submitting artwork, artists grant the City of Norwalk non-exclusive rights to reproduce, display, and distribute the work for promotional, educational, and commercial purposes related to the City. Artists will be credited wherever their work is used.



## Arts & Cultural Commission Partnership Application

### Purpose:

The Arts & Cultural Commission seeks to collaborate with organizations, businesses, and community groups on projects and events that enhance Norwalk's cultural landscape. Please complete this application at least 90 days before your proposed project or event.

### Instructions for Applicants:

1. Review eligibility guidelines before applying.
2. Complete all sections of this application in full.
3. Attach all required supporting documents (documents must be in PDF format):
  - Detailed project/event budget
  - Executed Conflict of Interest form
  - Marketing plan (if available)
  - Visuals or renderings (for public art projects)
  - Samples from past events/projects (optional)
4. Submit application at least 90 days prior to the proposed project/event.
5. If profits are generated, net profits must be shared with the Arts & Cultural Commission.
6. A final report, including financials, is due within 30 days of project completion.

Note: Submission of this application does not guarantee approval. Proposals will be reviewed by Commission staff and presented to the Arts & Cultural Commission for consideration.

### Section 1: Organization Information

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title/Role: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Website: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Organization:  Nonprofit  Business  Government Entity  Community Group  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Is your organization politically affiliated?: Yes No

Are there any particular community groups your organization services?: Yes No

If yes, which groups or organizations? \_\_\_\_\_

Tax ID Number / EIN: \_\_\_\_\_

Mission Statement:

## **Section 2: Project / Event Details**

Project/Event Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Project/Event Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Location/Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Attendance: \_\_\_\_\_

Target Audience: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief Description of Project/Event (200 words or less):

## Goals & Community Impact

Goals of the Project/Event:

Community Benefit:

### Section 3: Financial Information

Total Project/Event Budget: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Total Confirmed Funding (grants, sponsors, etc.): \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Requested Support from Commission: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ or describe:

\_\_\_\_\_

Expected Revenue Sources: \_\_\_\_\_

### Profit Projection

Anticipated Gross Revenue: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Anticipated Total Expenses: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated Net Profit: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Profit-Sharing Agreement:

Yes, I agree to 50/50 profit-sharing

Requesting alternative arrangement \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section 4: Roles and Responsibilities**

Your Organization's Responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

Commission's Expected Role: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section 5: Marketing & Acknowledgment**

Acknowledgment Methods:

Logo placement

Verbal acknowledgment

Social media

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Section 6: Supporting Documents**

Required Attachments:

- Budget
- Marketing Plan
- Visuals (fliers, marketing materials, photos)

#### **Section 7: Signature & Agreement**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Submission Instructions:**

Email completed applications and attachments to: [norwalkarts@norwalkct.gov](mailto:norwalkarts@norwalkct.gov)

Phone: 203-854-7948



## **Arts & Cultural Commission Partnership Guidelines and Application Process**

The Arts & Cultural Commission invites partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and community groups to enhance Norwalk’s cultural landscape through collaborative projects and events. These partnerships aim to foster creativity, celebrate diversity, and strengthen the city’s cultural vitality by providing accessible and impactful arts experiences for all residents.

This document outlines the requirements and process for organizations seeking to collaborate with the Commission.

### **1. Eligibility**

To be considered for partnership, the applying organization must:

- Be a nonprofit, community group, government entity, or business operating within Norwalk or serving Norwalk residents.
- Demonstrate a clear commitment to arts, culture, and community engagement.
- Have the capacity and experience to plan, manage, and execute the proposed project or event successfully.
- Be in good standing with the City of Norwalk, with no outstanding taxes, fees, or compliance issues.
- Agree to adhere to the Commission’s values, including inclusivity, accessibility, and respect for diversity. <https://www.norwalkct.gov/1795/Norwalk-Arts-Commission>

### **2. Partnership Opportunities**

The Commission may partner with organizations in the following ways:

- Event Co-Sponsorship – Collaborative public events such as festivals, performances, workshops, or cultural celebrations.
- Public Art Projects – Murals, sculptures, installations, or other art activations in public spaces.
- Community Engagement Programs – Arts education initiatives, outreach programs, or projects that connect underrepresented communities to cultural opportunities.
- Marketing & Promotion – Cross-promotion through Commission platforms to increase visibility and attendance.

Note: The Commission’s involvement may include funding, promotional support, or logistical assistance, depending on available resources and alignment with its mission.

### **3. Partnership Requirements**

To ensure transparency and alignment, all proposed projects or events must meet the following criteria:

- Accessibility & Public Benefit: Events must be open and accessible to the public and demonstrate measurable community impact (e.g., increased cultural participation, economic activity, or artist support).

- Compliance with Laws & Permits: The partner organization is responsible for obtaining all required permits, licenses, and insurance.
- Clear Financial Planning: A detailed budget must be provided showing all revenue and expenses.
- The Arts & Cultural Commission must approve all ticketing, vendor fees, or other revenue-generating activities prior to the event.
- Profit-Sharing Requirement: If there is any profit generated from the project or event, net profits must be shared with the Arts & Cultural Commission.
  - The standard profit-sharing split is 20/80, unless otherwise negotiated and outlined in the partnership agreement. This will be dependent on the amount of funding contributed.
- Partners are required to submit a post-event financial report, including receipts and documentation of revenue and expenses, within 30 days of the event.
- Marketing Acknowledgment: The Commission must be clearly recognized on all promotional materials and in media releases as a partner and/or sponsor. The commission also must approve any marketing for the event prior to its publication.

#### **4. Application Process**

##### Step 1: Submit an Application

Organizations must submit a Partnership Application Form at least 90 days prior to the proposed event or project launch.

Applications must include:

- Organization Information – Name, contact details, mission statement, and organizational structure.
- Project/Event Description – Goals, location, timeline, target audience, and anticipated outcomes.
- Budget Overview – Total budget, expected revenue streams, confirmed funding, and requested support.
- Profit Projection – If applicable, estimated profits and plan for profit-sharing with the Commission.
- Supporting Materials – Images, renderings, or samples of past work (if applicable).

##### Step 2: Staff Review

Applications are reviewed for completeness and eligibility.

Incomplete applications will be returned for revision before moving forward.

##### Step 3: Commission Review

Applications will be presented at a regular Commission meeting for review and vote.

Evaluation will focus on:

- Mission alignment with Commission goals.
- Community benefit and cultural impact.
- Financial feasibility, including transparency of revenue and expenses.
- Appropriate handling of profit-sharing requirements.

**The commission reserves the right to deny any application for any reason at any time.**

Step 4: Partnership Agreement

If approved, a formal agreement will be signed by both parties, clearly outlining:

- Roles and responsibilities.
- Marketing and acknowledgment requirements.
- Profit-sharing terms.
- Financial and attendance reporting obligations.
- Deadlines and deliverables.

Step 5: Final Report

Within 30 days after the event/project, the partner organization must submit:

- Final attendance numbers and demographic data.
- A complete financial report, including documentation of revenue, expenses, and profit-sharing payments.
- A summary of successes, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Photos or documentation of the event/project.
- Funding will be distributed as a reimbursement. If documentation is not received in full within 30 days of the event completion date, the commission reserves the right to rescind funding.

**5. Timeline Overview**

<u>Step</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
1	Application Submission	90+ days before event
2	Staff Review	Within 2 weeks of submission
3	Commission Review & Vote	Next scheduled Commission meeting
4	Partnership Agreement Signed	Within 2 weeks of approval
5	Final Report Submitted	Within 30 days after event

**6. Evaluation Criteria**

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Alignment with Commission mission	35%
Community benefit & engagement	45%
Financial clarity & sustainability (including profit-sharing plan)	10%
Feasibility of execution	10%

## **7. Contact Information**

For questions or to submit an application:

Email: [norwalkarts@norwalkct.gov](mailto:norwalkarts@norwalkct.gov)

Phone: 203-854-7948



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## Event Report - The Gathering: POP UP - November 6th

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**From** Jonathan Winn <jonathan@thrownstone.org>

**Date** Mon 11/10/2025 4:27 PM

**To** Godeski, Sabrina <SGodeski@norwalkct.gov>; Danny LG <danny@thenorwalkconservatory.org>; Alan, Marc <marc.factoryunderground@gmail.com>; Brian Kaspr <brian@bkaspr.com>; Breault, Anna <ABreault@norwalkct.gov>; Janay Sylvester <jnsylvester@gmail.com>; Norwalk Arts <Norwalkarts@norwalkct.gov>; Giandurco, Shannon <shannon@greaternorwalkchamber.com>; Brian A Clarke Jr <Regalpropertiesct@gmail.com>

**CAUTION:** EXTERNAL Email: Don't open links or attachments from untrusted senders

Dear Norwalk Arts & Culture Commissioners and Greater Norwalk Chamber leadership,

I wanted to follow up with a quick recap of **The Gathering: POP UP** on November 6th and **thank you again** for your partnership in making this event happen.

### **By the Numbers:**

- 146 total registrations
- 85 attendees (58% show rate, which is typical for free events)
- Strong mix of Chamber members, artists, civic leaders, and residents from across the region

**What Worked:** The energy in the room was genuinely positive—multiple people commented on the vibe throughout the night. Performances by Neddy Smith, Evan Wertz, and Katherine Schneider were well-received, the Center for Contemporary Printmaking exhibition drew consistent attention, and our reprise of "Party Princess," winner of the CT Short Play Fest (youth), was a hit.

The food from **Some Things Fishy Catering** was exceptional — attendees raved about the charcuterie spread. We were able to donate all leftovers to **Meals on Wheels**, which felt like the right way to close out the evening.

**Most importantly, we saw exactly what we hoped: artists and business owners in the same space, making introductions, exchanging cards, having conversations that wouldn't have happened otherwise.**

You can see highlights from the evening in this reel compiled by Katie Schneider:

[https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQvWn\\_AjIWD/](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQvWn_AjIWD/)

**Looking Ahead:** This was the first convening of its kind, and I think it proved the concept—there's real appetite for bringing these two sectors together. **Multiple attendees told me this was their first time at the Crystal Theatre, and several asked about the next Gathering before they left.** I'd love to explore what a next iteration might look like, whether that's another Gathering or a different format altogether.

This event wouldn't have been possible without the Arts & Culture Commission's support and partnership. Thank you for believing in this vision and helping make it a reality.

I'm happy to provide any additional information you need for your own reporting, or to schedule a debrief call if that would be helpful.

Gratefully,

Jonathan Winn [he/him](#)  
Executive Director, Co-Artistic Director

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