



CULTURAL PLANS IN MECKLENBURG COUNTY'S SMALLER COMMUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

As the Arts & Science Council (ASC) moves into the new millennium, it looks forward to the development of a more thoughtfully crafted relationship with Mecklenburg County's communities beyond Charlotte. In order to design a relationship that is reflective of each community's needs and desires, and in order to assure their residents of access to a rich assortment of cultural resources and programs, the ASC has launched a series of cultural planning efforts in partnership with local governments within Mecklenburg County.

Beginning in the summer of 2003, this two-year initiative will result in community cultural plans for the six smaller incorporated municipalities in Mecklenburg County. Currently, the ASC is working in partnership with the Towns of Cornelius, Davidson and Huntersville on a North Mecklenburg Cultural Plan and the Town of Matthews on a Matthews Cultural Plan. The North Mecklenburg Cultural Plan is in the final stages of development and will be considered for adoption by the Town Councils in the three participating communities in July and August 2004. The ASC will consider the plan for adoption in September 2004. We anticipate the Matthews Cultural Plan will be complete by November 2004. Planning efforts will begin in the Towns of Pineville and Mint Hill in July 2004. We anticipate that those two planning efforts will be complete by March 2005.

WHAT IS CULTURAL PLANNING?

Cultural planning is a process which identifies the arts and cultural needs and preferences of community residents, examines existing resources and opportunities for arts and cultural development, and proposes strategies a given community can use to meet its citizens' needs for arts and cultural experiences.

REASONS TO PLAN?

A combination of factors stimulates communities to initiate cultural planning processes. Some of the key factors are the desire to insure a high quality of life for residents, the desire to enhance economic development, the desire to bring the civilizing influence of arts and cultural activities to residents, the realization that arts experiences increase children's academic attainment, the desire to create a built environment which supports affirmative human interaction, and the desire to create cohesive communities among people with diverse beliefs and experiences.

In the case of the ASC's Town Planning Initiative, the effort was driven by the need to better connect with the growing number of individual donors who give through their workplace but live in these rapidly growing suburban community.

THE TOWN CULTURAL PLANS

PLANNING LEADERSHIP

Each community will be asked to establish or identify an appropriate local Cultural Plan Steering Committee to work with the ASC's cultural planning consultants. This committee will help in the identification of individuals to work with in planning, in the organization and hosting of local interviews and meetings, in the interpretation of local data and information, and in the selection and approval of a recommended strategy for action.

FIRST PLANNING STEPS

Each community's planning process will include:

- A consultant's tour of local cultural facilities;
- Interviews with key cultural leaders and practitioners in the community;
- Random digit dial sample telephone survey of 850 Mecklenburg County residents (survey results can be broken down to specific towns or regions of the County);
- Small group meetings with municipal employees, artists and representatives of non-profit and proprietary cultural

organizations, business leaders, civic and neighborhood organizations, arts, science and history educators, and faith community representatives;

- Town meetings; and
- Documentation of interviewees' and meeting participants' sense of the community's cultural issues, preferences and needs.

CULTURAL SUMMIT

The culminating activity of each planning process is the convening of a Cultural Summit. At this summit, members of the public and local elected officials will review the consultant's findings and research results and consider the needs, preferences and options for cultural development in their area.

Participants are taken through a group process exploring the key findings of the consultants with a focus on giving concrete solutions to the issues identified through the planning process. All ideas must begin with one of three words:

- Start
- Stop
- Change

Local groups and ASC affiliate arts, science and history organizations offering programs of interest to citizens will showcase their work and discuss options for partnership programming in the community. The consultant will incorporate these citizen responses in the development of a draft community cultural plan.

FINALIZING THE PLAN

The draft plan will be reviewed and adopted by the Steering Committee. When finalized, the plan will be submitted for adoption by both municipal government and the ASC. Once adopted, the plan will guide the cultural development investments of both parties on behalf of the stated needs and desires of the citizens of each community. In addition, once a town adopts the plan, the mayor of that community is able to appoint one member of the Town Council to serve on the ASC's Board of Directors. To ensure that

works begins to implement the plan recommendations, the ASC has pledged \$20,000 to each community to begin the implementation process.

COSTS

Over the two year period, the ASC will invest \$125,000 in support of the planning efforts in the six communities. The total commitment including implementation funding is \$245,000.