

DATE: May 21, 2015

TO: Urban Land Institute Staff

FROM: Samia Byrd, Joe Pace, Summer Salyer, Christina Sorrento, and Alex Villegas

RE: Cultural District for Southwest DC

Proposal- The Southwest Neighborhood Assembly, The Westminster Presbyterian Church, and the Southwest Business Improvement District partnered for this mTAP to ascertain the viability of creating a cultural district for the Southwest DC neighborhood containing approximately a ten block radius from the Waterfront Metro Station. The intent of the cultural district is to create a strong identity that would be recognized both in and outside of the community for the programming, public art, artistic training and performance opportunities, and the associated economic growth of the area.

Challenges- The Southwest DC neighborhood is undergoing a massive redevelopment, which creates a potential clash between the existing residents and land uses and the new residents. It is important to the mTAP partners that the history and culture of the area are not lost in this redevelopment. It is also imperative that the existing residents, including the public housing community, are an active part of the cultural district. In addition to the cultural challenges, the redevelopment has also tied up any available land in the area for the foreseeable future, leaving only public spaces and rights-of-way to utilize for public art initiatives.

Approach- The mTAP team familiarized itself with the area, surveyed the existing attributes of the neighborhood like the Southwest Duck Pond and Arena Stage, and gained an understanding of how cultural districts have been implemented elsewhere throughout the country. Since the implementation of a cultural district takes multiple steps and a significant effort, the team decided to focus on laying out the first steps towards implementation and creative ideas for the ultimate build out of the cultural district.

Research- Cultural districts have been implemented around the country to drive development and bring a sense of community to an area. A few successful examples of cultural districts both locally and nationally were identified as part of the team's research effort. National: Shreveport Commons (Shreveport, LA), Pittsburgh Cultural District and Manchester Craftsmen's Guild/Bidwell Training Center (Pittsburgh, PA). Local: Silver Spring Arts & Entertainment District (Silver Spring, MD) and The Gateway Arts & Entertainment District (Prince George's MD). These examples show that the creation of a cultural district can facilitate inclusive economic development that benefits both current and new residents and can be related to the Southwest DC area.

Research also found local government programs that could assist with the implementation of the cultural district. An example of this is the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities that provides grants for public art. It became apparent in early stages of the research that all of the developable land already has entitlements, which does not

leave land for the BID or other entity to acquire for purposes of the cultural district. Therefore, most of the public art and other cultural district features need to be implemented on public land and within rights-of-way. This makes the relationship with the public agencies essential for success.

Recommendations-

The team recommends a strong marketing plan and unified website for the cultural district that lists all of the upcoming events in the area on one calendar. The website would likely be part of the BID website and would be a one stop shop for events in the cultural district as well as an information center about the neighborhood. This could be easily used by residents and visitors. The marketing plan would include branding items such as a cultural district logo that is easily associated with the area. The logo could even be designed by artists in the community through a logo contest. Once the cultural district is branded, it will be easier for the mTAP partners to get the public and private sectors invested in its success.

In order to have a physical space to implement some of the public art and community goals of the cultural district, the team recommends that the BID enter into an memorandum of understanding with the Washington DC Department of Recreation to operate and maintain the Southwest Duck Pond. That space would become the center of the cultural district and can be used for public art, arts and craft festivals, ice skating, cultural walking tours, and other programming central to the core of the cultural district. Although the Southwest Duck Pond is occasionally programmed with events such as the farmers market, the BID's ownership of these events would make them more frequent, organized, and successful.

In addition to the public art space in the Southwest Duck Pond, the cultural district can have public art throughout the district in rights-of-way and public land. One way to incorporate this art would be to work with the DC government to receive approval for special streetscape and lighting throughout the cultural district. Simple items such as trash cans and light poles can be turned into works of art that directly engages the artists within the community. The BID can run art contests and/or commission local artists to paint murals on those items. Murals can also be incorporated on the CSX bridges, especially since CSX is a member of the BID.

Information and wayfinding can be done throughout the cultural district in a way that incorporates the artistic component. The outdated wayfinding signs can be updated with artistic renderings. A QR code can be embedded throughout the cultural district that would link directly to the website. Moving forward with the public information display outside of the Waterfront Metro Station that incorporates the events calendar and other useful information for the cultural district would help create awareness about the cultural district and draw visitors that are using the Metro Station to go to the Wharf development.