



Memorandum

TO: Mayor, City Council, City Manager, and Residents of Smithville
FROM: Andy Esquivel, Community Engagement Coordinator
RE: Status Report: Richard D. Latham Cultural District's Art Bridging Community Project
DATE: June 26, 2023

1. Introduction

This report provides a summary of the Art Bridging Community 2.0 Project within the Richard D. Latham Cultural District. The project, funded by the St. David's Foundation, aimed to incorporate community-led art in public places. The report outlines the community engagement process, idea generation, selection methods, and the current status of projects.

2. Kitchen Table Talks: December 2022-April 2023

To ensure community participation, the project organized a series of Kitchen Table Talks, where different populations of residents were invited to share their ideas and perspectives. Initially planning around 12 meetings, a total of 8 meetings were successfully conducted between December 2022 and April 2023. Meetings were held in different parts of the city and with as diverse a population as possible, including meetings held by the Black community and the Hispanic community.

a. Idea Generation

The Kitchen Table Talks proved to be highly productive, resulting in the generation of over 60 unique ideas from the engaged community members. These ideas reflected the community's vision and desires for the art initiatives within the Richard D. Latham Cultural District.

3. Cultural District Workshop: May 2023

Following the Kitchen Table Talks, a Cultural District Workshop was organized in early May 2023 with approximately 40 residents in attendance. Distribution lists and social media were utilized to announce the public meeting. Attendees were given the opportunity to review, discuss, nominate, and vote on the generated ideas. The objective was to identify the most promising and impactful concepts.

a. Idea Selection and Survey

Based on the nominations and votes received during the Cultural District Workshop, a list of approximately 18 top-ranked ideas was compiled. To gather further input from the general public, a survey was created, and it incorporated the list of these ideas. The survey aimed to gauge the preferences and opinions of the broader community. The survey was sent out through distribution lists and posted on social media to reach the community.

b. Public Survey Response

The survey, which was open for voting for about 2 weeks, concluded with a total of 93 responses from the general public. The responses provided valuable insights into the community's preferences and priorities regarding the proposed public initiatives.

5. Final Idea Selection: May 2023

The Cultural District Committee reviewed the survey responses and considered various factors such as feasibility, time frame, and grant deadlines to select the most viable ideas for implementation. Taking into account these considerations, the committee chose four ideas from the top responses: A Makers Fair project, an Art Studio Guided Tour project (to enhance and build upon the Art Crawl project), an Art for the Elderly Banner project, and a Way Finding Sign project.

6. Communication with Three Idea Contributors

In an effort to acknowledge the community's selection, the Cultural District Committee reached out to the individuals who proposed the first three selected ideas. The contributors were informed that their ideas had been chosen by the community, emphasizing their valued contributions to the Art Bridging Community Project.

7. Way Finding Sign Project – the Fourth Idea

Among the selected ideas for implementation, one notable project involved updating a way finding sign within the City of Smithville. Recognizing the importance of community involvement and artistic expertise, a Call to Artists was initiated to identify and engage a suitable artist who could bring this idea to life.

a. Call to Artists: Ongoing Status – June 2023

The fourth idea requires a more in-depth, and continuing community-led approach because it promotes local talent involvement. A Call to Artists has been created and publicized. This open call invites artists from the community and beyond to submit their proposals for the fourth idea, a way finding sign project. The Call to Artists aims to provide an opportunity for artists to contribute their creative vision and skills to enhance a community-led way finding sign project.

b. Implementation Stage – June 22, 2023

The City Council met on June 21, 2023, and they deliberated over the four entries. An idea titled, "Unity in Bloom: Celebrating Diversity and Community Harmony," by Michelle Gardella and Ana Luevano-Young was selected, but unfortunately, they announced they could not complete the project. Rather than withdraw the idea, another artist, Janus Lee, was asked she would be willing to use her experience with community-led artwork and take over this project. She agreed, so the Way Finding Sign Project is set to be completed by late August 2023.

9. Summary

The Art Bridging Community Project within the Richard D. Latham Cultural District has successfully engaged the community through Kitchen Table Talks and a Cultural District Workshop. Over 60 ideas were generated, reflecting the community's aspirations for art in public places. The project involved the general public through a survey, which garnered 93 responses. Based on feasibility and grant constraints, four ideas were selected for implementation. The committee actively communicated with the idea contributors to express appreciation for their involvement in the project.

By incorporating the talents and perspectives of local artists, the way finding project seeks to ensure that the updated sign will not only be functional but also visually appealing and representative of both the Richard D. Latham Cultural District's and the City of Smithville's unique identity.

The Art Bridging Community Project strives to create a culturally vibrant and inclusive environment within the Richard D. Latham Cultural District. By incorporating community-led art initiatives, the project aims to foster community pride and engagement.