

GRMN Creates

an arts and culture roadmap



CITY OF
GRAND RAPIDS
IT'S IN MINNESOTA'S NATURE

"For many families, it's a generational thing. It can tie us to each other, our future, our past, and even a place. Raising children now, I really feel the importance and impact for young ones to have access to arts and mediums to help them develop, grow, express, and find themselves."

–Survey Respondent

"As a community, we need to embrace art and use it as a differentiator in terms of our economy, harness it as something that makes the community a better place to live."

–Ed Zabinski, Grand Rapids City Council

"The arts and culture piece is one of the things that draws people to our area that creates the opportunities for economic development...if we work really, really hard at building that culture of our community...we will attract the people we need... culture, businesses, they go hand in hand."

–Bud Stone, Grand Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce

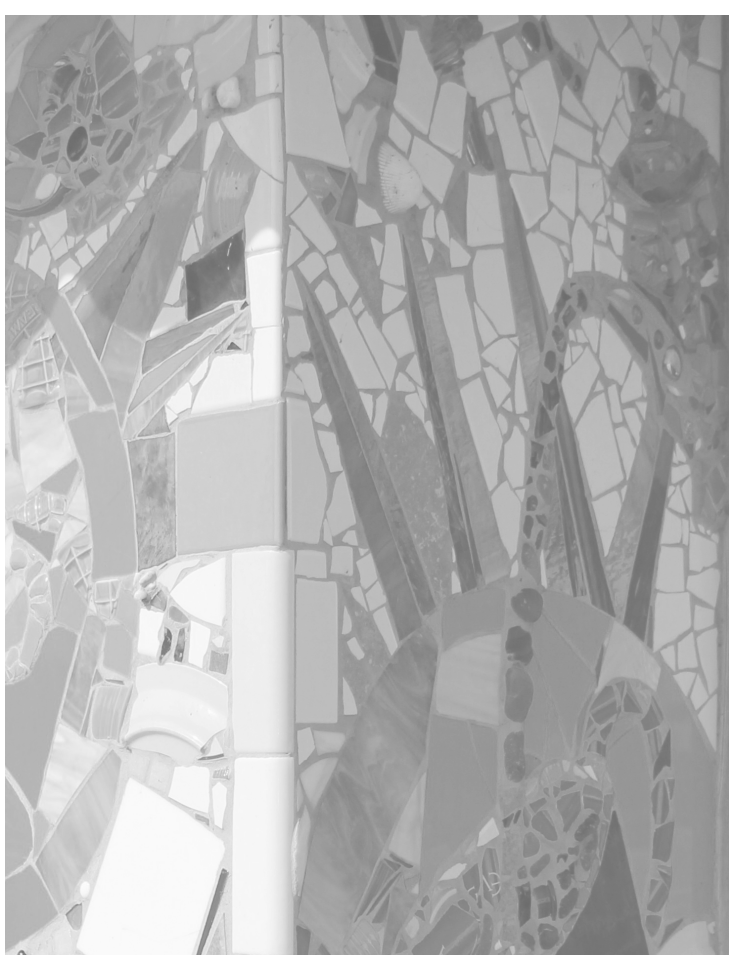
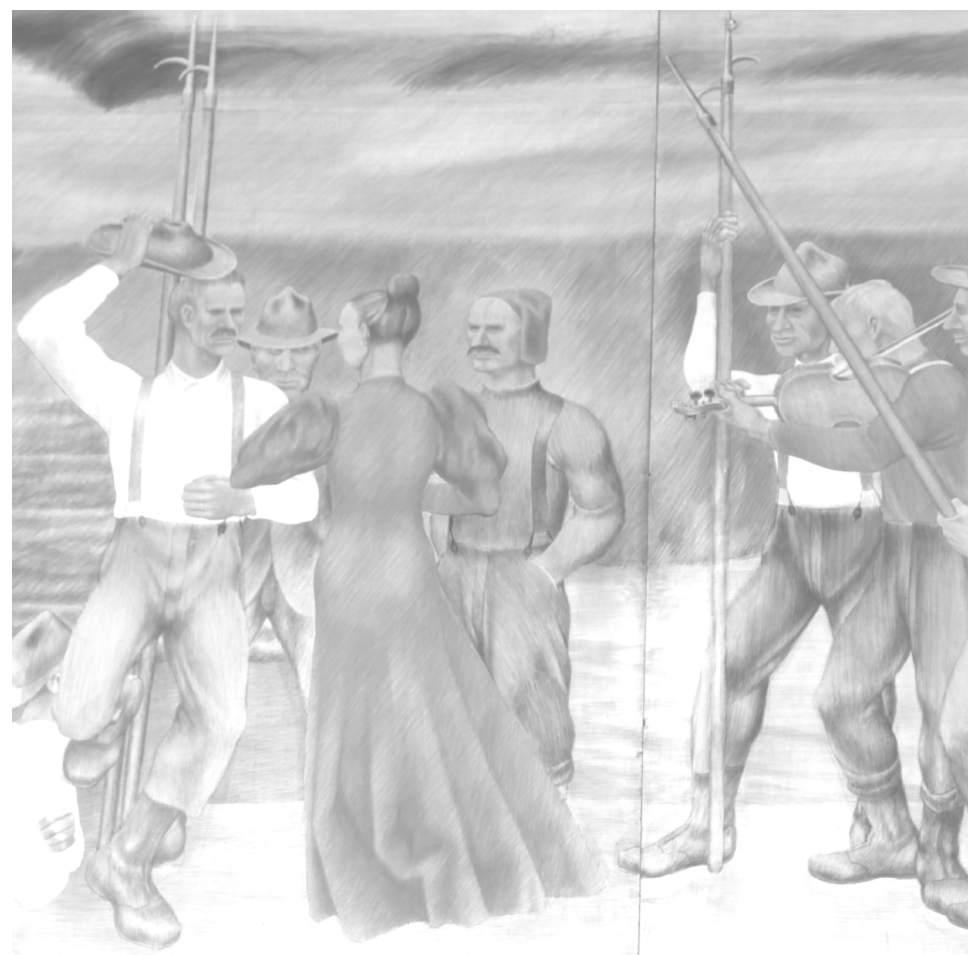
"We should get used to talking about arts and culture more broadly than we do—all of the farmers at the farmers market—many of them are artisans. There are a lot of fishermen and outfitters who are very artistic and creative who are not seen as part of our current narrative."

–Sonja Merrild, Blandin Foundation

GRMN CREATES: *An Arts and Culture Roadmap* is a plan that provides a roadmap for the City of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission to follow over the next 10 years, to help the city nurture and grow its arts and culture offerings.

The arts and culture have always been an integral part of Grand Rapids. From the Minnesota Forest History Center, and the Judy Garland Museum, to the Reif Performing Arts Center, and MacRostie Art Center, Grand Rapids is known for the strength and diversity of its cultural organizations and institutions.

This plan arose from the input and effort of its citizens. Through interviews, focus groups, an online survey, and community meetings, the team worked to gather the ideas and visions of the City's residents. The result is a plan that gives direction to the City in setting policy and allotting the resources needed to advance municipal arts and culture. The plan also recognizes the role diversity plays in a creative economy and highlights the importance of creating a welcoming environment to all who live here and visit.



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AN ARTS AND CULTURE ROADMAP

Goal 1: Enhance Grand Rapids’ distinctive identity through arts and culture

Community stakeholders saw arts and culture’s ability to enhance quality of life as closely linked to Grand Rapids’ ability to attract and keep people and businesses, including young families, highly skilled workers, job-creating entrepreneurs, and tourists. Arts and culture not only intrinsically enhance community life, they can also help reinforce and promote other defining community attributes, all adding up to a process of “placemaking,” or fostering a distinctive culture to which people want to belong. For Grand Rapids, these elements include its rich and diverse cultural influence (Ojibwe, logger, and settler cultures), historic architecture, and the economic and recreational opportunities afforded by the river, lakes, and forest.



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 1: Connect arts, heritage, and the natural environment to help promote Grand Rapids’ distinctive identity

- 1.1 Foster cultural/family-oriented programming at the landmark Central School (interior and grounds)
- 1.2 Nurture public-private partnerships to expand arts-related offerings at the Forest History Center
- 1.3 Nurture public-private partnerships to celebrate connections between art and lakes, rivers, forestry, sporting, and recreational activities (artistry of creating fishing lures, canoe building, gunsmithing, tanning, etc.)
- 1.4 Celebrate Ojibwe cultural heritage through city signage in English/Ojibwe
- 1.5 Nurture public-private partnerships to develop history or nature-centered tours
- 1.6 Create a larger, citywide public policy conversation about the mechanisms for the support and preservation of historic buildings



PHOTO CREDIT: DELINA WHITE

OBJECTIVE 2: Promote Grand Rapids’ distinctive local cultural and arts identity

- 1.7 Promote existing cultural offerings to residents and potential visitors (Annual arts awards, electronic message board, centralized web calendar/e-blast)
- 1.8 Develop a cultural center to celebrate diverse local cultural practices (e.g. Finnish, Scandinavian, Native American, German, Latino, etc.), draw area residents and tourists, and link artists with shared resources, teaching, and exhibition opportunities
- 1.9 Plan for a city staff position to coordinate city-supported cultural programs/events and work with other organizations such as Visit Grand Rapids

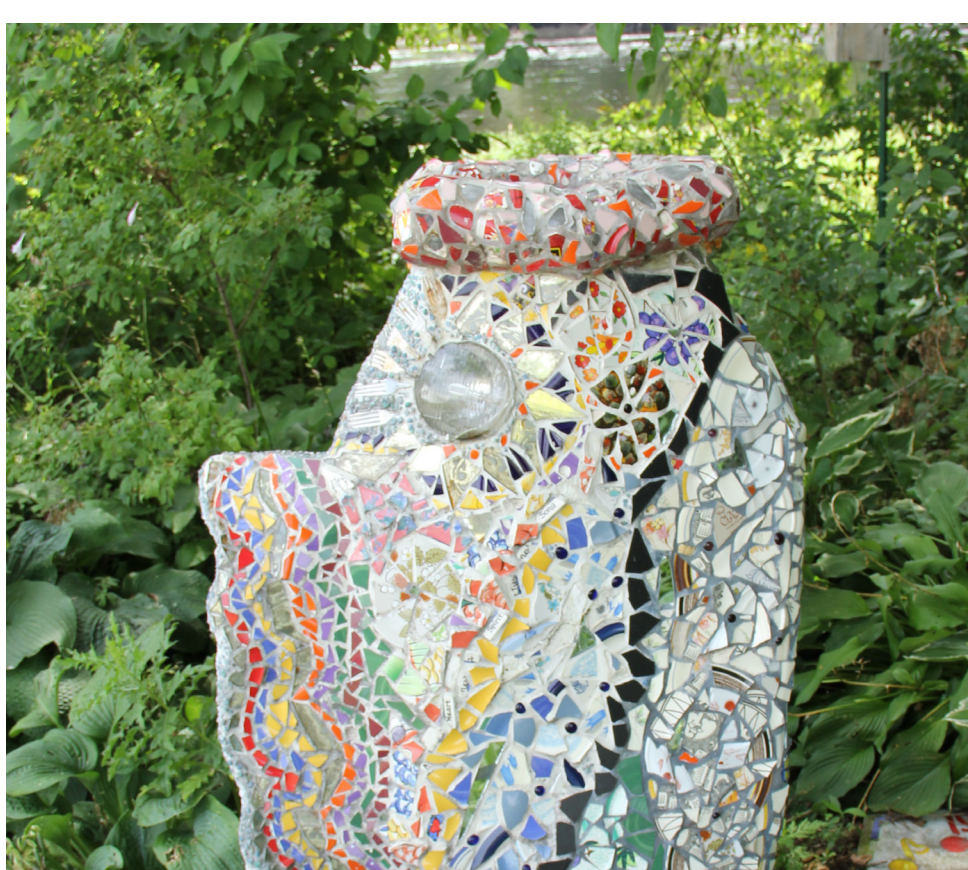


PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 3: Foster regional networking to explore opportunities for collaborative programming and promotion

- 1.10 Create a workgroup to explore opportunities for collaborative regional programming and promotion among specific arts and culture venues
- 1.11 Facilitate connections between local arts and cultural nonprofit organizations and local and regional Ojibwe artists and organizations with experience exhibiting Native American visual and performing art
- 1.12 Nurture public-private partnerships to explore opportunities for summer residency programs, building on the strength of the successful collaboration with the Minnesota Orchestra

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Goal 2: Expand opportunities for lifelong arts learning

Community stakeholders linked arts learning to being a “whole-person,” with the creative thinking needed to be competitive as an employee or entrepreneur, and healing and empowerment. They saw youth arts learning as a particular priority, both on intrinsic grounds, and because of issues of equal access—they wanted low-income youth to have access to arts learning and enrichment within the public schools and through outside of school offerings. Stakeholders’ interest in arts learning did not stop at youth. It extended to elders, professional artists, other adults, and in particular, people in challenging situations, such as homelessness, mental illness, disabilities, and substance abuse recovery.



PHOTO CREDIT: KELLY KLATT

OBJECTIVE 1: Youth—Celebrate and expand opportunities for in-school and outside-of-school arts learning

- 2.1 Coordinate a roundtable workgroup to address youth arts learning (in and outside-of-school)
- 2.2 Identify and remedy gaps in existing outside-of-school offerings and barriers to access such as cost and transportation
- 2.3 Increase youth art offerings via the park system, such as a “fun wagon” or arts summer camps
- 2.4 Coordinate public and private fundraising efforts (including grant applications and individual donations) to expand youth-arts learning opportunities
- 2.5 Raise awareness of existing in-school arts offerings, including arts integration into class curricula, residencies, and the Reif-Kennedy Center Partners in Education program
- 2.6 Match artists and arts organizations interested in providing paid or volunteer school residencies and/or classroom teacher professional development via an online directory annual and creative resource fair
- 2.7 Develop an internship program that places high school students with local artists



PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN CONNELLY

OBJECTIVE 2: Adults & Community—Increase access to arts-based enrichment and healing

- 2.8 Convene a roundtable workgroup to identify and reduce gaps in arts learning opportunities for college students, adults, elders, etc.
- 2.9 Coordinate public and private fundraising efforts (including grant applications and individual donations) to expand arts-based enrichment and healing
- 2.10 Promote healing and empowerment by matching artists and arts organizations interested in providing paid or volunteer residencies with nursing homes, assisted living homes, medical providers, social service providers, etc. (Online directory and annual creative resource fair)

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Goal 3: Foster inclusive arts and cultural offerings and expand access

Numerous community stakeholders lauded art’s ability to bring people together, but also articulated a pressing need to do more along these lines. They desired art offerings that encouraged people of all walks of life to mix and forge connections, particularly people of different races, ethnicities, income levels, ages, and disabled and non-disabled people. By embracing Native American art forms, residents may help break down persistent racism towards Native Americans and increase the visibility of this important part of the community. Overall, community stakeholders want to see access to arts and culture expand to serve blue collar and low income residents and seek opportunities to more fully integrate populations hidden from view—such as people with disabilities or mental illness—with the greater community. They seek intergenerational opportunities and offerings suitable for families with children.



OBJECTIVE 1: Facilitate community spaces and programming that welcome the entire community

- 3.1 Clarify and streamline city rules related to street festivals, performances in parks, and street performers via fact and FAQ sheets and a volunteer arts help desk
- 3.2 Identify a new, prominent location for the Farmers’ Market to strengthen its role as a social gathering place and artisan-incubator
- 3.3 Develop a rink for recreational figure skating, preferably in the downtown area



PHOTO CREDIT: JOHN CONNELLY

OBJECTIVE 2: Increase the amount of inclusive arts and cultural offerings through public-private partnerships

- 3.4 Convene a diversity and inclusion workgroup to informally share updates and explore opportunities for collaboration
- 3.5 Nurture public-private partnerships to create opportunities to link people of different ages, ethnicities, income levels
- 3.6 Nurture public-private partnerships to integrate more art (music, visual and performing art, literature, and design) by regional Ojibwe artists
- 3.7 Nurture public-private partnerships to provide more arts offerings suitable for families with children through tailored programs, child-care provisions, and/or varied hours
- 3.8 Nurture public-private partnerships to offer arts opportunities for people with disabilities or mental illness to create and connect with the greater community



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 3: Expand arts and cultural offerings to all people, regardless of family income

- 3.9 Compile, seasonally update, and disseminate information about existing scholarship/subsidized arts and cultural opportunities
- 3.10 Seek opportunities to expand scholarships, subsidies, and passes
- 3.11 Cultivate opportunities with developers interested in integrating art installations and community-oriented space suitable for arts programming into affordable housing developments

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Goal 4: Use the arts to animate the physical realm and improve connectivity

Every city strives for a welcoming and vibrant built environment, and the arts are a key component of the public realm’s vitality. While the private and nonprofit sectors primarily produce and promote arts and cultural programs and venues, city government typically leads efforts to integrate artworks into capital and infrastructure improvement projects. Such artworks can add greatly to streetscapes, trail networks, and civic buildings, bringing visual interest, community history, and vitality to many areas of the city. Because such pieces occur outside or in public spaces and there is no fee charged to view, they also help expand accessibility.



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 1: Infuse and align Grand Rapids’ existing city policies, plans, and projects with arts and culture to help achieve broader community health and connectivity goals

- 4.1 Consider the creation of arts-specific amendments to integrate the objectives and strategic priorities of GRMN Creates within the City of Grand Rapids Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan and Riverfront Framework Plan
- 4.2 Consider the creation of an amendment to the Downtown Plan that specifically addresses issues of fragmentation and pedestrian wayfinding through artistic streetscape interventions and additional infrastructure
- 4.3 Collaborate with Get Fit Itasca to identify potential arts-based interventions that help to meet community health goals
- 4.4 Develop a pedestrian bridge over the Mississippi and enhance with artistic elements and good design
- 4.5 Explore opportunities to use art to promote walking and bike use within the upcoming Grand Rapids Trails Plan and that can help to activate key areas and trail heads, and effectively promote local history and identity
- 4.6 Integrate artistic crosswalks into Complete Streets Plan implementation



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 2: Embed public art into existing and future streetscapes to create a dynamic and vital physical environment

- 4.7 Identify upcoming City of Grand Rapids’ Capital Improvement Projects where city staff, with support from Arts and Culture Commission members, can integrate artistic components along with their continued maintenance (e.g. 5th Street redesigns and existing and future roundabouts)
- 4.8 Create murals and art installations along existing infrastructure, such as bridges and railroad crossings, to help animate points of entrance into town and beautify neglected areas
- 4.9 Encourage the donation of privately funded art into Veteran’s Park to help celebrate heritage and identity
- 4.10 Organize a sculpture walk that highlights work from regional artists and provides opportunities to animate downtown area and promote Grand Rapids as a regional arts center



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE 3: Create initial public art policies and develop a program that consistently contribute to the vitality and economic development of the city

- 4.11 Create City of Grand Rapids “Art Adoption/Acquisition/Loan” policy that would create a clear understanding of what type of artworks to accept into the city’s collection and to establish guidelines around the conversations about maintenance, insurance, and other administrative necessities
- 4.12 Create a City of Grand Rapids “Arts Inclusion” policy to help frame conversations between the city and private developers who might be looking to develop artwork within their own developments
- 4.13 Create a formal City of Grand Rapids Public Art Policy

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Goal 5: Foster support for artists and arts and cultural organizations

The final goal of GRMN Creates focuses on supporting arts and cultural producers—the artists and arts and cultural organizations responsible for generating Grand Rapids’ creative milieu and cultural vitality. GRMN Creates participants expressed far ranging ideas for the ways in which city government might foster support for these entities. Many strategies connect underutilized assets with perceived needs, such as the idea to convert vacant storefronts into pop-up galleries, which would simultaneously animate the downtown and provide artists with increased exhibition spaces.



PHOTO CREDIT: MACROSTIE ART CENTER

OBJECTIVE: Cultivate and strategize with allies in the business community to increase opportunities for cultural entrepreneurs/practitioners

- 5.1 Via an annual award, honor and celebrate an exemplar arts-supportive business
- 5.2 Create a roundtable to serve as a business arts leadership and advocacy board to help: increase public and private funding, coordinate business volunteers for the arts, identify event sponsors, facilitate art displays at area businesses, and help cultural entrepreneurs build capacity
- 5.3 Via an online artist directory, link local businesses to local cultural entrepreneurs with marketable services (exhibitions, performances, design, etc.)
- 5.4 Offer Springboard for the Arts’ Work of Art series and strategize with local partners on ways to disseminate the knowledge more broadly and over the long-term



OBJECTIVE: Tap existing spaces to create opportunities for creative practitioners to affordably live, work, and share their work

- 5.5 Advocate for re-purposing of Central School interior to include performance opportunities (e.g. live music within a “brew pub”)
- 5.6 Explore possibility of the use of the Showboat site by other artists/groups
- 5.7 Investigate models for public-private partnerships (pop-up programs, etc.) to animate vacant/underutilized storefront windows and commercial spaces to support galleries and creative entrepreneurs
- 5.8 Sustain and support the Artist-In-Residence program, in Central School or elsewhere (Seek public and private funds, including grants and individual donations to offer a stipend in addition to space)
- 5.9 Create a workgroup to investigate the adaptive reuse of the Rialto Theater and Township Hall as arts and cultural spaces
- 5.10 Assess feasibility of an artist live-work project development and pursue implementation
- 5.11 Partner with affordable housing developers to explore including artist-appropriate units within proposed projects
- 5.12 Nurture public-private partnerships to develop facilities in which artists share equipment, access work and exhibition space, teach the broader community, and gain training
 - a. Specific models include cultural centers (see Goal 1), makers’ spaces, artist centers, folk schools, and cooperative galleries/workspaces. Community members expressed specific interest in a culinary institute, machine/woodshop cooperative, and folk school.
- 5.13 Investigate opportunities to expand the Itasca County Fairgrounds as a performance venue