



SOLDOTNA
City of Soldotna, Alaska

Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan

September 2023



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Special thanks to:

Kaitlin Vadla for creating the beautiful art boards that were used in our public engagement efforts at Soldotna Creek Park.

Homer Council on the Arts: **Sharlene Cline** (Board President) and **Jenna Gerrety** (Marketing Assistant) for sharing your time to tell us about your organization.

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Cover photo: Bunny Swan Gease engages with youth at Soldotna Creek Park, using an artboard designed by artist Kaitlin Vadla. *Photo: Agnew::Beck*

This Community Arts Partnership project is supported by a grant from the Alaska State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts with additional funding from Rasmuson Foundation.



Introduction

This Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan outlines how the City of Soldotna will support arts and culture over the next ten years. The plan establishes clear priorities and the necessary actions to achieve them, backed by policies and a commitment of resources. The plan recognizes that some recommendations are better led by other organizations and identifies specific ways that the City can partner with and support those organizations.

How to Read this Plan

Soldotna and the surrounding area, have the potential to become a thriving arts and culture hub with temporary and permanent public art and a diversity of vibrant year-round programming for residents and visitors. The actions that

will bring this vision to life include recommendations that the City can implement directly, as well as recommendations that are better led by a to-be-formed arts and culture council and by the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce.

While this plan draws from various fields, including the arts, business administration, marketing, and education, it ultimately focuses less on physical infrastructure and more on people, connections, and how we engage with arts and culture in our community.

This plan is just the first step, and we invite the community to participate in this collaborative effort to build a stronger system that benefits everyone.

This plan is the beginning of Soldotna’s journey, with a focus on ideas to explore, resources to find, and partnerships to build for collaboration. This plan covers important aspects of arts and culture planning, including:

- What defines our community, where we are now and what is the role of arts and culture in our daily lives.
- How other communities support arts and culture, and what Soldotna can learn and apply to our community.
- An assessment of the community’s existing cultural assets and venues, and identification of areas for improvement and potential opportunities.
- A summary of input and feedback from the community that led to crafting this plan.
- Outcomes prompted by listening to the community, leading to the following four focus areas: Identify, Connect, Re-energize, and Integrate.
- Finally, we outline recommendations and specific strategies that can be implemented by the City, the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce, and a to-be-formed regional arts and culture council, and to bring this vision to life.

Arts and Culture: Our Definition

Planning for arts and culture can be complex because these terms have various meanings. This plan adopts a broad understanding of these terms.

Traditionally, the arts have been associated with established institutions like ballet, opera, symphony, theaters, and museums. However, today the arts encompass much more. With advancements in media access, innovative entrepreneurship, and the blending of culture with cuisine, the arts can take on more immediate forms. They can include crafts, community art, digital media, or even food, alongside traditional forms like painting, sculpture, dance, theater, and music. This plan embraces a broad perspective on arts and culture, recognizing the diverse range of media and expressions that contribute to the strength of the arts sector.

Culture, like art, reflects how a group of people express their ideas, values, and aspirations. It encompasses all the activities that we engage in as a community and shapes our connection to the places we call home. It is captured in our language, traditions, histories, ways of life, and shared events that bring people together. The culture of a community represents its unique imprint on the world.

Both art and culture are vital in expressing our individual identities and fostering community connections.

“I am an artist, having relocated here two years ago and established a home and studio. I am eager to share Soldotna with visitors.”

- Survey Participant

Why Support Arts and Culture

Arts and culture have always been an important part of our human experience. They inspire us, bring us joy, and foster connections within our community through various forms of expression like images, stories, and dance.

Arts and cultural activities are sometimes seen as optional enhancements to our daily lives. However, this plan recognizes that arts and culture play a crucial role in our community. Businesses recognize the value of creativity and innovation, and we see increased funding and collaborative partnerships across different sectors to create vibrant communities.



A community fur-sewing class. Photo: City of Soldotna



A view of Soldotna's Homestead Museum. Photo: Martin Media

Ten Reasons to Support the Arts

Below are ten ways that arts and culture contribute to social, educational, and economic development, even during challenging social and economic times.¹

- 1. Unify communities.** 72% of Americans believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity” and 73% agree that the arts “helps me understand other cultures better”—a perspective observed across all demographic and economic categories.
- 2. Improve individual well-being.** 81% of the population says the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world,” 69% of the population believe the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences,” and 73% feel the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in.”
- 3. Strengthen the economy.** The nation’s arts and culture sector—nonprofit, commercial, education—is an \$876.7 billion industry that supports 4.6 million jobs (2020). That is 4.2% of the nation’s economy—a larger share of GDP than powerhouse sectors such as agriculture, transportation, and utilities. The arts boast a \$33 billion international trade surplus (2019). The arts accelerate economic recovery: a growth in arts employment has a positive and causal effect on overall employment.
- 4. Drive tourism and revenue to local businesses.** The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$166.3 billion in economic activity annually—spending by organizations and their audiences—which supports 4.6 million jobs and generates \$27.5 billion in government revenue. Arts attendees spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and lodging—vital income for local businesses. Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic culture experiences.
- 5. Improve academic performance.** Students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students across all socio-economic strata. Yet the Department of Education reports that access to arts education for students of color is significantly lower than for their white peers. 91% of Americans believe that arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education.
- 6. Spark creativity and innovation.** Creativity is among the top five applied skills sought by business leaders—per the Conference Board’s Ready to Innovate report—with 72% saying creativity is of “high importance” when hiring. Research on creativity shows that Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged as an arts maker than other scientists.
- 7. Arts have social impact.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates.
- 8. Improve healthcare.** Nearly one-half of the nation’s healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78% deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.
- 9. Health and well-being of our military.** The arts heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military service members and Veterans, who rank the creative arts therapies in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments. Across the military continuum, the arts promote resilience during pre-deployment, deployment, and the reintegration of military service members, Veterans, their families, and caregivers into communities.
- 10. Strengthen mental health.** The arts are an effective resource in reducing depression and anxiety and increasing life satisfaction. Just 30 minutes of active arts activities daily can combat the ill effects of isolation and loneliness associated with COVID-19.

¹ Cohen. (2022). 10 Reasons to Support the Arts in 2022. ARTSBLOG. <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2022/03/21/10-reasons-to-support-the-arts-in-2022>

Soldotna Area Context

Soldotna is well positioned to be a hub for arts and culture on the Kenai Peninsula. Soldotna exists at a unique intersection of history, place, and nature, which contributes to the richness of the lives of residents and the visitor experience. The Kenai River and our centralized location on the Kenai Peninsula have drawn people to the Soldotna area for thousands of years. Fishing and the rich culture around fishing have historically been the focus. More recently, the City has worked to strengthen ties to the river in a broader sense, with the expansion of Soldotna Creek Park and its functions as a community gathering place and must-see riverside attraction.

The vision established in *Envision Soldotna 2030* states that “Soldotna is a **vibrant community** in the **heart of the Kenai Peninsula**, providing a **high quality of life** through care and attention to both the **natural and built [created] environment** and **cherishing its past while reaching out to the future.**” Arts and culture are at the center of this vision.

The City of Soldotna encompasses a relatively small area and population within the Central Peninsula region. Within a twenty-minute drive of Soldotna are the Central Peninsula communities of Kenai, Nikiski, Kasilof, and Sterling.

Residents and visitors freely move between these locations. People often live in one community and work in another. Artists, performers, and makers collaborate and participate in activities and events across these communities. Culturally, there are also very strong ties and commonalities across these communities.

Considering the close proximity and interconnected nature of the Central Peninsula region, the plan proposes to adopt a regional approach to support arts and culture. This means collaboration and coordination among the various communities to collectively enhance and promote the arts scene. By recognizing and leveraging the shared resources and talents across these interconnected towns, we can create a stronger and more vibrant arts and culture ecosystem for the benefit of both residents and visitors.

“Love the planning that is moving forward. Soldotna is planning for a great future.”

- Survey Participant

“We’ve got a massive amount of talent around here. I love the KPEN!”

- Survey Participant

The Soldotna Summer Music Series has become a signature event. *Photo: Martin Media*



The City of Soldotna's Support of Arts and Culture

The City of Soldotna has a history of supporting arts and culture initiatives but has not had a formal process in place for doing so.

Past and ongoing support from the City includes:

- Support of weekly Music in the Park event at Soldotna Creek Park, in partnership with the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce and Vision Soldotna. Parks and Recreation staff help set up and breakdown for the event each week, and the City provides use of Soldotna Creek Park at no cost for the event.
- Soldotna provides space to host community events like music and theatrical performances, and artist and artisan markets at city parks and the Soldotna Regional Sports Complex. Parks and Recreation also hosts community events like movies in the park.
- The Soldotna Public Library regularly hosts community programming for both youth and adults, including arts and crafts programming and book clubs. Community groups host guest speakers, film screenings, and other public events in the library's community room.
- Installation of public art at City facilities has included an art park at Soldotna Creek Park; the installation of murals created by Kenai Peninsula College art students at Soldotna Creek Park; and the installation of "art drawers" at the Soldotna Public Library featuring the work of local artists. A seasonal salmon sculpture has been approved for installation at Soldotna Creek Park in the near future.
- The work of local photographers is featured on the City's light pole banners, installed as part of Soldotna's Downtown Improvement Plan.
- The Community Schools program (originally founded in 1975), was a partnership between the City of Soldotna, the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District, and community educators. The program provided a variety of opportunities for residents to participate in cultural and historical education, arts and crafts classes, athletics, and practical education, taught by local community members.
- The City leases land to the Soldotna Historical Society and Museum at the rate of \$1 per year, providing a location for a museum, gift shop and related historical facilities adjacent to the Soldotna Visitor's Center and Centennial Park, and provides funding (\$5,000 in FY24) to the Historical Society and Museum as a non-departmental General Fund expenditure.



The Art Park at Soldotna Creek Park. *Photo: City of Soldotna*



KPC student artwork brightens park facilities. *Photo: City of Soldotna*



Photos by local artists decorate City light poles. *Photo: City of Soldotna*

A "pop-up gallery" at the Soldotna Library. *Photo: Agnew::Beck*





Community Input and Engagement

The focus areas and recommendations in the Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan were shaped by input from residents of the area. Additionally, the plan draws ideas and inspiration from successful models implemented in similar communities and nationally recognized best practices.

By combining the insight and aspirations of our local community with proven approaches, this plan aims to create a robust and effective framework that reflects the unique needs and desires of our community.

The public engagement component of the project included the following:

- Key informant interviews (artists, musicians, gallery owners, arts and culture organizations, educators, Kenaitze representatives, business owners, and likely partners)
- Engagement at public events (Kenai Peninsula Borough School District “Visual Feast” art show opening, Kenai Peninsula Home Show)
- Online survey
- Online asset mapping
- Plan preview at Wednesday Market/Music in the Park

Each component of community engagement played a vital role in shaping the Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan. Through key informant interviews, we established the overall framework. Engagement at public events served as opportunities to update the broader community on the planning process and gather feedback on emerging ideas from the interviews. The online survey deepened our understanding of how the community perceived the current state of arts and culture in our community and provided valuable input and ideas on how to grow arts and culture assets and programming.

As the plan took shape, we had a booth at the first Wednesday Market and Levitt Amp Series event to give residents a sneak peek at emerging ideas and gather feedback.

The plan reflects the insight and aspirations of community members and key informants paired with proven approaches other communities have taken to fostering arts and culture.

Online Survey

The City of Soldotna conducted an online survey for residents, students, and people who work in the Soldotna area. Over 200 responses were collected from April 10-May 15, 2023. Below are key highlights from the survey. Complete survey data and over 800 open-ended comments are available in the appendix.

Eighty-five percent of respondents live and work in the Soldotna area. The ethnicity and age of respondents matched the census data, with the exception of the under 21 age group which had zero respondents. We believe that this was in part due to the timing of the survey at the end of the school year. Survey respondents tended to be more highly educated than census data, and predominantly female (78%). Additionally, nearly half of the respondents indicated that they considered themselves artists.

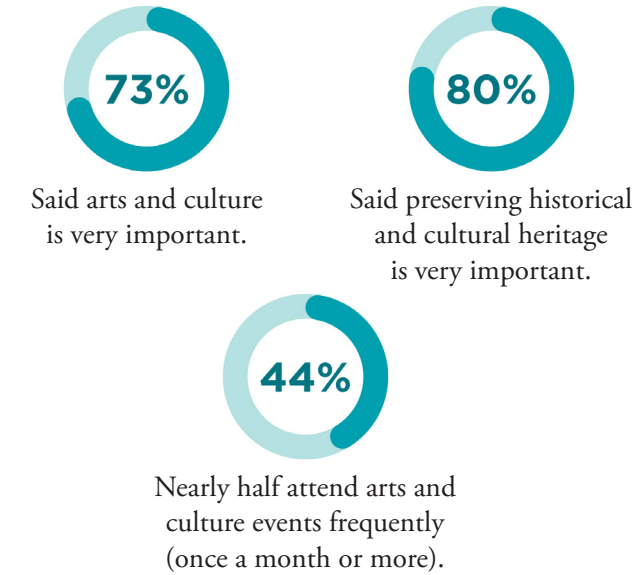
What type of arts and culture do you engage with most?



What would you like to see more of?



How important is art and culture to you?



What are the biggest challenges artists and cultural organizations face?

- Lack of venues, galleries, and creative spaces
- Costs, funding, and money
- Advertising and exposure

What are the biggest barriers to participation in arts and culture in our community?

- Lack of awareness/advertising
- Lack of offerings

It is likely that the perceived lack of offerings is impacted by the problems related to lack of awareness and lack of advertising. In other words, there is more going on in our community than people know about.

Summary

The findings from the survey indicate a community with a strong love of arts and culture and a desire to engage and participate in arts and culture activities. Many thanks to the hundreds of community members who completed the survey.

Arts and Culture Assets

Over the past 15 years, the Soldotna area has witnessed the emergence of several arts and culture organizations and traditions that have become integral to the local arts scene. These organizations contribute to the community by offering a wide range of cultural experiences. The Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan aims to uphold and sustain these organizations while providing assistance to enhance their capabilities. Through capacity-building programs, this plan seeks to strengthen their operations and support them in fulfilling their respective missions. Our goal is to foster a thriving arts and culture community that benefits both the organizations and the wider community they serve.

In addition to the success stories highlighted below, the appendix includes a full list of arts and culture assets identified by community members.

Community Theater

There are several community theater groups in the Soldotna area, including Triumvirate Theatre and The Kenai Performers. These groups put on drama camps, work with the local schools, and put on dozens of shows each year. Additionally, Triumvirate Theatre is breaking ground on a new 200-person theater in the City of Kenai that will house their performances and provide space for other activities.

Soldotna Music Series, Wednesday Market

The Soldotna Wednesday Market and Summer Music Series has become a signature event, providing opportunities for local artists, makers, musicians, and chefs to engage with hundreds of people every Wednesday. Additionally, Vision Soldotna has been awarded a three-year Levitt AMP grant. The Summer Music Series brings national bands to Soldotna to headline, and provides opportunities for local bands to open for them.

Kenai River Festival

The annual Kenai River Festival, run by the Kenai Watershed Forum, draws over 8,000 attendees from all over Southcentral Alaska and beyond. It is an opportunity for the community to gather and for local artists, vendors, musicians, and chefs to sell their work.

Frozen RiverFest

Each winter, residents and visitors defy the winter cold at the outdoor Frozen RiverFest. Live music, bonfires, food vendors, and a beer garden, help build community and support local arts during the cold, dark winter. This event showcases Alaskan Breweries from around the state, local musicians, and local vendors.

Community Arts and Culture Resources Map



Above: Artist Kaitlin Vadla created a portrayal of the arts and culture landscape in the Soldotna area. The public was invited to add arts and culture resources at the Wednesday Market on June 7, 2023.

“Let’s get more public art installations throughout the city!”

- Survey Participant

“My dream is to have a theater/performing arts stage along or near the river in downtown Soldotna.”

- Survey Participant

How Do Cities Support the Arts?

Cities around the country believe in the value of investing public funds to advance the artistic life of their communities and to support the role they play in the local economy.

One common approach used by municipalities to fund arts and culture facilities and programs, as well as support local nonprofit institutions, is utilizing revenue generated from visitors.

In many U.S. cities, revenue from development fees is primarily allocated to commissioning and installing public art. This is often referred to as a “percent for art” law, with the assessment varying by community. The assessments range from a fraction of a percent to three percent of the cost of new construction or renovation, with some cities maintaining a specific dollar cap on the assessment.

Many cities utilize a combination of funding mechanisms to fund arts in their community. For example, using the General Fund to support cultural facilities, allocating a portion of local revenues for grants to local arts organizations and their own arts and culture commission, and allocating 1% of the construction costs of City building projects for public art commissioning and installation.

Some cities augment their own public funding by applying for grants to federal and state agencies, national, regional and local foundations, corporations and businesses, individual philanthropists and by conducting fundraising events to help pay for specific programs or the purchase of public art.

Municipal Arts Agencies Comparative Report

There are different ways that arts and culture management can be organized, as shown in the graphic below.

The recommended structure in the long term is #4, the Regional Nonprofit Arts Council approach due to the proximity of the City of Kenai, and the importance of local Tribal entities in cultural activities in our community. As a first step, structure #2, the City Coordinates Partners, can be utilized while a regional arts council is created and other regional governments are brought in.

**Structure #1:
Embed in the City**
Arts commission entity within the City, which includes City staff members or teams.



**Structure #2:
City Coordinates Partners**
Partnership between the City and arts and culture organizations. City takes the lead and the nonprofits facilitate community engagement and collaborate with the private sector.



**Structure #3:
Nonprofit Arts Council Leads**
Partnership between the City and a nonprofit, but in this case the nonprofit takes the lead and works strategically with other entities to manage, support, and fund arts and cultural initiatives.



**Structure #4:
Regional Nonprofit Arts Council Leads with Support from Regional Governments**
Regional approach led by a nonprofit organization in collaboration with multiple governmental and tribal organizations.



City staff engage with the public at Soldotna Creek Park. Photo: Agnew::Beck



Benchmark Study

Our study includes a review of two cities with comparable population to Soldotna. While both cities have a variety of thriving arts organizations, the primary focus of our research was to highlight the organizational structure and funding strategies. By understanding the role these organizations play in the community and the way that they operate, we can learn a great deal about how a community like Soldotna can grow its arts and culture scene. In Homer, Alaska, we researched the City of Homer and the Homer Council on the Arts. In Moab, Utah, we looked at the City of Moab and the Moab Arts

Homer, Alaska

Organization

- City of Homer Parks, Art, Recreation and Cultural Advisory Commission (PARC)
- Homer Council on the Arts (HCOA), a 501(c) (3) arts council

Structure

PARC Commission

7 voting members and non-voting youth and City members

Homer Council on the Arts

4 paid staff, 8-member volunteer board of directors

Funding

PARC Commission

1% for art on capital expenditures over \$250K (capped at \$70K)
Private funding
Public art fund (separate account within the City’s general fund)

Homer Council on the Arts

\$1,248,208 annual expenditures (2005) \$232 per capita Grants (NEA, Alaska State Council on the Arts, Rasmussen, CIRI)
Corporate funding and planned giving
Memberships and participation fees
Private donations

Council. In both cities, the city government and the arts council work together, but the level of partnership varies. In simplified terms, in Homer the city and the arts council have distinct and separate leadership, organization and funding. In Moab, the city and the arts council have a more integrated partnership.

A detailed comparison of city and arts council functions for Homer and Moab is included in the appendix.

Roles/Purpose

PARC Commission

The purpose of the PARC is to act in an advisory capacity to the City Manager and the City Council on matters involving city parks, recreation facilities, public beaches and trails, support of the arts and acquisition, maintenance and disposition of works of art. PARC may also solicit donations of money and property and make recommendations to the Council for the disposition of money or property so received.

Homer Council on the Arts (HCOA)

HCOA provides opportunities for all people in the community to experience and participate in the arts. Creating space and opportunities for people and innovative ideas to collide. Offering stellar performances, original exhibitions, arts education for all ages and abilities, and community partnerships, HCOA fuels inspiration.

Public Offerings

PARC Commission

Municipal art collection

Homer Council on the Arts (HCOA)

Galleries: Homer Council on the Arts Gallery, South Peninsula Hospital Gallery
Programs: Artist directory, event calendar, newsletter, jam sessions, writing groups, art in the park, sip and paint

Moab, Utah

Organization

- City of Moab Department - Moab Arts
- Moab Arts Council (MAC) a separate 501(c)(3) arts council

Structure

City of Moab Department (Moab Arts)

3 full-time City employees
5-member Recreation, Arts, Parks Tax Advisory Committee

Moab Arts Council (MAC)

7-member volunteer board of directors

Funding

City of Moab Department (Moab Arts)

General fund (\$421,213 budgeted for FY2023)
Recreation, Arts, and Parks Tax (adds 0.1% to the sales tax, approximately \$465,000 in 2022-23)
Revenue from Moab Arts and Recreation Center (\$56,000)

Roles/Purpose

City of Moab Department (Moab Arts)

The City of Moab Recreation, Arts, Parks and Trails Department houses Moab Arts and owns the Moab Arts and Recreation Center (MARC). Moab Arts runs the MARC, provides programming, organizes events, and manages galleries.

Programming: Arts and Rec Camp, Moab Art Walk, Arts and Ag, Red Rock Arts Festival, and the Holiday Craft Fair.

Galleries: Moab Arts Gallery, Moab Airport Gallery, Moab City Hall Gallery, Online gallery

City of Moab Recreation, Arts, Parks Tax Advisory Commission

The RAP Tax Advisory Committee advises the City Council on the use of RAP Tax funds, including providing recommendations on how to distribute RAP Tax Grants which make up 20% of the RAP Taxes collected. RAP Tax Grants are available to 501(c)3 organizations to support recreation, arts, and cultural programs, collections and exhibits, and related promotion.

Moab Art Council (MAC)

Moab Arts Council is a non-profit arts advocacy organization. They have a directory of local artists and a calendar of arts events, administer grants, serve as a 501(c)3 nonprofit umbrella for one-time or continuing programming. Prior to the 2021 RAP Tax, MAC provided grant administration to the City of Moab for their Community Arts Grants. This grant program appears to have been replaced by the RAP Tax Grant program which MAC does not administer.

Arts and Culture Management

Role of the City

The City of Soldotna has supported arts and culture efforts in the past and does so currently. The creation of the Arts and Culture Master Plan will help define, continue and expand these roles and support the creation of a more vibrant arts and culture destination and maintain our high quality of life. The City’s roles as provider, partner, and facilitator are outlined below.

Provider

The City has a strong history of support for arts and culture through programming, funding, and providing space for community events. To continue this support, the City will maintain successful programs like the variety of activities, guest speakers, and presentations at the Soldotna Library, reevaluate past programs like Community Schools, and explore new ways to incorporate arts and culture into our community. Additionally, the City will continue to fund arts and culture initiatives, commission public art, and accept and maintain art donations, but will seek to formalize and improve these processes. The City aims to establish clear policies and procedures to commission art, manage funding for arts and culture, and support arts programming. This will ensure a more inclusive, transparent, and strategic approach to community art opportunities, and arts and culture programming. Lastly, the City recognizes the importance of investment in public spaces that bring people together, foster community, and serve as hubs for arts and culture events. Expanding our role as a provider of such spaces is a key objective to meet the needs of our vibrant arts and culture community.

Partner

The City actively supports art as an essential component of daily life through partnerships that enrich the lives of Soldotna residents. Collaborations with the Soldotna Chamber, the Soldotna Rotary Club, the Soldotna Historical Society, Vision Soldotna, the Triumvirate Theatre, and other organizations have successfully brought art, literature, creativity, history, culture, music, and theater into the lives of community members. The City has hosted various arts and culture events organized by partners, and accepted donations and the responsibility of maintenance of public art created and funded by partners in their facilities and public spaces. Exploring additional ways to collaborate with new and existing partners is an efficient way for the City to nurture arts and culture experiences for the community members and to enhance the aesthetic appeal and cultural vibrancy of our community.

Facilitator

The City is uniquely positioned to play a transformative role of facilitator to empower other organizations and businesses to support the arts and culture. Building on the belief that collaboration is key to success, the City will facilitate connections among diverse stakeholders and champion the establishment of a regional arts and culture council to serve as a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and shared resources. Furthermore, the City will facilitate support of the arts by identifying and removing barriers that prevent other organizations and businesses from supporting arts and culture, creating an ecosystem where arts and culture can thrive. The City will pave the way for a vibrant and inclusive community, bolster economic growth, foster creativity, and nurture a sense of pride and cultural vitality for all.

Role of the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce

Promoter

The Soldotna Chamber of Commerce plays a vital role in our community through the promotion of local business and tourism. To build upon this role of promoter, the Chamber can raise awareness of arts and culture opportunities within our vibrant community by highlighting local artists, performances, exhibitions, and cultural events to ensure that residents and visitors alike are informed about the diverse artistic offerings available. Art and culture enhance the visitor experience. Incorporating arts and culture into the Chamber’s tourism marketing efforts, showcasing the rich artistic tapestry of our city will attract tourists who seek immersive cultural experiences and create a positive economic impact for local artists, businesses, and the overall community.

Connector

As a valuable connector within the community, the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce plays a crucial role in building business capacity within the arts and culture sector. The Chamber can foster connections between local artists, performers, and cultural organizations with businesses and potential collaborators. By facilitating these connections, the Chamber can support the growth and sustainability of the arts and culture sector, creating a thriving environment for creativity and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the Chamber serves as a reliable hub for current event and contact information in town. The Chamber can help the public and visitors access to up-to-date details about exciting arts and cultural events in Soldotna, as well as provide a directory of local artists, galleries, venues, public art installations, and arts and culture organizations. As a connector, the Soldotna Chamber of Commerce will enhance the visibility and accessibility of arts and culture, and contribute to the overall economic and social vitality of our city.

“We seem to miss many activities because we didn’t know it was happening until after it happens.”

- Survey Participant

“A regional first Friday would be fun. Art, music, dance, restaurants all participating in a special Friday once a month.”

- Survey Participant

An event at Soldotna Creek Park. *Photo: Agnew::Beck*



Below, a vacant retail space became a school district art gallery at the 5th Ave. Mall in Anchorage. *Photo: Agnew::Beck*



Soldotna Arts and Culture Master Plan

Role of a Regional Arts and Culture Council

Due to the close proximity of Central Peninsula communities, this plan recommends the creation of a regional arts council. This non-profit arts council can serve the roles of partner, connector, and leader.

Connector

Looking towards the future, the regional arts and culture council will serve as a vital connector, strengthening the arts and culture sector in our region. The council will forge connections with educational institutions, community organizations, and local artists to develop a cohesive arts and culture network. The enhancement of connections between the creative and business sectors will strengthen creativity and foster innovation. These connections will encourage collaboration between artists, entrepreneurs, and businesses, creating a dynamic creative ecosystem that benefits the entire community. Additionally, the council will play a crucial role in connecting regional government agencies with arts and culture organizations, facilitating communication and cooperation to address common challenges and maximize the impact of our collective efforts. Through these connections, the council will support a future where arts and culture flourish, bring people together, enrich lives, and contribute to the vibrant identity of our region.

Leader

The regional arts and culture council will be well positioned to take on the role of leader, to guide and energize the growth and development of the arts and culture sector in our region. With a commitment to building capacity within the sector, the council will provide connections to resources, training, and mentorship opportunities to support artists, organizations, and cultural institutions to reach their full potential. In collaboration with tribal governments and other culture organizations, the council will integrate and preserve the diverse cultural heritage of our communities, promote a sense of pride and identity, and ensure that our history is valued and our distinct identities are cherished and celebrated by residents and visitors alike. As a visionary leader, the regional arts and culture council will inspire and guide the arts and culture sector and cultivate a vibrant and inclusive creative landscape that uplifts our region and captivates both residents and visitors alike.



Above: The Kenai Arts Center plays an important role for arts and culture in the region, with monthly art shows, live music, and year-round events. Photo: Agnew::Beck



Focus Areas and Recommendations

★ Growing a Thriving Arts and Culture Scene

Here's what we've heard from the survey and interviews...

IDENTIFY
Increase awareness & visibility.

- Arts and culture calendar**
- Directory of arts and culture resources**
- Promote events
- Cultural history - learning knowledge from our past

CONNECT
Create connections that support arts and culture.

- Across disciplines (artist to artist)*
- With local businesses*
- Artist/creative industry incubator (support on the business side of being an artist)*
- To funding streams *
- Collaborative projects**
- To opportunities (to exhibit work or to create art for public display/installation)

REENERGIZE
Make it accessible and part of daily life.

- First Friday Art Walk/Bus
- More public art/beautification***
- Signage for cultural sites
- Incorporate Dena'ina language
- Year-round programs*
- Programs for all ages*
- Arts in Schools! For the enrichment of learning
- Adult Art class - photography, drawing/painting
- Walking trails - running - out door shops

INTEGRATE
Integrate arts and culture into local planning efforts.

- Local arts commission*
- Arts and culture tourism promotion
- Exhibit space in municipal buildings
- Micro-loans - community support
- Implement 1% for arts
- Coordination between local organizations
- Paid staff**
- Have affordable housing/studio space by allowing youth + people who live here to pursue creative work

★ Young Folx, what do you think?

- public transport

- needs for people w/ disabilities & YOUTH

Maintain Theater Arts

Arts & Culture Masterplan

Above: Community feedback board by artist Kaitlin Vadla.

1

IDENTIFY:
Increase awareness and visibility

Increase awareness and visibility of local artists, organizations, cultural assets, events, and educational opportunities within the community. Establish a clear view of the gaps and areas for strategic growth.

2

CONNECT:
Work together

Work together across organizations, governments, and arts and culture sectors to support and create opportunities to current and emerging artists, nurturing their growth, and supporting a vibrant arts and culture scene.

3

RE-ENERGIZE:
Make it part of daily life

Bring arts and culture into the community's everyday life, making it visible and accessible to residents and visitors to create enthusiasm, engagement, and collaboration around arts and culture events and programming.

4

INTEGRATE:
Put art and culture into city planning

Integrate arts and culture into city planning and operations, making it visible and accessible to residents and visitors alike.

Recommended Actions:

City of Soldotna

Focus Areas:

- 1 IDENTIFY:** Increase awareness and visibility
- 2 CONNECT:** Work together
- 3 RE-ENERGIZE:** Make it part of daily life
- 4 INTEGRATE:** Put art and culture into city planning

	Recommendations	Strategies	Rationale	Department(s)	Focus Areas	Potential Partners	Timeframe
1	Call out art/murals as allowable expenditure under existing City grant programs (Storefront Improvement Program and Soldotna City Council Mini-grant Program).	<p>Add public art, like murals and sculptures, to the list of allowable improvements in the Storefront Improvement Program, and make sure the arts community knows of the change.</p> <p>Soldotna Chamber of Commerce or a future regional arts and culture council could house a list of artist contacts for businesses interested in connecting with artists. <i>See recommendation 11.</i></p>	Public art adds to the beauty and character of a community and inspires future artists, highlighting them in the City's existing grant programs helps support this.	Economic Development and Planning (ED and P)	<div>3</div> <div>4</div>		Short term
2	Develop policy and process for commissioning and/or accepting donations of art for installation in city parks and facilities, including policies for ownership, maintenance, decommissioning of public art.	These standards should be aligned with other public sector owned and managed art, historic structures, and property.	Institutionalizes the City's role and responsibility.	Administration, ED and P	<div>3</div> <div>4</div>		Short term
3	Establish Arts and Culture Advisory Committee composed of City staff and representatives from existing boards and commissions (e.g. City Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, Library Advisory Board).	Include local arts organizations when advertising vacancies on these boards.	Institutionalizes the City's role and responsibility.	Administration, ED and P	<div>3</div> <div>4</div>		Short term
4	Convene working group to explore formation of regional arts and culture council. <i>See page 32 for more on recommended actions of this council.</i>	Form a board with representation in Soldotna, Kenai and other areas. Funding for eventual staff may come from state and national funders (<i>see details of Homer Council on the Arts funding in the benchmark study</i>).	Arts and culture in our community knows no city boundaries. We have vibrant arts and culture community that will be stronger as a united organization.	Administration	<div>1</div> <div>2</div>	Kenai Arts Center, Soldotna Chamber of Commerce, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Soldotna Rotary, Kenai Peninsula College (KPC), other local arts and culture organizations	Short term
5	Build partnership with Dena'ina Language Institute and Kenaitze Indian Tribe to explore incorporation of traditional place names in Soldotna.	<p>Explore the potential to incorporate Dena'ina language and cultural elements into new naming of buildings, parks, streets, and programs. Consider educational signage and wayfinding for culture/historical sites.</p> <p>Establish an approval process to ensure correct spelling and usage of the Dena'ina language.</p>	Use of traditional place names and programming can help heal past trauma, connect our community to its past, and establish a richer connection to our community for both residents and visitors.	Administration, ED and P, Parks and Recreation	<div>1</div> <div>2</div> <div>4</div>	Dena'ina Language Institute, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Salamatof Native Association, KPC	Short term

Recommended Actions:

City of Soldotna (continued)

- Focus Areas:
- 1 IDENTIFY: Increase awareness and visibility
 - 2 CONNECT: Work together
 - 3 RE-ENERGIZE: Make it part of daily life
 - 4 INTEGRATE: Put art and culture into city planning

	Recommendations	Strategies	Rationale	Department(s)	Focus Areas	Potential Partners	Timeframe
6	Explore creation of public art fund and mechanisms for the City to support the creation of public art and programming.	<p>Explore creation of a mini-grant program that is specific to funding arts and culture programming.</p> <p>Develop methodology for calls for public art.</p> <p>Structure the public art fund to allow access to grants that require matching funds.</p>	Provides an integrated method and standardized processes and procedures to support the creation of public art and programming. When possible, utilize existing tools and models.	Administration	<div>3</div> <div>4</div>		Medium term
7	Incorporate public art into infrastructure planning and beautification projects.	<p>Identify locations for installation of public art in/on city facilities, parks, utility boxes, light pole banners, wayfinding signage, etc.</p> <p>Incorporate arts and culture into current planning efforts and capital projects (e.g. downtown improvement plan, riverfront redevelopment, wayfinding, complete streets)</p> <p>Expand/highlight existing public art offerings at municipal facilities/parks.</p> <p>Incentivize arts and culture businesses and public art projects to locate themselves in the downtown area.</p> <p>Promote these opportunities to arts and culture community.</p>	Integration of local art into infrastructure brings awareness to local artists, builds brand of Soldotna as an arts and culture hub, makes the city beautiful.	Administration, ED and P, Public Works, Parks and Recreation	<div>4</div>		Medium term

Recommended Actions: City of Soldotna (continued)

- Focus Areas:
- 1 IDENTIFY: Increase awareness and visibility
 - 2 CONNECT: Work together
 - 3 RE-ENERGIZE: Make it part of daily life
 - 4 INTEGRATE: Put art and culture into city planning

	Recommendations	Strategies	Rationale	Department(s)	Focus Areas	Potential Partners	Timeframe
8	Support/facilitate year round arts and culture programming for all ages and abilities.	<p>Revitalize programming that is similar to the former community schools program.</p> <p>Continue and expand partnerships and programming at the Soldotna Library.</p> <p>Continue support of the summer music series and other arts and culture events at City facilities.</p> <p>Explore new partnerships with local arts and culture and educational (e.g. Kenai Peninsula College, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District) organizations to support existing programming (example: theater and drama camps, language and culture camps).</p>	Arts and culture programming engages the community, enriches their experience, creates opportunities for intergenerational learning, teaches practical skills, and highlights understanding of our local culture and environment.	Parks and Recreation, ED and P, Library	2 3	KPC, KPBSD, Soldotna Chamber, Vision Soldotna, other local arts and culture organizations	Medium term
9	Explore adaptive use of vacant spaces for use as maker spaces, co-working spaces for artists and creative start-ups.	The City could encourage this through incentives, such as abatement of property taxes, vacancy charges, and/or other measures.	The <i>Envision 2030 Comprehensive Plan</i> (Arts and Culture Strategy 5) encourages the use of vacant retail areas for arts and public uses.	ED and P	1 4		Medium term

Recommended Actions: Chamber of Commerce

Focus Areas:

- 1 IDENTIFY:** Increase awareness and visibility
- 2 CONNECT:** Work together
- 3 RE-ENERGIZE:** Make it part of daily life
- 4 INTEGRATE:** Put art and culture into city planning

	Recommendations	Strategies	Rationale	Focus Areas	Role of the City	Potential Partners	Timeframe
10	Promote Chamber calendar as centralized events calendar for art and culture events on the central peninsula.	<p>Outreach monthly to local arts organizations and guilds, historical societies, regional and tribal governments.</p> <p>Share during Tuesday morning Chamber radio announcements, online and in print.</p> <p>Develop a campaign to raise awareness and encourage usage of the calendar.</p>	Community feedback indicates there is a lack of opportunities in our area. Raising and sharing awareness about existing opportunities and researching to find opportunities will help the community learn about new possibilities.	<div>1</div> <div>3</div>	Utilize City communications channels to amplify the Chamber's promotion efforts.	City of Kenai, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Chambers of Commerce, Arts Guilds, Historic Society, Fish and Wildlife, KPC, Alaska Christian College, Alaska Humanities Forum, Alaska State Council on the Arts, Rotary, Potters Guild, Kenai Peninsula Borough School District (KPBSD)	Short term
11	Develop, maintain, and promote directory of artists and performers, venues, creative spaces, gallery spaces, historical sites, museums, and arts and culture organizations.	<p>Update list annually, create and promote a web portal for community members to submit information.</p> <p>Share online and in print. (Example: <i>Kenai Local Food Directory</i> compiled by Kenai Local Food Network)</p> <p>Develop a campaign to raise awareness and encourage usage of the directory.</p>	Our community is rich in artists, organizations and spaces, but there is a lack of awareness and creative use of space. The directory tool can help the community understand what we have so they can envision creative ways to connect and collaborate with our resources.	<div>1</div> <div>2</div>	<p>Communicate City spaces and programming for inclusion in the directory.</p> <p>Utilize City media channels to amplify the Chamber's promotion efforts.</p>	City of Kenai, Kenaitze Indian Tribe, Chambers of Commerce, Arts Guilds, Historic Society, Fish and Wildlife, KPC, Alaska Christian College, Alaska Humanities Forum, Alaska State Council on the Arts, Rotary, Potters Guild, KPBSD	Short term
12	Develop advertising campaign to raise awareness of and participation in local arts and culture assets and events.	<p>Include arts and culture into tourism marketing, including the Visitor's Guide.</p> <p>Establish brand of Soldotna as an arts and culture hub</p>	Many survey respondents indicated the need for better awareness and promotion of local arts & culture events. Many local events are currently happening, but there may be a lack of awareness amongst the general public.	<div>3</div>	<p>Use City media channels to promote messaging.</p> <p>Reinforce branding of Soldotna as an arts and culture hub in City communications.</p>	Arts and Culture Council, Kenai Arts Center	Medium term
13	Strengthen partnership opportunities between local artists, arts and culture organizations, and local businesses.	<p>Connect artists and arts and culture organizations with business training and mentorship opportunities.</p> <p>Luncheons and After Hours events that feature arts and culture businesses and provide opportunities to connect and network.</p>	Connecting local artists with local business can create mutually beneficial relationships, where local businesses can include and promote local artwork, allowing local artists and makers to get their work in front of a larger audience, and increasing opportunities to sell artwork when desired.	<div>2</div> <div>3</div>	<p>Utilize City media channels to promote the Chamber's efforts.</p> <p>Direct local businesses to arts and culture directory to connect with local artists and makers.</p>	Small Business Development Center, Alaska Humanities Forum, Arts and Culture Council, Kenai Arts Center	Medium term

Recommended Actions: Future Regional Arts and Culture Council

<p>1. Conduct ongoing engagement with local arts and culture organizations and broader community to identify needs, gaps, and opportunities.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public surveys and focus groups to identify asset and programming needs.• Review directory to identify gaps.• Promote and share findings with community.	<p>4. Bring funders, venues, and artists together to allow connection and innovation.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold arts and culture salons to share ideas, plan projects, brainstorm solutions, and work collaboratively to strengthen the local artist community.• Explore additional opportunities to bring this community together (e.g. artist cooperative, First Friday events, etc.).
<p>2. Connect artists and performers, arts and culture organizations, and creative businesses to upcoming grants, opportunities, and calls for art.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with the state and national arts and humanities organizations, regional governments to develop a quarterly list of grants, opportunities, and calls for art and distribute to local arts organizations.	<p>5. Identify opportunities for collaboration and partnership between local municipalities, organizations, and across artistic sectors.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordinate regional events, programming, marketing for the arts and culture scene.• Explore a coordinated first Friday for arts and culture events including the salons.
<p>3. Develop organizational capacity by seeking funding for paid staff.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore funding options, including grants and partnerships with local art and culture organizations, to support a paid staff member.	<p>6. Develop prepackaged arts and culture programming that meets state standards and connect artists and culture bearers to schools.</p> <p>Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council on the Arts has an Artists in the School program. Tie back to this. Make sure teachers are aware as well.• Use this type of programming to provide opportunities for youth and elders to connect in our community.

City of Soldotna Role in Partnership with Regional Arts and Culture Council

The City of Soldotna will partner with and support the regional arts and culture council in the following ways:

- Convene regional partners to spur formation of the regional arts and culture council
- Designate a City representative to participate as a member of the regional arts and culture council
- Provide information about funding opportunities and calls for art
- Share information and opportunities to engage with the regional arts and culture council to City media channels
- Provide space to host events

Regional Arts and Culture Council Potential Partners/Participants

Potential participants on a regional arts and culture council may include:

- Kenai Arts Center
- Soldotna Chamber of Commerce
- Vision Soldotna
- Soldotna Rotary
- Kenaitze Indian Tribe
- City of Kenai
- Kenai Peninsula Borough
- Kenai Chamber of Commerce
- Local art galleries, art-related businesses, and nonprofits
- Small Business Development Center

