

ArtsPlan06

A Strategic Vision for the Arts and Culture in Northfield

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ArtsPlan06: A Strategic Vision for the Arts and Culture in Northfield

Introduction

ArtsPlan06 is a community arts and cultural planning process initiated by the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation (NDDC) and funded by the City of Northfield. It has been led by a volunteer steering committee of community members led by Chair Jane McWilliams and members Steve Edwins, Susan Lloyd, Bart de Malignon, Heather Robins, and Philip Spensley. The task force was assisted by Northfield City staff member Howard Merriam, facilitator Tom Clough, and researchers Tim Braulick and Leslie Schultz. The task force met bi-weekly for more than six months, interviewed more than 70 community members, compiled an inventory of Northfield arts and cultural activities, organizations, venues and individual artists, surveyed other community arts plans and possible funding sources, and conducted planning reviews with leaders of arts and cultural organizations and the NDDC.

This draft represents a summary of the purpose, findings, vision and recommended strategies of the ArtsPlan06 Steering Committee. It is meant to provide a basis for further discussion, so that it can be revised before submission to the sponsors of the project in November, 2006. Data from the inventory study, the survey of other arts towns, the survey of funding sources, and the list of individual artists is presented in a separate document.

I. Purpose and Scope

The purpose of ArtsPlan06 is to assist Northfield in becoming a community in which arts and cultural activities:

- Are recognized as vital components of community life that are worthy of investment and support from the public, private and non-profit sectors,
- Are valued and promoted for their economic benefits and development potential, especially in the downtown,
- Include new ethnic groups in Northfield's identity and sense of community,
- Represent an integral part of Northfield's educational mission and programs for young people,
- Engage the talents and involvement of retirees and senior citizens,
- Develop a wider array of mutually beneficial opportunities for collaboration between faculty and student artist at the two colleges and community artists.
- Cooperate to enhance the public perceptions of Northfield's identity and quality of life in the community itself, the surrounding region and beyond.

In the view of the ArtsPlan06 task force, these elements of purpose should be regarded not only as goals for this planning process, but as long-term shared goals for the entire community.

The term “arts and cultural activities” is meant to include both traditionally defined arts genres such as music, theater, dance, the visual arts and literature, and an extended variety of cultural activities and organizations that enrich Northfield’s quality of life. An illustrative list of these would include (but is not limited to):

- Institutions such as the Northfield Public Library, the Northfield Historical Society, and the Cannon Valley Elder Collegium.
- Educational institutions such as the two colleges and the public schools.
- Festivals and events such as Defeat of Jesse James Days, Artswirl, the Bridge Square Music Festival, the Northfield Arts Guild’s Shakespeare in the Park productions, the International Vintage Band Festival, popular music events such as Over and Back, square dance clubs, and meetings and shows of antique cars and farm equipment.
- Local coffee houses and pubs that offer popular or recorded music and entertainment to their patrons.
- Local service clubs such as Rotary, Lions and Seratoma.

While many of the recommendations contained in this report focus primarily on the arts, others are related to the full range of arts and cultural opportunities in Northfield.

II. Findings

Strengths. Here are the primary strengths of Northfield as an arts and cultural community, as perceived by interview participants.

- **Amount and diversity of arts and cultural activities.** Many people pointed out that Northfield has an enormous range of arts and cultural activities for a town of its size, a considerable variety of arts and cultural organizations that are supported by community members, and a large number of resident artists.
- **The two colleges.** Many interview participants attributed the quality and variety of arts and cultural activities in the town to the presence of Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges. The colleges provide a base of arts faculty, students, performances, exhibitions, lectures and events, and have a variety of performance spaces, exhibition galleries, lecture halls, classrooms, libraries and dormitories. Carleton and St. Olaf provide all or most of their public events at little or no charge, and have been generous in sharing their facilities with community groups. There might be possibilities for additional shared use of these facilities when the colleges are not in session.
- **Arts and cultural organizations.** Northfield also has a considerable collection of well-regarded arts and cultural organizations. These include the Northfield Arts Guild, ArtOrg, the Northfield Historical Society, Northfield Youth Choirs, the Cannon Valley Regional Orchestra, the Cannon Valley Youth Orchestra, the Northfield Garden Club, and Defeat of Jesse James Days, to name a few.
- **Humanizing factors.** Northfield’s small scale, its proximity to the Cannon River, its historic and pedestrian-friendly downtown, its nearby arboretums, its bike

trails and its friendly people make the town a delightful place to live, work and visit.

- **The Public Schools.** Northfield is fortunate to have some of the best schools in Minnesota. The school system has recently developed new facilities for theater, music and the visual arts. Arts programs are well supported by teachers, administrators and parents.
- **Proximity to the Twin Cities metropolitan area.** Northfield is close enough to the Minneapolis and St. Paul metropolitan area that city residents can drive down for a day or week-end visit in about one hour, yet the community is far enough from the competing activities in these cities to encourage Northfield residents to attend and support arts and cultural activities in the local community.
- **Arts and cultural publications and web sites.** Publications such as the *Northfield Entertainment Guide*, the weekly *Diversions* guide to arts, dining and entertainment in the *Northfield News*, and web sites maintained by the Northfield Arts Guild, Northfield.org, the Chamber of Commerce and other organizations have helped to provide information about arts and cultural activities and to reinforce the town's image as an arts town.
- **Image.** Many people in the Twin Cities and south-central Minnesota have visited or heard of Northfield and have a positive image of it. Northfield's public image represents a composite of its historic and charming downtown, the presence of two highly regarded colleges, and Defeat of Jesse James Days, one of the most popular events in Minnesota.

Limitations. Interview participants cited the following factors as weaknesses or limitations in Northfield's development and potential as an arts town.

- **Facilities.** Although the town has a variety of facilities and venues for arts and cultural activities, many interviewees complained of significant shortcomings, particularly for the performing arts. College facilities are often in use during school sessions and unavailable to local arts groups during that time. Many of the other available spaces in town charge rental fees that some local artists find unaffordable. The library has also identified a need for expanded facilities.
- **Marketing.** Many interview respondents suggested that while Northfield has many arts and cultural organizations, most are too small and under-funded to afford adequate marketing and public relations programs. What advertising does occur focuses primarily on promoting particular events, rather than marketing the Northfield arts and cultural scene in its entirety or promoting the image of Northfield as an arts town.
- **Organization: coordination, cooperation and communication.** A number of interview participants said that Northfield arts organizations saw themselves as competitors for limited funding, venues and volunteers, and as a result did not cooperate, coordinate or communicate well. The Northfield Arts Guild (NAG) was originally intended to serve as an umbrella organization for all the arts, and still performs this function for a number of arts programs. But with growth in the number and diversity of arts organizations in Northfield, the NAG cannot support,

market and coordinate all the community's arts and cultural activities with its present staff and funding.

- **Leadership.** Some respondents suggested that leaders of Northfield arts organizations tend to focus on short-term, incremental goals rather than developing and implementing more ambitious long-term visions for the community's progress as a center for the arts. Of course, what appears as limited ambition is often the consequences of small scale, limited staff, and lack of resources for the development of new programs.
- **Funding.** Almost all interview respondents cited lack of funding as a critical constraint for the arts and cultural activities and organizations with which they are involved. The biggest consequence of limited funding for the arts is that most organizations cannot afford to hire adequate paid staffs, and must rely principally on volunteer labor. While this approach has worked well for certain activities, notably Defeat of Jesse James Days, prospects for further development of Northfield's arts and cultural activities and organizations are limited without additional paid staff. In addition, almost all available funding is dedicated to the support of existing arts and cultural programs. Very little money is available for new ideas, however promising.
- **Opportunities for professional artists and arts organizations.** Another consequence of limited funding is the lack of paid work opportunities for professional artists and arts organizations. Many Northfield artists work for the love of their art alone, and few of those who sell their work or perform for pay earn enough to live on without other sources of income.

III. The Case for Investment in Arts and Cultural Activities

The overall picture presented by the inventory and interview data is one of a community that already enjoys a wonderful array of arts and cultural activities, but also one in which there are significant opportunities for further development as an arts town. The case for community investment in arts and cultural activities has four parts.

- **Demand for more arts and cultural opportunities.** Based on our interviews, many Northfield residents and artists want more opportunities to create, perform and enjoy arts and cultural activities, and see the need for additional investment in programs and facilities that can provide them. Northfielders consider arts and cultural activities important to the quality of their lives, and favor increased support from government, the colleges, the business community and individuals.
- **Contribution to Northfield's distinctive sense of community.** Modern transportation, communication and media technologies tend to draw people away from their local communities for work, friendship and entertainment. Participation in the arts and culture brings Northfield residents together in cooperative activities that build personal relationships, provide opportunities for families to work and play together, involve people of different ages and ethnic

backgrounds in cooperative projects, and build the “social capital” that is essential for a strong community.¹

- **Economic development.** With the continuing decline in employment in the agricultural and manufacturing economies, traditional strategies for economic development that rely on low taxes and subsidized land have become less effective, particularly for communities like Northfield whose housing costs cannot be afforded by most agricultural and industrial workers even if jobs were available. Instead, communities like Northfield must invest in the arts, culture, education, and recreation to provide a character and quality of life that will attract talented, educated people to live and work here. Their presence will in turn attract growing, high-paying businesses from what economist Richard Florida terms the “creative economy”² – that is, businesses such as information technology, professional and technical services, health care, environmental technologies and logistics.³ These companies hire talented people, pay good salaries and benefits, generate sales for local service businesses, and provide the growth in tax revenues needed to support good schools and public services at affordable tax rates.
- **Downtown preservation and revitalization.** In recent years, the arrival of “big box” retailers like K-Mart, Target and Menards, along with the construction of the large Cub Foods grocery store two miles south of town, has shifted the bulk of the town’s retail economy to Highway 3. At the same time, the community has located new public facilities, such as elementary and middle schools, the hospital, and the Northfield Community Resource Center, far from the downtown. These changes threaten the economic viability of downtown businesses, which are crucial to the preservation of the town’s historic and social center. If Northfield is to preserve the vitality of the downtown, it must develop new kinds of activities that will attract residents, tourists and students to visit. Investment in downtown arts and cultural activities and facilities can help support the growth of related businesses such as bookstores, art galleries, crafts stores, antiques shops, specialty clothing stores, coffee houses, pubs and restaurants, renewing the downtown as the artistic, cultural and social core of the community.

The case for support of arts and cultural activities is essentially a case for shaping Northfield’s future development through active planning and investment, rather than passive acceptance of changes imposed by external economic forces. The question is not whether the town will continue to grow, but how it can maintain and enhance its distinctive character and quality of life as it grows. A community and economic development strategy driven by investment in the arts and culture will provide a far better future for Northfield residents than if the town were to become yet another generic, impersonal, suburban bedroom community, or (less likely but even worse) if it were to endanger its environment and introduce greater income inequality by attracting low-wage industrial and agricultural businesses that compete on cost.

¹ See Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 2000

² Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Basic Books, 2004

³ See Northfield’s *Comprehensive Economic Development Plan*, June, 2006, p. 5.

IV. Arts Towns: A Comparative Survey

As part of this project, the ArtsPlan06 Steering Committee and researchers Tim Braulick and Leslie Schultz surveyed ten other arts towns, selected for their similarity to Northfield in terms of size, having a college or university, or being located in Minnesota. The towns are Ashland, Oregon; Athens, Ohio; Bellingham, Washington; Cedar Falls, Iowa; Grand Marais, Minnesota; Lanesboro, Minnesota; Northampton, Massachusetts; Quincy, Illinois; Red Wing, Minnesota; and Stillwater, Minnesota. We found that each town is distinct in terms of its geography, its economic climate, and its own eclectic mix of performing, visual, and literary arts, along with educational institutions, scenic attractions, outdoor recreation, and business community draws such as restaurants, lodging, gift shops, and antique stores. However, we also discovered certain common threads, including the following.

- Many arts towns have a coordinating arts council (usually a non-profit organization) that helps individual artists and other non-profits share resources.
- Many towns have a long-term or strategic plan (or are developing one) that includes the arts and recognizes the importance of the arts to economic development and quality of life.
- The town attracts and retains a critical mass of artists and arts entrepreneurs by leveraging local resources; scenic beauty and colleges are natural starting points, but institutions that support artists are always needed.
- Reliably attracting visitors each year is essential to success, so there is often a close partnership between the city's tourism/visitors function and art organizations. Every town has art-related festivals that it promotes and supports.
- There seem to be strong leaders with vision who drive key institutions in each town – a performing arts center, an arts council, an arts colony, or a festival.

Based on our survey, the successful experience of other arts towns suggests the following ideas for action.

- It is essential to have a strategic plan. Some of the plans are provided as in the appendixes to this report. There are many, many examples on the web. We did a Google search on “arts master plan” and found many potentially useful documents.
- Some towns publish meeting places and other venue information on the city's web site. This could be done on a community web site such as Northfield.org or on a separate arts and cultural site.
- Some towns provide a free web page for artists. The directory of links is usually maintained on the city's web site.
- Lanesboro has leveraged the Root River State Bike Trail successfully, using it to bring a significant number of outsiders to their area. Northfield should look at similar possibilities with the Mill Towns Trail.
- Northfield's scenic beauty should not be overlooked. Although it is not as dramatic as the North Shore or the Berkshire Mountains, the beauty of Northfield,

in the river, the historic neighborhoods, the colleges, and the surrounding countryside, is attractive to both artists and visitors.

- An art colony in or near Northfield might be explored. Several potential initiatives have looked at how to attract artists, and there are some artists and art organizations who already attract artists/students from far away.

Northfield already has in place many of the prerequisites for moving deliberately and consciously toward an understanding of itself as an arts town – a city that attracts visitors to its arts and culture as well as providing rich resources for residents and students. To build on our current strengths and to permanently shift Northfield's perception of itself, we need a long-term funded mandate from the city government, a strategic plan that recognizes the value of arts and culture, a coordinating council for artists and art organizations, and strong leadership to build and maintain momentum.

V. Northfield as an Arts Town: A Vision for the Future

One good approach to long-term planning is to envision the desired character of the community ten or fifteen years from now, and then identify strategies that can help achieve that vision. Here are the key elements of a vision for Northfield that motivate the strategies recommended in section VI of this report. While some components of this vision are speculative at this early stage of planning, taken together they illustrate what kind of community Northfield should seek to develop through its investment in arts and cultural activities.

- **Identity as an “arts town.”** Northfield will be known as one of the leading arts towns in the United States for its quantity, quality and diversity of arts and cultural activities, organizations, and facilities, for the appeal and accessibility of these activities to residents, visitors and artists, and for productive collaborations among key institutions – the City, the two colleges, the public schools, the business sector and community arts and cultural organizations.
- **Broad community investment and support for arts and cultural development.** Arts and cultural activities will be viewed by the City, the colleges, businesses, non-profits, and individuals as worthy of substantial ongoing investment and support.
 - The Northfield City government, through an Arts and Cultural Commission, will be committed to long-term planning for arts and cultural development, will help create economic incentives to retain and attract artists to Northfield, and will participate financially in the acquisition, renovation, development and maintenance of arts and cultural facilities.
 - New opportunities will emerge for mutually beneficial collaborations among Carleton, St. Olaf, local artists and arts and cultural organizations on programs of community and educational value. The City, Carleton and St. Olaf will explore the economics and practicality of developing shared use facilities such as a Performing Arts Center that might include The Grand Theater.
 - Local businesses will respond to fund-raising needs and support the activities of local non-profit arts and cultural organizations, perhaps through a combination of company sponsorships and employee payroll deduction plans similar to those organized for social services by the United Way.
 - Non-profit arts organizations will cooperate with the Northfield Arts Guild or create a separate non-profit Arts and Cultural Collaborative (working title) to provide shared marketing, fund-raising, advocacy, schedule coordination, health insurance and retirement plans for artists, and other support services where cost-effective.
 - The public schools continue to support a wide array of arts and cultural programs as part of their academic and extracurricular programs.

- **More opportunities for arts and cultural involvement.** Northfield residents will have more opportunities to participate in the arts as artists, writers and performers, and more residents will look to Northfield as the primary locus of their artistic and cultural interests. By fostering broad, inclusive involvement from all segments of the community – families, students, young people, retirees, and members of various ethnic groups – Northfield’s arts and cultural activities will help maintain the town’s distinctive sense of community and its high quality of life.
- **More artists.** More artists, performers and writers will find Northfield an attractive community in which to work and live because of the presence of its colleges, the number and diversity of arts activities here, the growing market for their work from tourists and visitors as well as local residents, and the availability of affordable studio space, living accommodations, health insurance and retirement plans.
- **A creative economy.** Arts and cultural opportunities, along with Northfield’s relatively small size, good schools, recreational amenities, and humanizing factors will attract talented and educated people to live and work in the community. Their availability for employment will help attract and retain new and growing businesses in the creative economy, whose well-paying jobs and taxes will enable Northfield to support good schools and public services with affordable tax rates.
- **More retirees.** An active arts and cultural scene will attract a growing number of retirees whose volunteer activities will help maintain Northfield’s distinctive sense of community, and whose spending and taxes will help support local businesses, health services, schools, and public services.
- **More festivals, tourists and visitors.** Northfield will develop a thriving tourist business that attracts more visitors interested in Northfield’s arts, cultural, dining, entertainment and shopping opportunities. Tour buses will visit daily, especially in the summer and holiday seasons. In addition to such events as Defeat of Jesse James Days, more summer and December holiday festivals will be developed to take advantage of the town’s location, downtown appeal, historic character, and arts and cultural activities. These festivals will provide market opportunities for local artists and attract the participation of local residents as well as visitors.
- **A vibrant downtown.** Northfield’s downtown will be the primary focus of its arts and cultural activities, although some festivals and events will use facilities throughout the community. Both visitors and residents will come downtown frequently for arts, cultural, dining, entertainment and shopping opportunities, and their patronage of downtown businesses will help maintain the downtown’s historic character, aesthetic charm and economic value.
- **Outstanding design.** Northfield will have designated an arts and cultural district centered on the downtown, and will have planning and zoning ordinances and review processes to ensure that development within this district conforms to the highest aesthetic standards of design and preserves the historic character of the town’s architecture. The river front, downtown streets, walkways and bike trails

will be designed with public art, sculpture and gardens to enhance the town's beauty and charm.

- **More arts and cultural facilities.** Carleton College will complete its renovation of the old Middle School as a Center for the Arts. On a timely basis, Carleton will seek community input about its design plans for this renovation. Carleton and St. Olaf will continue to work with community groups to share their performance spaces when they are not in use by the colleges, and to develop new shared facilities such as a Performing Arts Center, possibly incorporating The Grand Theater. The City will develop a Community Cultural Center that includes a new library as well as space for art galleries, music recitals, poetry readings, book group meetings, films, lectures, a retail store, a café, and a visitors' center and ticket office for performances, exhibitions and tours.

This is an ambitious vision for Northfield's future as an arts town. Some of the ideas are speculative, and we cannot be certain how many of them might be realized within the next ten to fifteen years. The ArtsPlan06 task force recognizes that the Northfield community has other important claims on its resources, and that these resources are not infinite. Nevertheless, the planning group believes that each of these concepts has enough potential for the community's arts and cultural development to warrant further exploration and planning.

VI. Recommended Strategies: First Steps

The following section recommends a number of strategies that should be adopted as first steps toward the realization of the vision for Northfield's future as an arts town outlined above. These are listed by the sector or organization that should take the lead in further planning and implementation. However, most of these strategies require collaboration among a number of different organizations. The most important challenge for the development of Northfield as an arts and cultural town is to pull together many different leaders and organizations into cooperative action.

A. The City of Northfield

We believe that is essential for the City of Northfield to take overall leadership in developing Northfield as an arts and cultural town, working with the arts and cultural community, the two colleges and the public schools, the business community and the public.

1. **The City Council should create an Arts and Cultural Commission as part of City government.** The purpose of this commission would be to advise the City of Northfield in developing arts and cultural activities, organizations and facilities. The commission will be composed of volunteer community leaders, and its work will be supported with City staff and budget where needed. Its functions would include:
 - a. Develop and update a City mission, public agenda and strategic plan for arts and culture in Northfield, including further development of the strategic initiatives outlined in this plan.
 - b. Provide leadership for completing the Comprehensive Plan sections regarding civic arts and culture goals and planning, and providing input for Plan revisions.
 - c. Advocate the use of City funds for arts and cultural activities, events and facilities, and for leveraging private and corporate funding for these programs.
 - d. Facilitate cooperation and joint planning among public and private agencies now involved with related issues such as economic development, heritage tourism, and arts education.
 - e. Guide the planning, acquisition and development of land and facilities by the City that might be needed to support Northfield's arts and cultural activities and organizations, and the development of affordable studio space and housing for individual artists.
 - f. Develop and advocate design standards for City facilities, public areas, and private development, particularly in the designated arts, culture and entertainment district that represent a coherent image of Northfield as a place with a unique aesthetic, architectural, and cultural identity.
 - g. Foster inclusive and cross-cultural activities to help build community as Northfield becomes more diverse.

- h. Provide grants to arts and cultural organizations and individuals to support existing programs, events and works of art, and to support the development of new arts and cultural initiatives.
2. **The City Arts and Cultural Commission should take steps to enhance the design Northfield as an arts town.** Northfield already has beauty and charm, especially in its historic downtown and along the Cannon River. As proposed in Northfield's economic development plan, the City should take advantage of these assets by taking their character into account in land use planning. The City should also take steps to ensure that future development does not ruin or diminish the aesthetic appeal and historic character of the town, but rather adds to it. Possible actions might include the following:
- a. Create a downtown arts and cultural and entertainment district that would focus design and development of arts and cultural facilities on the downtown.
 - b. Adopt and implement physical design guidelines and standards to reinforce the best and most authentic qualities of Northfield in a comprehensive and coherent way.
 - c. Invest in the design and development of outdoor spaces, such as the Cannon River front, public walkways, bike and arts trails, and public art and sculpture to enhance Northfield's aesthetic appeal.
 - d. In particular, the City should complete the development of the Mill River Bike Trail, which has significant potential for attracting tourists and enhancing the appeal of entire Northfield area.
 - e. Provide public educational programs to develop long-term advocacy for citizens to value Northfield's physical and visual assets.
3. **The City Arts and Cultural Commission and the Northfield Public Library should plan the development of a downtown Community Cultural Center.** The Northfield Public Library is an important component of the current downtown arts, cultural and entertainment scene, and should remain there. With the help of the Arts and Cultural Commission, the Library should also consider expanding its facilities plans to include support for other arts and cultural activities that would benefit from location in the block south of the current library. A new downtown Community Cultural Center might include such spaces as:
- a. Library facilities, including book, magazine, video and CD shelving, reading rooms, meeting spaces for book groups of various sizes, and Internet facilities.
 - b. An atrium for chamber music, recitals and poetry readings.
 - c. An art gallery and a sculpture garden.
 - d. A small- to medium-sized auditorium for lectures, films, concerts and plays.
 - e. Rehearsal spaces, art studios, and classrooms.

- f. Office space and meeting rooms for community arts and cultural organizations.
 - g. A café and a retail store for arts, crafts, books and gifts.
 - h. A visitors' center for tourists offering tours and historic information and videos about Northfield, along with a ticket office listing and promoting all arts and cultural events in the community and selling tickets for performances, exhibitions and tours.
4. **The City Arts and Cultural Commission should help develop economic incentives to help retain and attract more artists.** Particularly in the early stages of their careers, professional artists often do not have high incomes. Many artists struggle to find adequate studio space and housing, and many do not have access to group health insurance and retirement plans. Northfield has relatively high living and housing costs. If the town is to be an attractive place for artists to live and work, it needs to create economic incentives that offset these disadvantages. Some possible actions:
- a. The City, in cooperation with private developers, might develop subsidized multi-use projects that offer housing, studios and retail space to resident artists.
 - b. The City, in cooperation with private developers, might convert older "warehouse" buildings into low-cost artists' lofts and studios.
 - c. The City might develop a program of community arts grants and residencies for artists who live or relocate in Northfield.
 - d. The City or a non-profit organization such as an Arts and Cultural Collaborative might explore ways to enable local artists to obtain affordable health insurance and retirement plans, perhaps with subsidies that would bring them in line with group rates for similar plans.

B. Arts and Cultural Organizations

The ArtsPlan06 task force believes that there are significant opportunities for collaboration among leaders and organizations in the arts and cultural community that would contribute to Northfield's development as an arts town.

1. **Leaders of arts and cultural organizations and representative individual artists should meet to consider the creation of an Arts and Cultural Collaborative that would represent the arts and cultural community and provide shared services to its members.** Services might include the following:
 - a. Plan the long-term development of arts and cultural programs in Northfield, in cooperation with the Arts and Cultural Commission.
 - b. Raise money from local, state and national sources to fund new arts and cultural activities and facilities.
 - c. Provide local arts and cultural organizations with information and links to corporations, foundations, and government agencies that provide funding

for the arts, and provide assistance on preparing grant proposals and funding requests.

- d. Convene arts and cultural organizations to plan and schedule events in ways that maximize market appeal and minimize overlaps between competing activities.
- e. Develop and fund cooperative marketing, advertising and public relations programs that enhance Northfield's image as an arts town, and providing comprehensive printed and web-based calendars, on-line marketing and promotional materials, and directories for all arts and cultural activities, organizations, venues, events, festivals and artists in town.
- f. Market reservations and tickets to all performances, exhibits, events and tours through a centrally located box office and web-based ticket sales, along with links to reservation telephone numbers and web sites for local restaurants, bed and breakfast inns, and hotels.
- g. Develop services for individual artists, including an artists' directory, links to artists' websites and blogs, hosting and moderation of artists' discussion forums and chat rooms, information on studio and housing opportunities in the Northfield area, listings of arts-related teaching and other job openings, and referrals to business support services for artists, including accountants, tax services, insurance agencies, and legal services.
- h. With the business and educational communities, explore the potential for developing payroll deduction programs that support arts and cultural organizations, similar to how the United Way supports social and human services organizations.
- i. Explore the development of affordable group health insurance and retirement plans for participating Northfield artists.
- j. Participate in the development of live/work studio and apartment developments that would provide working and living accommodations at affordable cost.

2. **Leaders of Northfield's existing festivals should convene to determine how to develop additional summer and holiday festivals.** Based on the success of current festivals like Defeat of Jesse James Days, Artswirl, the Bridge Square Music Festival and the International Vintage Band Festival, Northfield has an opportunity to develop more arts and cultural festivals during the summer and the December holiday season, when college facilities are available. Possible initiatives might include the following:

- a. Develop a summer-long sequence of arts festival that included music, theater, dance, literary events, and visual arts exhibitions, as well as festivals devoted to ethnic groups and special interests such as antique farm equipment and automobiles. Each festival would be separately defined and promoted so as to maintain its distinctive character and recognition, but the timing and scope of festivals would be coordinated to maximize their market appeal and minimize schedule conflicts.

- b. Develop a Historic Holiday festival in December, expanded from the St. Olaf Christmas Concert, Winter Walk and the Festival of Trees, that features 19th-century Christmas decorations, performances of Christmas music, theater and dance productions, holiday shopping and gallery tours, and so forth.
- c. Develop a summer music festival featuring performances by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, and/or other well-known musical ensembles, along with perhaps the development of a summer music camp for students and amateur musicians of all ages to be hosted by one or both of the colleges. If the music festival were successful, it might be expanded in duration and (more speculatively) eventually support the development of an outdoor performance amphitheatre.
- d. Establish a support organization, perhaps titled “Northfield Festivals,” as a part of the Northfield Arts Guild or as an independent non-profit that would foster the development of new festivals, coordinate timing, raise financial support, provide marketing, and offer logistical and production services to affiliated festivals. This would allow volunteer leaders to supervise the character and content of each festival without having raise all the money and perform all the work themselves.

C. The Colleges

As noted in the Findings section, Carleton and St. Olaf Colleges are invaluable assets to Northfield’s arts and cultural development, and have been generous in sharing their programs and facilities with the community. We believe that the further development of Northfield as an arts and cultural community can also enrich the educational and co-curricular experience of undergraduates in the two colleges, and serve to attract and retain faculty and staff to work for them.

1. **Faculty and staff from Carleton College, St. Olaf College, the Northfield Public Schools and the City Arts and Cultural Commission should develop new forms of collaboration between the colleges and the community.** Both Carleton and St. Olaf have longstanding cultures of working closely with the community. In light of Carleton’s development of its new arts curriculum and arts center, the colleges and the community should explore opportunities for new collaborations. Here are some ideas to consider.
 - a. Provide information and opportunities for community input as Carleton plans programs and designs its new Center for the Arts.
 - b. Review the availability of Carleton and St. Olaf facilities and identify ways these facilities might be used to host Northfield festivals.
 - c. Both Carleton and St. Olaf have developed service learning and community programs that enhance the educations of their students by involving them in the Northfield community. These might be expanded to involve more students and faculty with arts and cultural activities with the

public schools, with various ethnic groups, and with local artists and arts organizations.

- d. Encourage public school visits to art exhibits, concerts, plays, and other performances and events on the campuses of both colleges.
- e. Develop grants, fellowships and artist-in-residence programs that provide artists and arts faculty with opportunities to work with the colleges, the public schools and the local arts community.
- f. Encourage faculty exchanges between the colleges and the public schools.
- g. Develop and/or expand college-based summer arts camps for students of all ages, involving local artists and college and public school arts faculty as teachers where appropriate.
- h. Develop and/or expand fifth-year arts programs for St. Olaf and Carleton arts graduates, with study and teaching assistant opportunities at the colleges, schools and in the community.

2. **Carleton College, St. Olaf College, and the City Arts and Cultural Commission, should initiate a feasibility study for developing a shared Performing Arts Center.** Perhaps located in the block containing The Grand Theater and adjoining or including the Community Cultural Center described above, a Performing Arts Center would include one or more spaces for theater, music and dance. It might include the acquisition and renovation of The Grand for theater performances, film series and lectures, as well as a newly constructed concert hall suitable for performances by both classical orchestras and popular music ensembles. While a shared facility would require coordination of use, its higher utilization and shared construction and operating costs might make it more affordable for both the colleges and the City.

D. The Business Community

1. **Northfield employers should develop ways to increase financial support for Northfield's arts and cultural activities through coordinated employer contributions and a payroll deduction plan for employees.** At present, many arts and cultural programs operate their own membership and fund-raising programs, each of which is time-consuming and inefficient. Business leaders complain that they receive a growing number of funding requests from arts, cultural and educational organizations, that they have difficulty determining which organizations to support, and that their employees have no efficient way to join their employers in supporting arts and cultural activities. Possible actions include the following.
 - a. Consider developing a coordinated funding program for business support of arts and cultural organizations, with community-wide targets stated as a percentage of company revenues or profits and a pooled grant mechanism for allocating funds.
 - b. Explore the potential for creating a community-wide payroll deduction plan for the support of arts and cultural activities, similar to how the

United Way facilitates payroll deductions for local social and human services organizations.

- c. Consider whether to assign responsibility for these fund-raising programs to an Arts and Cultural Collaborative (described above), the United Way, or a separate organization sponsored by employers.

2. **The Convention and Visitors' Bureau should cooperate with arts and cultural organizations to develop programs that will attract more tour groups to Northfield.** In addition to its current tours, the CVB might consider developing such tour group activities as:

- a. Themed arts tours that include art galleries and book stores as well as historic sites and distinctive architecture.
- b. Studio arts and crafts demonstrations and sales by local artists working from existing studios and perhaps from the proposed new artists' live/work development planned by the Northfield Downtown Development Corporation.
- c. Nature walks in the Arboretum along with garden tours.
- d. Matinee performances of music or dinner theater productions at The Grand or other venues.
- e. Downtown antiquing, shopping and dining.

VII. Illustrative Timelines

The strategies listed above are first steps in planning and developing Northfield's potential as an arts town. The cost, feasibility and funding of these initiatives remains to be explored. However, even at this early stage of planning, it is apparent that implementing these initiatives will take many years. Here are some illustrative timelines that suggests targets for planning, development and implementation of various strategies and tasks.

Strategy/Task	1 Year	2 – 5 Years	5 – 10 Years
City: Create an Arts and Cultural Commission	*		
City: Enhance design of Northfield <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning & design ▪ Arts & Cultural district ▪ Design standards 	*	* *	
City: Plan/develop a Community Cultural Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning ▪ Construction 	*	*	
City: Develop economic incentives for artists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study and planning ▪ Housing, studio and retail projects ▪ Develop affordable health and retirement plans 	* *	*	*
Arts & Cultural Organizations: Arts Collaborative <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study and planning ▪ Formation of Arts Collaborative 	* *		
Arts & Cultural Orgs: Develop more festivals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning and development ▪ New festivals support organization (if formed) ▪ New festivals 	* *	*	*
Colleges: Develop college-community collabs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning and discussion ▪ New programs 	*	*	*
Colleges: Develop shared use Perform Arts Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study and planning ▪ Acquisition/renovation/construction 	*	* *	*
Businesses: Increase financial support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plan & develop pooled employer contributions ▪ Plan & develop payroll deduction plan 	* *	*	
Convention and Visitors' Bureau: Arts Tours <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning ▪ New tours 	* *	*	

VIII. Potential Funding Sources

The primary goal of this project has been to create a vision for the future of Northfield as an arts and cultural town, and to recommend some strategies for how to realize this vision. Next steps include estimating costs and identifying funding sources. The ArtsPlan06 Steering Committee conducted a survey of some prospective foundation and government funding sources, including Arts Midwest, the Blandin Foundation, the Bush Foundation, the Jerome Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, the Minnesota Humanities Commission, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Northfield Area Foundation, and the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council. Here are some conclusions from our study.

- **Multiple funding sources.** Most funders make grants with the expectation that they will not be the only source of funding for projects. Many successful projects require funding from multiple sources, including city, state and federal governments; private foundations and corporations; individual donors; and earned income from admissions, fees and facilities rental.
- **City arts and cultural facilities.** A number of larger cities have invested in the acquisition, renovation and construction of arts and cultural facilities, especially where these can be used by different organizations. Fewer small towns have taken this step, perhaps because they have not yet recognized the value of arts and cultural initiatives as a strategy for economic development. The City of Northfield has an opportunity to demonstrate innovative leadership in city government by investing in arts and cultural initiatives and facilities as a form of economic development and downtown revitalization.
- **Foundation support.** While some foundations provide small grants for particular performances and events, many make larger grants for innovative new initiatives that have strategic or transformational potential. Over the past decade, foundations have placed increased emphasis on projects that can demonstrate measurable results or outcomes. Funding for general operating support of existing organizations has declined.
- **Major donors.** Arts and cultural organizations in many cities enjoy the leadership and financial support of philanthropists with the capacity to provide major gifts, especially capital gifts for facilities and bequests for endowment. A number of recent projects in Northfield, including the Northfield Community Resource Center and the recent Northfield Arts Guild capital campaign have received generous support from Northfield residents. The community's funding strategy should include efforts to identify major donor prospects with current or past connections to Northfield, and cultivate their interest, involvement and financial support for arts and cultural initiatives, including facilities and endowment.
- **The Colleges.** Carleton and St. Olaf represent the largest employers in Northfield, and have been generous in providing financial support for important community projects in the past. The two colleges, along with several local banks, have also created a Community Investment Fund that can provide loans for community development projects at favorable interest rates. However, it must be recognized that the colleges face their own financial challenges and do not typically serve as

grant-making institutions. Proposals for college financial support must be carefully designed to ensure that they represent good opportunities to advance the colleges' educational missions, as well as to improve the local community.

Conclusion

This plan is only a beginning. Strategic, financial and facilities planning for arts and cultural facilities should become a permanent part of the community's institutional infrastructure, with leadership from the proposed City Arts and Cultural Commission and participation by the colleges, the business community, arts and cultural organizations and individual artists. We believe that investment in arts and cultural activities, organizations, and facilities is the best way to shape Northfield's future growth in ways that preserve the essence of the community – its distinctive character, identity and quality of life. A strategic commitment to investing in the arts and culture offers a rare combination of both good community development and good economic development. It deserves the support of the entire community.