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Leaders want downtown Arlington designated a cultural district

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BY SUSAN SCHROCK
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ARLINGTON — Community leaders are seeking to have downtown Arlington officially designated as a cultural district, which they say could help attract more artists and open [grant funding](#) opportunities to pay for events and attractions designed to promote tourism and revitalization.



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At its annual luncheon Friday, the Downtown Arlington Management Corp. announced plans [to apply](#) for a cultural district designation from the Texas Commission on the Arts. The state agency recognizes 24 cultural districts, including parts of Fort Worth, Dallas, Houston and Austin.

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The cultural district designation not only can be used as a marketing tool for downtown, but it would also make the area eligible [to apply](#) for state incentive programs, such as those available through the Texas Historical Commission, the Commission on the Arts and even the Governor's Office, said Gary Gibbs, executive director of the arts commission.

Downtown Arlington includes attractions such as the Levitt Pavilion, Arlington Music Hall, Theatre Arlington, the Arlington Museum of Art, the Creative Arts Theatre and School, and the University of Texas at Arlington's fine arts and theater arts [programs](#).

"We are so blessed to have an amazing cast of cultural and arts amenities right here in downtown Arlington," said Tony Rutigliano, executive director of the Downtown Arlington Management Corp.

"Cultural arts are what distinguish one community from the next. They are going to be what sets us apart from other destinations."

Promoting the arts is among several projects the downtown group, which is funded by the city, UT Arlington and a business improvement district, says it will work on over the next five years. Other priorities outlined in a strategic [action plan](#) adopted this summer include economic development, marketing, safety, and cleanliness and beautification.

Gibbs said community leaders are wise to focus on the arts, which bring in sales taxes and help attract highly skilled young professionals seeking to live in a vibrant community.

About \$150 million a year in revenue across the state is generated from cultural tourism, he said.

"The highest-spending tourist is a cultural tourist. They tend to stay longer. They tend to spend more than any other kind of tourist," Gibbs told community members at the luncheon.

Downtown Arlington Management Corp. will [apply](#) for the designation in the spring and expects to learn as soon as summer whether it is successful, Rutigliano said.

"What that will do for us is not only show the community that we are committed to the arts but show the artist that we are committed. Hopefully we will start attracting more artists downtown so we will have art galleries and studios," Rutigliano said. "By establishing ourselves as a cultural art district we are telling the artists: 'We are behind you. Come downtown and find a place to create your genius and we will support you.'"

In the meantime the group continues its efforts to support existing cultural organizations and is working to attract artists and bring new events and art amenities downtown. Over the weekend, the agency hosted the first ever South Street Art Festival, bringing live music and 75 artists offering paintings, jewelry, photography and more downtown for the three-day event.

The organization also wants to commission murals and public art, Rutigliano said.

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