

MANIFESTO AND POLICY

There is a need for cultural space throughout Seattle. Cultural spaces—including space for creating, performing and presenting art, and space for entertainment—are recognized as bringing value, both socially and economically, to the neighborhoods in which they are located. Cultural spaces are anchors that drive “creative traffic” to their neighborhoods, and are thus a fundamental element of the neighborhood’s economy.

Culturally significant land uses are non-traditional drivers of retail traffic, property values, tax revenue and, most importantly, increased social health and quality of life. The establishment and development of culturally significant land uses is an organic, generally long-term process that is inextricably linked with the growth of a neighborhood. Citizens have made it clear that culturally significant land uses are valued social health indicators and are unquestionably a public benefit. Property owners whose business models depend on the long-term health of neighborhoods are in agreement.

As neighborhoods in the City of Seattle grow, or are “rediscovered,” real estate development capitalizes on the unique, unrepeatable character of certain neighborhoods, bringing in new wealth and neighbors. Culturally significant land uses become increasingly stressed, and, in many cases, become “priced out” of these neighborhoods altogether.

This tension raises legitimate questions regarding who “owns” a neighborhood and who is responsible for stewardship of property, and of community identity and culture. Where there is tension, there is opportunity for innovation.

The City of Seattle has equity on a neighborhood scale, and therefore has a unique role to play in helping to solve this equation by adopting policies and practices that support the continued feasibility of culturally significant land uses in neighborhoods.

Locally-invested, long-term neighborhood stakeholders believe the City of Seattle should develop and adopt policies that allow neighborhoods to:

- identify their culturally significant land uses;
- preserve the amenities that make the neighborhood attractive to developers;
- Educate citizens, property owners, and developers on the importance of the arts and cultural community to property values;
- create or offer tools and opportunities for alignment of community values with developer motives;
- reward specific types of neighborhood investment.

The goal is to close the loop so that the returns on investment in social health can continue to benefit those invested in social health: the City and the culturally significant land use programmers.

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Therefore, we recommend that the City of Seattle encourage the development of policies that allow current, culturally significant land uses to capture the unique value they drive in neighborhoods. The Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee has identified potential land use actions, incentives, innovations, and partnership opportunities. These would only be effective if they are combined with a well-defined strategic effort to marry the CODAC's suggested framework to other work, practices and policies aimed at incentivizing public benefits throughout the city, such as specific efforts to support the development of affordable housing, libraries, and open space.