

## CITY OF OAKLAND

### Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting Agenda

**Monday, January 26, 2026  
5:30 – 8:30 PM**

Please note that all meetings of the Cultural Affairs Commission will be conducted in person at:

**Oakland City Hall  
1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Hearing Room 2 (First Floor), Oakland, CA  
94612**

Join from PC, Mac, iPad, or Android:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83925702928>

Phone one-tap:

+16699006833,,84761257645# US (San Jose)

+14086380968,,84761257645# US (San Jose)

Join via audio:

+1 669 900 6833 US (San Jose)

+1 408 638 0968 US (San Jose)

+1 669 444 9171 US

Webinar ID: 83925702928

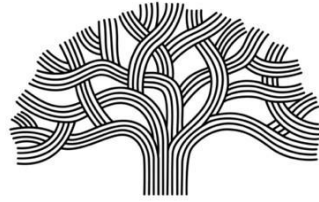
International numbers available:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83925702928>

#### **RE: ZOOM PARTICIPATION + COMMENT PERIODS**

**All Cultural Affairs Commission meetings will be conducted in person. The Cultural Affairs Commission is no longer accepting public comments via Zoom or telephone. There are two opportunities for the public to address the Cultural Affairs Commission and City staff. The first opportunity is during the "Public Comment" period, for items on the agenda. The second opportunity is during the "Open Forum" period. Dialogue during the meeting with Commissioners, City staff, or its guest speakers is not permitted outside of the two comment periods.**

**Written public comment can be submitted by 5:00 PM THE DAY BEFORE the meeting starts to [culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov). Any comments received via email during the duration or after the meeting may not be entered into public record but will be shared with the Commission and City staff later.**



CITY OF OAKLAND

**Cultural Affairs Commission**

**Monday, January 26,**

**2026**

**5:30 – 8:30 PM**

**AGENDA**

- I. CALL TO ORDER**
- II. ROLL CALL**
- III. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT + CITY OF OAKLAND LOVE LIFE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**
- IV. ACTIONS ON SPECIAL ORDERS OF THE DAY (Ceremonial Presentations, Including Proclamations, Individual Recognitions, etc.)**
- V. MODIFICATIONS TO THE AGENDA AND PROCEDURAL ITEMS (Requests To Reschedule Items, Change Order Of Items, etc.)**
- VI. PUBLIC COMMENT (for items on the agenda)**
- VII. ACTION ITEM I: APPROVE MEETING MINUTES**
  - a. Approve Minutes from the October 27, 2025 Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting
- VIII. ACTION ITEM II: PRESENT AND VOTE ON REVISED BYLAWS**
- IX. ARTIST SPOTLIGHT: JAVIER NAVARRETTE**
- X. DISCUSSION ITEM: CULTURAL DISTRICTS RECOMMENDATIONS**
- XI. INFORMATIONAL ITEM: CULTURAL AFFAIRS DIVISION UPDATE**
  - a. Economic & Workforce Development Director's Update

**b. Program Updates: Cultural Funding & Public Art**

**XII. CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION CHAIR'S UPDATE**

**XIII. COMMISSIONER UPDATES**

**XIV. OPEN FORUM**

**XV. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**XVI. ADJOURNMENT**

**Next Regular Meeting: Monday, March 23, 2026 from 5:30 – 8:30  
PM at Oakland City Hall – 1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, Oakland, CA  
94612**

Oakland Cultural Affairs Division of the Economic & Workforce Development  
Department 1 Frank H. Ogawa Plaza, 9th fl. Oakland, CA 94612  
[www.oaklandculturalarts.org](http://www.oaklandculturalarts.org)

This meeting location is wheelchair accessible. To request disability-related accommodations or to request American Sign Language (ASL), Cantonese, Mandarin, or Spanish language interpreter, please email [culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov) or call (510) 238-2212 Or 711 (for Relay Service) at least five (5) business days before the meeting. Please refrain from wearing scented products to this meeting as a courtesy to attendees with chemical sensitivities.

Esta reunión es accesible para sillas de ruedas. Si desea solicitar adaptaciones relacionadas con discapacidades, o para pedir un intérprete de en español, Cantonese, mandarín o de lenguaje de señas (ASL) por favor envíe un correo electrónico a [culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov) o llame al (510) 238-2212 o al 711 para servicio de retransmisión (Relay service) por lo menos cinco días hábiles antes de la reunión. Se le pide de favor que no use perfumes a esta reunión como cortesía para los que tienen sensibilidad a los productos químicos.  
Gracias.

會場有適合輪椅出入設施。需要殘障輔助設施, 手語, 西班牙語, 粵語或國語翻譯服務, 請在會議前五個工作天電郵[culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov) 或致電 (510) 238-2212 或 711 (電話傳達服務)。請避免塗搽香氛產品, 參加者可能對化學成分敏感

Địa điểm tổ chức cuộc họp có đường dành riêng cho xe lăn. Để yêu cầu các phương tiện hỗ trợ phục vụ người khuyết tật hoặc yêu cầu thông dịch viên ASL, tiếng Quảng Đông, tiếng Quan Thoại hoặc tiếng Tây Ban Nha, vui lòng gửi email đến địa chỉ [culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov) hoặc gọi đến số (510) 238-2212 hoặc 711 (với Dịch vụ Tiếp âm) ít nhất năm (5) ngày làm việc trước khi cuộc họp diễn ra. Vui lòng không sử dụng các sản phẩm có mùi thơm khi tham gia cuộc họp này như một phép lịch sự đối với những người tham dự nhạy cảm đối với các chất hóa học.

**Cultural Affairs Division - Economic & Workforce Development Department Cultural Affairs Commission Contacts – Pamela Mattera, Acting Cultural Funding Coordinator**

Email: [culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov](mailto:culturalaffairs@oaklandca.gov)

Phone: (510) 238-6369

Telecommunications Relay Service: 711

# Land Acknowledgement

**On behalf of the Cultural Affairs Commission & Public Art Advisory Committee:**

**We want to take a moment to honor the traditions and territory we are a part of.**

**Those of us on the land we now know as Oakland and lands all the way up to Albany are in Huichin (*Hooch-yoon*), the unceded territory of the Chochenyo (*Cho-Chen-yo*)-speaking Confederated Villages of Lisjan (*Lih-Shawn*) Ohlone.**

**We stand with the Lisjan people and their right to legal recognition and benefits from the US Government.**

## **LOVE LIFE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (abridged version)**

We acknowledge that in service to our beloved city of Oakland, and all its citizens, adhering to the city of Oakland's official motto, "Oakland Love Life" we enter into this space committed to embody love as our guiding principle.

We acknowledge Love Life as our motto as we denounce violence in all forms and the conditions that create it.

We acknowledge that when we demonstrate love, we also exhibit respect and kindness towards each other.

We commit to acts of love as an intentional force to generate tangible solutions, in regards to all of our actions.

We recognize as leaders, we must set an example and precedent for those in community who have entrusted us with these duties.

We welcome and appreciate all contributions to this space, and even when expressing disagreement, we request that we lead with love in your heart.

We seek to find common ground, and tangible solutions that demonstrate love for our city, its residents, and all constituents.

We acknowledge that when we lead with love we are able to uplift a thriving city rooted in equity, equality, justice, inclusion, and opportunity for all.

We commit to the action of "Love Life" as our motto and mantra.

## **Welcome to Our New Cultural Affairs Commissioners**

### **Claudia Paredes**

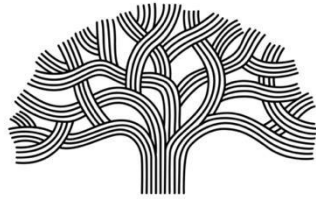
Claudia Paredes has been a proud Oakland resident for nearly 20 years. She is deeply rooted in this community and committed to advancing equity and leadership across our city. With over 15 years of experience leading transformative initiatives at the intersection of nonprofit, philanthropy, and civic leadership, her focus is on scaling programs that strengthen equity, expand leadership pipelines, and drive measurable social impact locally and beyond.

With degrees from UC Berkeley and Pepperdine University, she brings both strategy and heart to her work. She's known as a strategic architect and dynamic implementer—equally skilled at setting vision and executing with precision. As a coach, she advises executives, women leaders, and emerging grantmakers to align their leadership with purpose and values.

Claudia is a proud immigrant, Peruvian, future ancestor, and mother. She is raising her daughter in Oakland and continuing to invest in the people and ideas shaping a more just and thriving Bay Area.

### **Dontina Williams**

Dontina Williams is a cultural worker and arts administrator dedicated to advancing creative equity and community well-being across the Bay Area. She currently serves as the Office Manager at the African American Art & Culture Complex (AAACC) in San Francisco, where she supports daily operations, public programming, and partnerships that strengthen the city's Black arts ecosystem. With a deep love for the arts and over a decade of experience in the Bay Area's cultural landscape, including previous roles with the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the Museum of the African Diaspora, Dontina is proud to bring her commitment to cultural equity, collaboration, and community care to the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Commission. Born and raised in the Bay, she is passionate about creating spaces that celebrate creativity, heritage, and belonging.



## CITY OF OAKLAND

### **Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting Minutes Monday, October 27, 2025 5:30 – 8:30 PM**

**Members in Attendance:** Vanessa Whang (Chair), Jim Santi Owen (Vice Chair), Jennifer Easton, Miles Lassi, Ilana Lipsett, Mandolyn “Mystic” Ludlum

**Members Absent:** Olaywa K. Austin (unexcused), Dontina Williams (excused)

**Staff in Attendance:** Josie de Mira, Lex Leifheit, Pamela Mattera, Kristen Zaremba

#### **Call to Order/Roll Call**

##### **1. Welcome**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Whang at 5:35 PM.

##### **2. Land Acknowledgement + Official City of Oakland Love Life Acknowledgement**

Chair Whang read the Land Acknowledgement and Vice Chair Owen read the City’s [Love Life Acknowledgement](#).

##### **3. Actions on Special Orders of the Day**

Chair Whang introduced and welcomed Miles Lassi as the newest Commissioner for the Cultural Affairs Commission. Commissioner Lassi shared that he wanted to join the Commission in order to learn more about the arts ecosystem and what’s needed for it to thrive in Oakland. Chair Whang also acknowledged Lex Leifheit’s year of service as the Interim Cultural Affairs Manager. Vice Chair Owen, Commissioner Lipsett, and Commissioner Ludlum added their thanks and appreciation. Leifheit expressed gratitude for her time with the City of Oakland.

##### **4. Public Comment**

Public comment was entered by Ashleigh Kanat, Director of Economic and Workforce Development, to offer her thanks to Lex Leifheit.

##### **5. Action Item 1: Approval of Minutes from July**

Motion to approve meeting minutes from July 28, 2025, made by Commissioner Lipsett and seconded by Commissioner Easton.

Ayes: Easton, Lipsett, Ludlum, Owen, Whang

Absent: Austin, Williams

Abstention: Lassi

The motion passed.

**6. Discussion and Possible Action Item 2: Conflict of Interest Policy**

Chair Whang introduced the next item for discussion and possible action: a conflict-of-interest policy for the Commission. The goal for the policy is codification and alignment with policies at city and state levels as well as the culture of the field. She also noted that the proposal closely mirrors that from common grantmaking practices. Commissioners raised questions about defining close personal relationships and adversarial relationships, and the concept of self-reporting. Leifheit offered that the language as it is currently written allows for exploration of ethical concerns or consultation with the City attorney or officials, if needed. Chair Whang suggested that the language be revised to acknowledge that conflicts “may arise” rather than simply “to arise” and the Commissioners agreed.

Motion to accept the draft of the conflict-of-interest policy with the edit noted above pending addition of non-substantive edits and approval by City Attorney made by Vice Chair Owen and seconded by Commissioner Ludlum.

Ayes: Easton, Lassi, Lipsett, Ludlum, Owen, Whang

Absent: Austin, Williams

The motion passed.

**7. Discussion Item and Possible Action Item 3: Draft of Commission Bylaws**

Chair Whang presented the draft of Commission Bylaws, which are modeled after PRAC Bylaws (Parks and Rec Commission). Commissioner Easton raised questions about using Robert’s Rules of Order for meeting management and how Oakland residency is defined. Staff stated that they would confirm protocol and requirements around Rules of Order. Commissioner Easton suggested that Robert’s Rules be left in and an amendment could be made later, if applicable. Commissioners discussed residency and whether appointees need to be Oakland residents or can work in Oakland and live elsewhere. Chair Whang noted that as advisors to Councilmembers, being residents could be important. Concern for possibly excluding unhoused residents was expressed.

Commissioner Lipsett addressed the code of conduct and whether there needs to be a hiatus or “cooling off” period after leaving the Commission, specifically in regard to applying for Cultural Affairs Division (CAD) funding or resources. Chair Whang provided an example: if you, as a Commissioner, vote for policy to establish a program that needs to hire a consultant, and then you immediately step down and apply for the consulting role that can be perceived as setting yourself up for a contract. Leifheit noted that the cooling off period is part of the Oakland Municipal Code. Commissioners agreed that the question around CAD funding needs further research. Commissioner Easton raised the halo effect of AB5.

Commissioner Lipsett inquired if it was standard across Commissions that the City Administrator must approve standing committees. Chair Whang noted that currently the CAC ordinance requires

City Council approval for standing committees and that is why the Commission voted to amend the ordinance to City Administrator rather than Council approval earlier in the year.

Excessive absences and removal from the Commission were next raised. Staff report on Commission attendance, and if a Commissioner has three unexcused absences in a row, removal is possible. This would require going to Council, but staff and Commission officers can help Commissioners in this situation to resign as opposed to being removed. Seats cannot be filled until someone is removed or steps down. Chair Whang suggested adding language stating excessive absenteeism that makes it difficult for the Commission to function as a body will be considered reason for removal. She also inquired if there is standard language across Boards and Commissions for a hiatus or sabbatical.

Commissioners asked if the language about public comportment was standardized language, and asked for staff support on this question.

Chair Whang requested an ad hoc committee to review and edit draft language before bringing the Bylaws back to the Commission for a vote. Commissioners Easton, Lipsett, and Ludlum volunteered to join this committee led by Chair Whang.

#### **8. Cultural Affairs Division Update**

Lex Leifheit, Interim Cultural Affairs Manager, shared that while attending the Grantmakers in the Arts Conference last week, there was keen interest in Oakland arts and culture, particularly around the organizing that has been happening over the past year. She reiterated what an honor it has been to partner in efforts across the Oakland arts and culture sector. She highlighted accomplishments over the past year, including site visits, Council presentations, and new responsibilities assumed by the Division (like Cultural Districts and Cultural Assets). In her final weeks, she is focusing on a transition plan. Finally, she provided an overview of CAD services for FY2025-27 and the budget as it currently stands.

Chair Whang asked Leifheit about the opportunity that Cultural Districts represent. Leifheit noted that since this wasn't agendaized, she would provide a broad overview. The City has been approving a few districts ad hoc; the Downtown Plan called for the creation of a framework to identify priorities and provide a roadmap. The City was able to hire a pre-approved vendor to assist with research and engagement. The next step is to release a draft report for feedback later this year.

An update on the CAD Manager job search and position funding was provided by Ashleigh Kanat, Director of Economic and Workforce Development.

Pamela Mattera, Acting Cultural Funding Coordinator, provided an update on the Cultural Funding Program (CFP) for FY2025-27. She began her presentation by asking Commissioners to consider three questions around desired impact for the program. Mattera noted the constraints and considerations taken into account while creating a program design with limited dollars, including the balance between the size of the investment and the cost to administer, and alignment with City priorities. She reported on the engagement strategy employed to inform program design. Funds available for CFP are \$140,780 in FY25-26 and \$150,300 in FY26-27 and are broken into two categories: granting/regranting/financial assistance and convening/training/skill building. Proposed areas of support include belonging artist ambassadors, community-centric fundraising, financial narrative, legal support, loan products, marketing and audience development, the poet laureate program, and professional development grants. Mattera then shared a potential timeline and solicited feedback from Commissioners.

Given the small budget and lack of staff resources, Commissioners expressed concerns about the breadth of the program design and asked about leveraging resources already available in the City and in the field.

Kristen Zaremba, Public Art Coordinator, followed with an update on the Public Art Program on projects previously reported on, including DeFremery Park with AGANA, Mosswood Community Center with Adia Millett, and the Margaret Gordon West Port project with Civic Design Studio and Tommy Wong.

#### **9. Chair's Update**

Chair Whang updated the Commission on the work of the Oakland Arts & Culture Collaborative. In the wake of the cuts to the budget and the CAD Manager position, the group started small and has grown to 40-50 people, including artists and Oakland arts nonprofit executive directors. The group is commissioning an economic study of the sector. The next meeting on November 14 will cover mission, values alignment, and sustainability.

She next reiterated the need to re-invigorate the ad hoc committees and work, and asked the committees to share updates and plans.

#### **10. Commissioner Updates**

Commissioner Lipsett noted that she's been leading the Communications and Advocacy ad hoc committee and would like support on content creation for e-newsletters.

Commissioner Easton shared that she's been holding the Policy and Revenue Streams ad hoc committee, which has principally focused on cultural aspects of the General Plan Elements. The committee has also discussed funding alternatives. She noted that as she terms off, the committee will need new leadership.

Vice Chair Owen added that he's been working on the recruitment committee, which is actively seeking candidates to fill Commission seats.

#### **11. Open Forum**

No speakers during the open forum.

#### **12. Discussion Item: Cultural Affairs Proposed Workplan and 2026 Meeting Calendar**

Lex Leifheit presented a proposed workplan and 2026 meeting calendar, with the goal of mapping out staff projects and aligning those with the most advantageous schedule for Commission input to inform their work. The proposal is to hold meetings every other month, with the discretion for the Chair to add Special Meetings as needed. The dates were agreed upon in order to allow staff to move ahead with room reservations. Commissioners agreed to look at their roles and offer revisions for the suggested agendas.

#### **13. Announcement & Acknowledgements**

Chair Whang acknowledged the passing of Eddie Palmieri and the announcement of Tommy Orange's MacArthur Fellowship. Vice Chair Owen also applauded Orange's fellowship and noted that he was a two-time CFP Individual Artist Grant Recipient. Commissioner Ludlum offered an acknowledgement and remembrance of D'Angelo.

**14. Adjournment**

Motion to adjourn by Chair Whang, seconded by Vice Chair Owen.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 PM.

DRAFT



CITY OF OAKLAND

Cultural Affairs Commission

BYLAWS AND RULES OF PROCEDURE

JANUARY 2026 (final version to be vetted by the Office of the City Attorney)

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Abbreviations and Definition of Terms

The following terms, whenever used or referred to herein, shall have the following meanings, unless a different meaning is clearly made apparent by the context:

Brown Act shall refer to the State of California’s open meeting laws ([Government Code sections 54950 et seq.](#)).

CAD is an abbreviation for the Cultural Affairs Division of the Economic and Workforce Development Department.

CACom is an abbreviation for the Cultural Affairs Commission.

Charter shall refer to the [Charter of the City of Oakland](#).

Commission shall refer to the Cultural Affairs Commission.

Commissioner shall refer to a voting member of the CACom.

Committee shall refer to a standing committee or ad hoc committee of the Commission not comprising a quorum of Commissioners.

Meeting shall mean any gathering of a quorum of members of the Commission to hear and/or discuss any item of Commission business or potential Commission business, and as otherwise defined in Oakland Municipal Code section 2.22.030.F.

Municipal Code shall mean the [Oakland Municipal Code](#) (OMC).

Quorum shall mean the number of Commissioners permitted to undertake the business of the CACom, which is defined in Ordinance No. 13561.

Sunshine Ordinance shall mean Chapter 2.20 in the [Oakland Municipal Code](#). Briefly, the Sunshine Ordinance promotes access to government documents and timely notice of public meetings.

## Article I – Authority and Governance

### 1. Name

Cultural Affairs Commission (CACom)

### 2. Creation of Commission

As of May 1, 1991, pursuant to [Section 601](#) of the Charter of the City of Oakland, the Cultural Affairs Commission was created.

### 3. Authority

[Ordinance No. 13561](#) is the most recent enabling regulation that amended and restated the establishment and duties of the Commission.

The business of the Commission shall be conducted, including regular meetings and special meetings, pursuant to the state’s [Brown Act](#), the City of Oakland’s [Sunshine Ordinance](#), and the City of Oakland’s [Government Ethics Act](#). To the extent these Bylaws conflict with the proceeding laws and legislation, those laws and legislation

shall govern, unless these Bylaws hold a higher ethics standard than the proceeding laws and legislation.

4. Robert's Rules of Order

The business of the Commission shall be conducted by Robert's Rules of Order or other meeting protocol that conforms with acceptable City policies and practices, except to the extent that anything in these Bylaws or proceeding laws and legislation above conflict, in which case these Bylaws and applicable laws and legislation shall govern.

Article II – Commission Membership

1. Eligibility

The Commission shall consist of eleven (11) members who are Oakland residents, unless determined to represent an Oakland business or commercial sector that significantly contributes to the cultural vitality of the City. Appointments to the Commission are made pursuant to [Section 601](#) of the Charter. In making appointments, the Mayor shall accept for consideration recommendations offered by each Councilmember and by the Commission. To the extent practicable, appointments to the Commission shall be made using the guiding principles of cultural equity and reflect the demographic and geographic diversity of the City.

Commissioners shall receive no salary for serving.

2. Terms of service

Commissioners shall serve three (3) year terms, except when an appointment to fill a vacancy shall be for the unexpired portion of the term only. Commissioners may serve two (2) consecutive three-year terms, plus any initial term to fill a vacancy that is for less than one (1) year. Termed-out Commissioner(s) may continue to serve as holdover appointment(s) until new Commissioners are appointed pursuant to Charter [Section 601](#). A former member of the Commission can be appointed to the Commission for up to another two (2) consecutive three (3) year terms only after a full term of three years has passed after the member withdraws from service. a full term of three years has passed after the end of the member's full second three (3) year term.

Commissioner terms normally begin on October 1 and end on September 30, three (3) years hence, unless filling the unexpired portion of a vacancy.

3. Code of conduct

Acceptance of the Oath of Public Office constitutes a Commissioner's sworn responsibility of public trust. Members are required to serve well and to faithfully discharge their duties and responsibilities diligently and consistent with the laws of the City of Oakland and all applicable state and federal laws. To do so, Commissioners shall:

- a. Maintain the highest standards of professional and personal conduct;
- b. Support CAD's mission, goals, and objectives;
- c. Treat all City staff, members of the public, and colleagues with courtesy, respect, objectivity, and fairness;
- d. Instill in the public a sense of confidence about the Commission's conduct and intentions;
- e. Uphold all laws and regulations; and refrain from using their official positions to secure special advantage or benefit for themselves or others;
- f. Refrain from applying to CAD-funded grant programs as an individual or enter into a professional services contract with CAD;
- g. Ensure that any eligible organization of which they are an employee, ongoing contractor, or board member refrains from applying to any CAD-funded grant program or forfeit their position as a Commissioner.

Given that the Commission was established "for the purpose of advising the Mayor, City Council and City Administrator" (see Article III – Roles of Commission), no current employee or contractor of the Offices of the Mayor, City Councilmembers, or City Administrator will be recommended for an appointment to the Commission.

#### 4. Resignation

A Commissioner voluntarily resigning from the Commission shall immediately submit written notice to the City Clerk, Commission Chair, and CAD staff of the effective date of their separation. CAD staff shall inform the appointing authority of the special vacancy and perform all tasks necessary to fill the vacancy.

#### 5. Removal

A member may be removed pursuant to [Section 601](#) of the City Charter. Among other things, conviction of a felony, misconduct, incompetency, inattention or inability to perform duties. Regular attendance at Commission meetings is critical for the body to

function effectively. Excessive absenteeism (typically, absence from three or more consecutive regular meetings except when absent by permission of the Commission for special circumstances) shall constitute cause for removal from the Commission by the City Council.

#### 6. Separation

Upon leaving the Commission, whether by resignation or removal, former Commissioners may not, for one year after termination of their service, communicate with any officer, Commissioner, or CAD employee if the communication is on behalf of any other person and with the intent to influence a government decision and shall otherwise comply with the “revolving door” restrictions of [OMC section 2.25.050](#).

### Article III – Roles of Commission

#### 1. Duties

[Ordinance No. 13561](#) is the most recent enabling regulation that amended and restated the establishment and duties of the Commission, which include the following:

- a. Advise the Mayor, City Council, and City Administrator on matters affecting cultural development in the community;
- b. Review and comment on City and community policies, programs, and actions which affect arts and cultural development in Oakland;
- c. Advise the Mayor, City Council, and City Administrator on recommendations arising out of the Cultural Plan affecting City support for cultural development
- d. Act as ambassadors and advocates for the people of Oakland through the design, development, and implementation of a Commission work plan after consultation with the Cultural Affairs Manager or other City staff as designated by the City Administrator;
- e. Encourage and assist in the development of support for individual artists, traditional artists, and nonprofit arts and culture organizations within Oakland;
- f. Make cultural planning status reports and recommendations to the Mayor, City Council, and City Administrator regarding actions to be taken by the City to fund, assist, and encourage activities in support of artistic, cultural, and humanities activities in the City;

- g. Submit an informational report to the City Council committee designated as liaison to the Commission (i.e., the Life Enrichment Committee) as directed by the Chairperson of said committee;
- h. Informational reports submitted as required in this Section must include detailed descriptions of operating and staffing needs, to be developed and maintained by the department responsible for staffing and administration of the commission;
- i. Take such other actions as may be necessary or desirable to promote public awareness of, and participation in artistic, cultural, and humanities activities in Oakland;
- j. Perform such other functions and duties pertaining to Commission member's role as advocates and ambassadors as may be directed by the Mayor, City Council or City Administrator.

## 2. Officers

The Commission's officers shall be a Chairperson (or Chair) and Vice Chairperson (or Vice Chair) chosen from and by current members of the Commission.

- a. Nominations and elections for the officers of the Commission shall be conducted at the meeting immediately preceding October 1st. The nominations for and election of the Chair will be held first, followed by the nominations for and election of the Vice Chair.
- b. Terms of the Chair and Vice Chair shall be for two (2) years effective at noon on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of October and continue to the last meeting day of September two (2) years hence.
- c. If the office of the Chair is vacated before the expiration of a term, the Vice Chair shall serve as Chair until the next regular meeting. The Commission shall conduct an election for Chair at the next regular meeting to fill the unexpired portion of the vacancy. If the Vice Chair is elected as chair, there shall be an election for a new Vice Chair at that meeting.
- d. If the office of Vice Chair is vacated before the expiration of a term, it shall remain vacant until the next regular meeting, at which time an election shall be held.

- e. Regular elections for Chair and Vice Chair shall take place on their regular schedule once the unexpired portion of the terms end.

The duties of the Chair shall consist of the following:

- a. The Chair shall preside at all meetings of the Commission;
- b. The Chair shall work with the CAD Manager and staff to prepare the agenda for all regular and special Commission meetings. Suggestions for agenda items may be submitted to the Chair and/or staff no later than 10 business days prior to the meeting;
- c. The Chair may call a special meeting of the Commission;
- d. The Chair may create ad hoc committees to perform such advisory functions as they shall determine and may appoint or remove Commissioners from such committees;
- e. The Chair, or their designee, shall represent the Commission in meetings or communications with local officials and the public;
- f. The Chair, or their designee, shall serve as the liaison to the press for CACom;
- g. The Vice Chair shall assist the Chair as directed and shall assume all the obligations and authority of the Chair in the absence or recusal of the Chair;
- h. The Chair and Vice Chair shall work together with CAD staff to recommend candidates to the Mayor for the Commission.

In the event that both the Chair and Vice Chair are absent or unable to act in their respective capacities, the remaining members of the Commission shall elect one of their members to act temporarily as Chair by a majority vote of members present.

#### Article IV – CAD Staff

##### 1. Manager

The Manager serves as the chief executive and administrator of CAD and shall have the duties and powers which are set forth in the Charter and ordinances of the City of Oakland. The Manager, or their designee, may attend all meetings of the Commission. The Manager may report on all matters regarding CAD which are of concern to the Commission at the meetings or on other occasions, as the situation warrants.

##### 2. Commission Secretary

The Commission Secretary shall be a City employee designated to serve as such by City Administration. Under the direction of the CAD Manager, the Commission Secretary, or their designee, shall:

- a. Attend all Commission and committee meetings of the Commission and shall ensure that minutes are recorded and kept of all that transpires;
- b. Attest all minutes of the meetings of the Commission;
- c. Preserve and be custodian of all books, records, papers, and recordings of the Commission, and whenever necessary, shall certify true copies of Commission documents;
- d. Provide to the Commission agendas and agenda packets, and submit Commission letters, communications, and recommendations to City Officials;
- e. Ensure that Commission meetings are properly noticed and held at locations which are accessible to persons with disabilities;
- f. Perform all duties required of them by the Commission Bylaws as well as City of Oakland rules and regulations or in their absence shall ensure such duties are performed.

### 3. Legal Advisor

The City Attorney, or their designee, shall be the legal advisor to the Commission. If the City Attorney determines in writing that they cannot provide advice sought by the Commission, the City Attorney may recommend that the Commission retain outside counsel.

## Article V – Committees

CACom has two types of committees, which are described below. For a committee to meet, at least two of the commissioners appointed to the committee must be present. Committees will report their advisory actions to the Commission at regularly scheduled meetings. If the committee was not active in the preceding period, a report does not need to be made. Committee reports will include the date, location, and attendees for each committee meeting, and the actions taken by the committee at that meeting. A CACom committee may not take any final action that is delegated to the Commission as a whole.

### 1. Standing committees

City Administrator approval must be obtained prior to the creation of any standing committee of the Commission. A quorum of a standing committee is a majority of its members. A standing committee may not take any final action that is delegated to the Commission as a whole, unless explicitly delegated by the Commission through formal action or as delegated by the City Administrator.

2. Ad hoc committees

Ad hoc committees can be formed by selecting two to five Commissioners to serve on the ad hoc committee. The appointed commissioners can select up to three additional non-commissioners to attend meetings of the committee as non-voting members. The action forming the committee shall specify the charge and duration of the committee.

Article VI – Meetings

1. Regular meetings

Except as otherwise determined by the Commission, regular meetings shall be held at 5:30 p.m. on the last Monday of a meeting month. Commission meetings are normally held six (6) times a year.

2. Special meetings

A special meeting may be called by the Chair or the Vice Chair or by a majority of Commission members present at a regular meeting) at a date, time, and/or place that deviates from the regular meeting schedule. Special meetings shall be noticed to the public at least at least 48 hours prior to such meeting (excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays) and otherwise as pursuant to the Sunshine Ordinance.

3. Quorum

A quorum is necessary before the Commission can take any formal action. A quorum shall be defined in accordance with the most recent version of the Commission's establishing legislation.

A quorum shall be noted prior to the conduct of any official business at a Commission meeting. In the event that a quorum is not established within thirty (30) minutes of the noticed start time of the meeting, the Chair, at their discretion, shall cancel the meeting without any official action.

In the absence of a quorum, there is no official meeting. However, commissioners present could allow informal discussion or presentation without violating the Brown Act, as long as no action is taken.

Any Commissioner who recuses themselves due to a conflict of interest on an item should not be counted in establishing a quorum.

Email communications between members can violate the Brown Act. Staff may communicate with Commissioners to schedule a meeting. Otherwise, staff should only send information to commissioners with bcc (unilaterally) so that a quorum of members does not discuss Commission business outside of properly noticed meetings.

#### 4. Excused absences

If any Commissioner cannot attend a meeting for reasons other than illness, the Commissioner shall notify the Chair, CAD Manager, and/or Commission Secretary of their absence prior to the start of the meeting. For an absence to be excused, Commissioners must provide at least 48-hour notice to the Chair, CAD Manager, and/or Commission Secretary. In the event of illness, members shall notify the Chair and City staff of their absence as soon as practicable.

Commissioners who do not submit prior notice will be noted as an unexcused absence for purposes of the meeting minutes. Missing three consecutive regular meetings without permission shall constitute cause for removal.

#### 5. Meeting agendas

If an item is not on the agenda for a regular meeting or a special meeting, there may be no action or discussion about it at the meeting, except in limited instances as authorized by the Brown Act such as:

- Brief responses by members and staff to statements or questions posed by the public;
- Questions for clarification;
- References to staff or other resources for factual information;
- Requests to staff to report back on an issue at a subsequent meeting;
- Requests/actions to agendize matters for future meeting; and
- Brief announcements by members or staff and brief reports on their activities

In rare, emergency situations, two-thirds of the Commissioners present at the meeting (or if less than two-thirds of the members are present, then all of the members) could

determine that there is a need to take immediate action on a matter which came to the attention of the Commission after the agenda was posted. To meet the requirements of this exception, the action must be:

- a. Required to avoid a substantial adverse impact if the meeting were continued without action on the matter;
- b. Related to federal or state legislation; or
- c. Related to a purely ceremonial or commendatory action.

6. Recusal and disclosure requirements

Before discussing or voting on any agenda items, Commissioners shall follow state and local conflict of interest laws and Commission policy and report and recuse themselves, as necessary, for any item for which they have a conflict of interest. Commissioners may follow up with the Public Ethics Commission if they have any question about a potential conflict.

7. Voting

Each member of the Commission shall have one vote. A motion shall be passed by the affirmative vote of a majority of those members present at a meeting where a quorum has been established.

8. Consent calendar

Items may be placed on a consent calendar section of a meeting agenda. Items on the consent calendar may be approved by a single vote for all items.

Any Commissioner, member of the public, or the CAD Manager may request that the item be taken off the consent calendar and placed on the regular agenda for that meeting or at a later meeting, and the item will be moved at the discretion of the Chair.

9. Public comment and conduct

a. Audience conduct

The general public is invited to attend and participate in Commission meetings. The public has the right to constructively criticize policies, procedures, actions, or omissions of the Commission or City staff. However, meeting attendees should not speak or otherwise make a disruption, whether in support or

opposition, while others are speaking at commission meetings. Meeting attendees may not display signs that impede the ability of the public or Commission to see or participate in the meeting or that endanger any meeting participants.

b. Speaker conduct

The public is invited to speak at Commission meetings. Speakers should address their questions or remarks to the Chair. Other Commissioners and City staff will respond to questions only when requested to do so by the Chair.

Commissioners and City staff should refrain from entering into any debates or direct discussion with speakers during public comment or at any time during a meeting.

c. Speaker cards

Persons wishing to address the Commission must complete a speaker card for each agenda item they wish to speak on. CAD staff will have pre-printed speaker cards available for each meeting. Speaker cards shall not be required for teleconference meetings.

d. Open forum

This item shall provide an opportunity for members of the public to address the Commission on items that are within the subject matter jurisdiction of the Commission but which are not on the posted agenda for that meeting.

e. Public comment on agenda items

The public shall generally be provided with the opportunity to address the Commission on each agenda item for up to two (2) minutes, though the Chair may adjust the speaking time for each agenda item, pursuant to the Sunshine Ordinance. Any time constraints should be uniformly applied. The Chair shall announce publicly all reasons justifying any reduction in speaker time. The stated reasons shall be based at least on a consideration of the time allocated or anticipated for the meeting, the number and complexity of agenda items, and the number of persons wishing to address the local body.

f. Ceding time

Subject to the discretion of the Chair, a speaker may be allowed to extend their speaking time on agenda items if other speakers who have submitted their names to speak agree to cede their time to the recipient speaker. The recipient

speaker will receive one (1) minute speaking time from each ceding speaker, up to a maximum of five (5) minutes. The recipient speaker must collect and submit the ceding speakers' speaking cards to CAD staff during the meeting. The ceding speakers must be present at the time the recipient speaker speaks.

g. Removal of a disruptive person

The presiding officer shall maintain order in the chamber. The presiding officer may rule a member of the public out of order if: (a) the person engages in Disruptive Behavior, as defined below; or (b) the person's public remarks are not related to the agenda item or, in the case of open forum, are not related to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Commission.

Remarks that express nothing more than hate for a person or group of people based on race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, or similar grounds are inherently unrelated to any matter within the jurisdiction of the Commission and are therefore out of order.

"Disruptive behavior" is defined as behavior that impedes the orderly progress of a meeting by denying, delaying, or interrupting other people's rightful turn to speak. Disruptive behavior includes but is not limited to: 1) speaking beyond the time the speaker has been allotted and failing to yield; 2) speaking, yelling, or otherwise making noises that impedes another person's right to speak or be heard; and 3) actions that physically impede another person's right to speak or be heard.

The public has the right to criticize policies, procedures, programs or services of the City or of the actions or omissions of the legislative body or staff. But members of the public do not have the right to prevent or delay the orderly progress of meetings or the conduct of City business. Each member of the public must respect other people's rights to speak, including other members of the public, members of staff, presenters, and members of the body.

If a member of the public engages in disruptive behavior, the presiding officer may rule them out of order. Furthermore, a person who engages in disruptive behavior may be removed from a meeting at the direction of the presiding officer. Before being removed, the person must be warned: (1) that their behavior is disrupting the meeting, and (2) that continued disruption may result in their removal. The person may be so warned by the presiding officer, a member of City staff, a security guard, and/or a peace officer.

Any person who engages in dangerous activity during a meeting, including using force or making a credible threat to use force, may be removed without any direction from the presiding officer and without any warning.

#### Article VII – Amendment of Bylaws

These bylaws shall be reviewed as necessary and may be amended at any meeting of the Commission by a majority vote of members present, provided such proposed amendments are circulated in writing to all Commissioners at least ten (10) days prior to such meeting and the intent to revise the bylaws is noticed to the public at least five (5) days prior to such meeting.

Adopted on this \_\_\_ day and \_\_\_ month of \_\_\_ year.

DRAFT

## Artist Spotlight: Javier Navarrette



Javier Navarrette is an Oakland-based musician, arranger, composer, percussionist, educator and music producer, and has been a contributor to the legendary Afro-Caribbean musical traditions here in the Bay for over 30 years. Javier's highly-acclaimed productions are the Brooklyn Basin Modúpue series, and currently The Annex Sessions in El Cerrito. Bringing together the Bay Area's finest musicians from the Afro-Latino folkloric, Salsa and Latin Jazz scenes, he has created projects such as Javier Navarrette's Socially Distant Friends and The Charangüi Project.

Javier has developed the youth program and teaches with Oakland's Living Jazz Children's Program and The Freight's Children's Education program. He has taught with Sheila E at the Oakland High Jazz Festival, the Oakland Youth Program (OYC) and Cuba Caribe Moving Juntos program.

Javier has also performed with greats such as Aretha Franklin at her last show at the Oakland Coliseum, Los Van Van (Cuba), Pedrito Martinez, and has recorded on three Grammy-nominated albums with Oakland-based John Santos and the Machete Ensemble/Folklorico Kindembo, and currently is a member of Bobi Céspedes band and folkloric group.

Javier Navarrette has been a member of many Oakland and Bay Area musical groups such as: Jesus Diaz QBA; Linda Tillery Cultural Heritage Choir; Anthony Blea y su Charanga; Louie Romeros Mazacote; Los Mocosos; Cuban Cowboys; and Machina Soul.

City of Oakland  
Oakland-Specific Cultural Districts  
Program Design Recommendations  
December 2025 Draft for Public Comment

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## 1. Introduction

Oakland's cultural diversity is one of its greatest assets—a reflection of generations of artists, entrepreneurs, activists, and culture-keepers who have shaped the city's neighborhoods into places of creativity, resistance, and belonging. In the words of Mayor Barbara Lee, "Oakland's cultural spaces are more than businesses — they are the heartbeat of our neighborhoods. They are where stories are shared, movements are born, and communities are knit together." Oakland's arts and culture sector is also an essential part of the city's economy, with arts non-profits and businesses creating jobs, drawing visitors, and increasing local spending.<sup>1</sup> Earlier this year, an economic report commissioned by the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce referenced promising growth in the visual and performing arts industries, citing Oakland's creative sectors as "ripe for investment and strategic development."<sup>2</sup>

Yet this cultural vitality that defines and supports Oakland is threatened by displacement pressures and disparities in who owns or can access space and resources. Establishing a formal Oakland Cultural Districts Program (the Program) offers a new strategy to strengthen, sustain, and celebrate the city's diverse cultural communities through community-led planning and intentional, place-based investment and partnership.

Cultural districts are geographically defined areas with a strong, identifiable cultural identity where residents, artists, small businesses, and cultural organizations have built a shared sense of belonging, creativity, and civic life. In regions with rising real estate and living costs such as the Bay Area, many of these communities are also threatened with cultural erasure due to displacement. Cultural district designation is one method for recognizing, protecting, and investing in these areas so that their cultural legacy can continue to evolve in place. Across the country, cities such as Austin, Minneapolis, and San Francisco have implemented City-level cultural district programs to direct resources, shape land-use policy, and empower local communities. Oakland's approach builds on this broader movement while responding to the city's own long-standing calls for a coordinated structure to conserve cultural resources, prevent displacement, and foster belonging.

Throughout the city's history, neighborhoods with distinct cultural identities or centers of cultural production have naturally emerged throughout Oakland. Over the past decade, several of these districts have been locally designated through City Council resolutions and community advocacy—the Black Arts Movement and Business District (BAMBD), Latinx Cultural Arts District, and Lakeshore LGBTQ District. These efforts have laid a powerful foundation but developed without a consistent citywide framing of the resources available to support or guide them. At the same time, community plans and cultural strategists have continued to call for a formalized program that centers equity, coordination, and sustained investment in cultural communities.

In response to this, **the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division (housed within the Economic and Workforce Development Department) is now partnering with the Planning and Building Department to formalize a citywide program to establish clear criteria, processes, governance models, and support structures for existing and future cultural district designations.** This report outlines a city-level Cultural Districts Program that recognizes, resources, and sustains Oakland's cultural communities. It draws on years of community planning and cultural policy to define how cultural districts can advance equity, belonging, anti-displacement, and economic opportunity. The framework identifies the roles of City departments, local partners, and community leaders, and recommends tools, resources, processes, and governance structures to coordinate investments and preserve the people and places that shape Oakland's cultural landscape.

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<sup>1</sup> Alex Werth, City of Oakland Economic & Workforce Development Department Cultural Affairs Division, "[Oakland's Arts & Cultural Economy](#)," Appendix to *Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan*, Spring 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "[Annual Oakland/East Bay Economic Indicators Report](#)," March 2025.

## Program Foundation & Origins

Over the last decade, the City of Oakland's adopted plans and policies combined with community-led efforts to plan for and center culture have built a clear foundation for a citywide Cultural Districts Program. A consistent set of lessons have emerged from past planning and engagement efforts around cultural districts: the City must establish a transparent and repeatable process for district designation; align zoning, funding, and technical assistance tools to support district goals; and define a robust governance model that empowers communities as long-term stewards of their cultural spaces. Most importantly, the Program must ensure that recognition is matched with resources—so that cultural districts serve not only as symbols of identity, but as practical mechanisms for preventing displacement, preserving culture, and expanding opportunity.

## Equity in Cultural Districts

The City's Department of Race and Equity's vision is "To create a city where our diversity has been maintained, racial disparities have been eliminated and racial equity has been achieved."<sup>3</sup> Modern cultural district programs are a tool to protect and promote cultural diversity in cities, while empowering and investing in communities that have faced discrimination and oppression. The coalitions involved in the formation of Oakland's legislated and naturally-occurring cultural districts and zones have impressive histories of community organizing to eliminate disparities and injustices that affect their communities. For these communities, preserving and celebrating culture is inextricable from the fight for equity, opportunity, and belonging.

The Cultural District Program includes several measures to ensure that the Program is benefiting communities that may have been historically and currently overlooked by city services and planning processes and supporting their access to the Program. Recommended measures include:

- Capacity-building support for emerging potential cultural districts in the form of grants supporting district development activities
- Use of the Oakland Department of Transportation's (OakDOT) [Geographic Equity Toolbox](#), or similar resources, to identify patterns of displacement
- Guidance and templates for cultural districts applying for designation or conducting community planning processes (**see Appendix A and B**)
- Criteria scoring substantially acknowledges applicants who demonstrate that their proposed cultural district is actively utilizing culture as a form of expression and resilience, and "Holds importance to the historical legacy of a community and/or a community's ongoing struggle for civil rights, equity, and belonging, utilizing culture as a form of expression and resilience" (see Eligibility, p. 16)

## Policy & Plan Alignment

The idea of a citywide cultural district program in Oakland has been building momentum for years. Community-engaged plans—including the *Belonging in Oakland: Cultural Development Plan* (2018), the *Downtown Oakland Specific Plan* (2024)—all identify the creation of a formal cultural districts program and investment in cultural zones as strategies to stabilize neighborhoods and celebrate local identity. These plans reflect how Oaklanders value culture as a key part of civic infrastructure that requires careful planning and investment, just like housing, transportation, and economic development.

The following table outlines the Cultural Districts Program's alignment with the goals and recommendations of the City of Oakland's adopted policies and plans.

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<sup>3</sup> City of Oakland Department of Race and Equity, "[Race and Equity Theory of Change](#)".

**Table 1. Alignment with Adopted Policies and Plans**

Policy, Plan, or Resolution	Recommendation for Cultural Districts
Economic Development Action Plan 2025-2029 (2025)	Goal 5: Support Oakland’s Artistic, Cultural, and Social Activities Action: Develop and implement a framework for Culture and Entertainment Districts in alignment with the Culture of Belonging Plan and the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan. <sup>4</sup>
Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (2024)	Policy C1.1/LU-2.1: Citywide Cultural Districts Program - Establish a Citywide Cultural Districts Program to develop and formalize a collaborative partnership between the city and cultural communities; identify resources to stabilize vulnerable communities; preserve, strengthen, and promote the City’s cultural assets and diverse communities; and support entertainment districts. <sup>5</sup>
Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan (2018)	Future research recommendation: “Cultural Districts: There is a great deal of activity related to naturally-occurring cultural districts currently in progress. Timely research of policy alternatives for place-keeping and development of these areas would be extremely useful, such as community benefit districts, as would research on the role of culturally-specific retail in neighborhood development.” <sup>6</sup>
<a href="#">Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts and Culture Space in Oakland</a> – Mayors Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force (2016)	1e. Incentivize private developers to provide permanently or long-term affordable artist spaces in mixed-use developments through zoning tools, including in areas designated as formal Cultural Districts. <sup>7</sup>  3b. Improve the City’s internal infrastructure to support artists and arts organizations in Oakland, including working with the State of California Arts Council on the new Cultural Districts Program, and other proactive policy work.
West Oakland Specific Plan (2014)	Section on Benefits of Arts and Cultural Districts <sup>8</sup>  Recommendation to establish a Cultural District along 7 <sup>th</sup> Street, from Wood Street to Chester Street, in the 7 <sup>th</sup> Street Opportunity Area. <sup>9</sup>

### Existing Legislated Cultural Districts

Oakland’s three legislated cultural districts—the Black Arts Movement and Business District (BAMBD), Latinx Cultural Arts District, and Lakeshore LGBTQ Cultural District—reflect the leadership on behalf of Oakland’s cultural communities and the City’s recognition of their significant contributions to Oakland’s economic and civic life. Each district holds untapped potential to celebrate their cultural identity and strengthen neighborhood

<sup>4</sup> City of Oakland, 2025, Economic Development Action Plan 2025-2029.

<sup>5</sup> City of Oakland, 2024, [Downtown Oakland Specific Plan](#), 168.

<sup>6</sup> City of Oakland, 2018, [Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan](#), 114.

<sup>7</sup> Mayor’s Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, City of Oakland, 2016, [Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts and Culture Space in Oakland](#), 45.

<sup>8</sup> City of Oakland, [West Oakland Specific Plan](#), 2014, 8-42.

<sup>9</sup> [West Oakland Specific Plan](#), 2014, 8-33.

vitality, with community leaders working directly with their Councilmembers to pursue a designation from the City.

The Black Arts Movement and Business District (BAMBD), designated in 2016, honors Oakland's contributions to the Black Arts Movement and its legacy of Black-owned businesses and arts and cultural spaces along 14<sup>th</sup> Street that have long been spaces of creativity and community organizing.<sup>10</sup> The Latinx Cultural Arts District, centered in Fruitvale, highlights the neighborhood's Latinx art, community landmarks, businesses, and its unique concentration of community-based institutions focused on uplifting the Latinx community.<sup>11</sup> The Lakeshore LGBTQ Cultural District uplifts Oakland's decades-long history of organizing for LGBTQ rights and creating spaces of LGBTQ belonging in the neighborhood, including small businesses, community centers, and venues.<sup>12</sup>

Together, these districts have surfaced a set of common designation themes and criteria that provide a foundation for the citywide program. Existing cultural districts:

- Reflect a community central to Oakland's identity and cultural life.
- Contain a concentration of cultural or historic assets, including arts venues, businesses, gathering spaces, and public art that collectively embodies community heritage.
- Contribute to the City's broader goals for historic preservation, arts and culture, and civil rights, reinforcing the importance of safe, affirming spaces.
- Help prepare communities to pursue additional recognition and funding opportunities. For example, BAMBD has pursued California Arts Council's State Cultural District designation and associated funding, and the Lakeshore LGBTQ Cultural District has created a pathway for funding through OakDOT for the installation of rainbow crosswalks in the district.<sup>13</sup>

The citywide Program builds on these precedents by formalizing these criteria and requiring a clear geographic boundary for cultural district designation, allowing districts to utilize land use and zoning tools to pursue cultural conservation and cultivation goals. This Program also creates clear pathways for other cultural communities to pursue recognition and partnership with the City and outlines the resources and tools that cultural districts may utilize to support their anti-displacement, economic vitality, arts and culture, and place-keeping goals.

### Scholarship to Date

Alongside community organizing, this Program is informed by a robust body of work produced by Oakland's [Cultural Strategists in Government](#) and independent researchers. In 2016, Kelley Kahn, Assistant Director of Oakland's Economic and Workforce Development Department, wrote "Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts and Culture Space in Oakland" for the Mayor's Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, outlining how the City could utilize policy levers, partnerships, and real estate assets to create and preserve affordable space for cultural activities and producers.<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth O'Malley's independent work *Cultivating Oakland's Creativity* (2017) situates cultural investment within the City's broader economic development goals, recommending policies to support artists and stabilize arts organizations, venues, and cultural businesses. Rashida Chase's *Culture Keepers Guide* (2025) outlines both the potential and pitfalls of cultural district creation, calling for formal structures that safeguard culture from displacement while empowering artists and residents as co-governors of place. Natalia Neira's *Cultural Districts as a Tool for Community Self-Determination* (2025) argues for districts as vehicles for community ownership and collective agency over development. *Culture as Catalyst* (2025), a policy brief authored

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<sup>10</sup>[Oakland City Council Resolution No. 85958](#), Introduced by Council President Lynette Gibson McElhaney. Filed January 7, 2016. Passed January 19, 2016. 2.

<sup>11</sup> [Oakland City Council Resolution No. 89938](#), Introduced by Councilmember Noel Gallo. Filed Oct 5, 2023. Passed October 17, 2023. 3.

<sup>12</sup> [Oakland City Council Resolution No. 89978](#), Introduced by Councilmember Kaplan, Councilmember Fife, Mayor Thao, Council President Fortunato Bas, and Councilmember Kalb. Filed October 16, 2023. Passed November 7, 2023. 1.

<sup>13</sup> [Oakland City Council Resolution No. 90747](#), Introduced by Councilmembers Rowena Brown and Rebecca Kaplan. Filed May 15, 2025. Passed June 3, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Prepared for the City of Oakland Mayor's Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, "[Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts and Culture Space in Oakland](#)", Spring 2016.

by the San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR), argues for centering arts and culture as a catalyst for downtown economic revitalization that promotes equitable place-based growth.<sup>15</sup> Together, these works articulate a shared vision: first, that cultural districts should be locally led, equitably resourced, and structurally supported by the City; and second, that investing in cultural districts supports the City of Oakland's stated goals around preventing displacement and promoting equitable economic revitalization.

## 2. Program Goals

### Responding to Community Priorities

Over the past decade, the most salient arts and culture issues for Oaklanders have remained consistent: securing safe, affordable housing and workspace for artists, mitigating cultural displacement, and creatively generating new resources to invest in and bolster the city's artistic and cultural communities. In 2015, Mayor Libby Schaaf convened the Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, which conducted a survey of approximately 900 artists in Oakland. Most respondents said that the biggest challenges they faced were the cost of housing and workspace. Despite this, however, the majority of responding artists also said that they were determined to stay in Oakland – in large part due to the robust community of fellow artists.<sup>16</sup>

Two years later, the 2018 Oakland Cultural Development Plan process engaged approximately three-hundred Oaklanders. This time, community conversations continued to center the urgent need to address the displacement of artists and stressed the importance of doing so through an equitable lens – understanding the diverse needs of different artists and cultural communities. These conversations also suggested leveraging Oakland's wave of new economic and real estate development to invest in culture.<sup>17</sup>

In the 2024 Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP), displacement of Downtown's Black communities and culture was a primary concern. The plan resulted in the adoption of land use amendments including the Downtown District Art and Garage Commercial Zone, and the BAMBD Arts and Culture Combining Zone, intended to provide adaptable production space for artisans and craftspeople, foster a sense of belonging for all Oaklanders, and "support a critical mass of arts and entertainment establishments, which are essential to nurture and retain all residents including the creative workforce essential to recruiting and retaining employers in the modern economy."<sup>18</sup>

### 2025 Cultural District Program Design Recommendations

To further inform the design of the Cultural Districts Program, the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division of the Economic and Workforce Development Department hosted a workshop on October 1, 2025. Fifty-three community, arts, and cultural leaders attended, representing existing and potential future Cultural Districts, community organizations, Business Improvement Districts, Cultural Affairs commissioners, and arts funders. The top Cultural Districts Program priorities identified by attendees were:

- Supporting the self-defined success of organizations, including culturally-responsive small businesses and nonprofits
- Protecting and expanding access to affordable and below-market workspaces for artists, artisans and cultural producers
- Preventing displacement of residents who are artists and culture-keepers

Attendees echoed themes of previous engagement - including the necessity of balancing preservation of Oakland's heritage with welcoming newcomers. In conversation, participants defined "culture-keepers" inclusively,

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<sup>15</sup> SPUR, "[Culture as Catalyst: How arts and culture districts can revitalize downtowns](#)", January 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Mayor's Artist Housing and Workspace Task Force, [Strategies for Protecting and Creating Arts and Culture Space in Oakland](#), 2016, 61.

<sup>17</sup> Communities in Collaboration, [Oakland Cultural Plan Community Engagement Report](#), 2018.

<sup>18</sup> [Chapter 17.101K D-DT Downtown District Zones Regulations](#), 558.

recognizing that preserving a community's unique culture means preventing the displacement of the community at-large and culture-keepers of all types – from storytellers, to elders, to traditional cooks and business owners, to youth.

In response to prompts about *how* the City should partner with communities to achieve the above priorities, participants emphasized the importance of transparency, clarity, and consistency from the City. They also identified the need for building capacity at the neighborhood level to convene stakeholders, identify priorities for districts, and conduct strategic planning. Participants recognized constraints on resources for arts and culture and cited a diverse range of potential sources of support beyond the City's General Fund, including State programs, philanthropic funds, and BID property assessments. The community ideas and priorities summarized above are the foundation of the following program design and recommendations.

## Program Definition and Goals

Recommendations for the Program's focus, mission, and goals are derived from the clear priorities that Oaklanders have expressed over the past decade of community engagement, and the expertise of Oakland's artists and cultural organizers.

### Mission

The City of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program promotes and protects Oakland's unique cultural communities, utilizing the designation of cultural districts to enable the local production, celebration, and sharing of arts and culture, and to prevent the displacement of culture and community.

### Goals

The Program achieves its mission by strengthening coordination and partnership across city and community interest-holders who leverage the designation to secure and deploy resources related to place-keeping, arts, culture, heritage, and economic vitality. This partnership is a long-term, continuous relationship that is sustained even as leadership of individual businesses or nonprofits in the district may change over time. The Program is designed to connect communities to resources and tools that support broadly shared goals, including:

1. Stabilizing and supporting the success of cultural organizations and small businesses
2. Maintaining affordability for artists and cultural producers to live and work
3. Preventing the displacement of communities and culture-keepers of all types, including cultural organizations and small businesses
4. Conserving and enhancing cultural assets, such as places, traditions, and knowledge

While the City acknowledges that many of Oakland's cultural communities share these goals, it also celebrates the diversity and unique priorities and cultural traditions of each cultural district. The Program creates room for this diversity by enabling districts to determine their own priorities in Cultural District Community Plans (CDCP) for their districts, working with City staff to identify the tools and resources best suited to those goals. These Plans are living documents that allow district interest-holders to build sustainable operations and a clear pathway for investment by identifying and updating their shared priorities. The Program also allows for culturally-responsive governance and planning according to the values of each individual community.

By defining a geographic area, a cultural district designation allows for place-based allocation of City programs and resources that address a district's goals for the area. It also allows for the use of tools within the district such as zoning overlays, development requirements, or support navigating city processes that preserve cultural spaces or encourage cultural activity.

Through the Program, city resources relevant to cultural districts will be identified, and district representatives will be connected to programs, technical assistance, and resources (as available) offered by City of Oakland Departments including the Economic and Workforce Development, Planning and Building, and Housing and Community Development.

## Alignment with Other State and Local Programs

### California Cultural Districts Program

The California Cultural Districts Program, administered by the California Arts Council, was created in 2015 to recognize and strengthen communities that serve as centers of creative and cultural activity across the state. Its purpose is to preserve and promote local cultural assets while advancing equitable economic development and community well-being. The program designates geographic areas with a high concentration of cultural facilities, creative enterprises, or historic and artistic landmarks that reflect the diversity and vitality of California's cultural landscape. State-designated districts receive official recognition, statewide marketing and technical assistance, and modest grant funding to support local programming and coordination. Since the pilot launch in 2017, approximately \$1.8 million has been invested in state districts including support for planning, convening, evaluation and storytelling through general funds, COVID-relief funds, and cross-agency partnership. As of November 2025, several of Oakland's existing cultural districts have pursued or expressed interest in pursuing state-level cultural district designation from the California Arts Council.

The City of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program is designed to align with the State guidelines so that local districts are prepared to pursue State recognition – should they desire it – and secure the additional resources and funding that come with it. In terms of program purpose, both emphasize recognizing and sustaining cultural communities through place-based investment, cross-sector partnerships, and the preservation of cultural identity. Additionally, like the State program, Oakland's framework centers equity, accessibility, and anti-displacement.

### California Cultural Districts

#### State Program 2025 Grant Guidelines

Key eligibility requirements of the California Cultural District Program include:

- Partnership Model: Applicants must apply as a partnership of at least three entities—
  - an arts or cultural nonprofit or collective,
  - a local business, business association, or community development corporation, and
  - a branch of local government responsible for land use (e.g., Planning Department).
- Local and Nonprofit Status:
  - All partners must be based in California, and the lead applicant must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, fiscally sponsored organization, or unit of local, county, or Tribal government.
  - Applicants must have at least two years of consistent arts or cultural programming.
- Geographic and Cultural Concentration:
  - The district must be a defined geographic area with a concentration of cultural facilities, creative enterprises, or arts venues.
  - Districts may focus on cultural heritage, cultural production, or both.<sup>19</sup>

The eligibility criteria of the City's program are designed to align with the State requirements, while also allowing additional flexibility for local communities who may not wish to pursue State designation.

### Business Improvement Districts

In some cases, cultural districts may wish to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) that explicitly prioritizes cultural, social, and economic goals—ensuring the district has both recognition and a sustained local funding mechanism. In these geographically defined neighborhoods, property owners or business owners

<sup>19</sup> California Arts Council, Cultural Districts: 2025 Grant Guidelines.

(depending on the type of BID) vote to approve paying a special assessment tax that funds services or special projects that benefit the neighborhood.

The establishment of a BID is a lengthy process. While BIDs’ Boards of Directors are typically comprised of business owners and property owners, BIDs in cultural districts may want to craft bylaws that require more diverse and representative Boards that include community representatives and artists to ensure cultural leaders have oversight into how assessment revenues are spent in the district, and their impacts.

Oakland currently has 10 active, geographically defined BIDs authorized by City Council, including in Downtown, Chinatown, Koreatown/Northgate, and Lakeshore. BID activities often include marketing, streetscape maintenance, event programming, public safety coordination, and beautification, which overlap meaningfully with the goals of the Cultural Districts Program.

There may be opportunities for cultural districts to partner with an existing BID or to establish a new culturally-oriented BID within the cultural district’s boundaries. Layering of cultural districts and BIDs would be allowed under Oakland Municipal Code as long as the new proposed BID does not overlap with an existing BID.<sup>20</sup> Collaborating with a BID could allow cultural districts to access existing maintenance, marketing, and event infrastructure, streamline across capacities, and/or to co-develop initiatives that promote local businesses, cultural programming, and public space activation.

While BIDs may be a useful tool for some cultural districts, they may also have unintended consequences that are unaligned with the goals of the Cultural District Program, particularly around anti-displacement. While BIDs can support cultural identity and visibility, they may also influence local property values or prioritize commercial interests that do not always align with cultural preservation and production goals. Regardless of how a cultural district forms, a BID overlay should prompt consideration of existing plans and governance.

Table 2 describes further some of the benefits and drawbacks of BID partnership or formation in cultural districts.

**Table 2. BID Model Benefits and Considerations**

Potential Benefits	Considerations
Provides a sustained funding mechanism through local assessments that can support marketing, maintenance, events, and cultural programming.	BID assessments may raise costs for property and business owners, potentially burdening smaller or legacy cultural businesses
Offers capacity for operations and administration, helping cultural districts manage programs, contracts, or physical improvements.	BID structures are typically property-owner led, which may reduce representation from renters, artists, or nonprofits central to cultural district identity.
Enhances visibility and branding through coordinated marketing, wayfinding, and events that promote the district’s cultural identity.	BID marketing and branding efforts may commercialize heritage or shift focus from cultural conservation.
Supports streetscape improvements and public realm maintenance, complementing cultural activation efforts.	Infrastructure improvements can increase property values, potentially contributing to gentrification or displacement pressures.

<sup>20</sup> Oakland, California, Municipal Code, Ord. 12190 § 6, 1999

The Cultural Districts Program encourages districts and organizers to explore options and weigh these considerations during the Community Planning process, as detailed further in **Appendix A**.

### 3. Program Tools and Resources

The Cultural Districts Program will be supported by a coordinated, cross-departmental toolkit of policies, programs, and partnerships that help communities achieve their cultural, economic, and place-keeping goals. These tools reflect existing City resources, new proposed approaches, and potential collaborations with outside partners. Together, they provide a framework for the types of supports the City can offer to cultural district leadership.

The following section lists the tools, programs, and resources currently offered by the City of Oakland that may be useful to cultural district organizers, residents, artists, and property-owners. Recognizing the current financial constraints of the City, this report prioritizes examining how existing tools may be leveraged to support cultural districts' goals. However, some new applications of existing tools have been recommended in City-adopted plans, particularly the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan (DOSP). These recommendations point to how core City functions – such as zoning, development permitting, and small business support – can be adapted to support the goals of cultural districts.

The most relevant tools and resources will vary according to each unique district's goals. For example, for cultural districts in Downtown such as the Black Arts Movement and Business District, many of the DOSP's recommendations focus on activating ground-floor space, increasing ease of permitting arts and culture uses, and preserving artist live-work space. The following list is not exhaustive, and cultural districts may utilize forms of partnership with the City or external organizations that are not listed below.

The following tools are organized by which of the program goals they may address:

#### Program Goals

1. Maintaining affordability for artists and cultural producers to live and work
2. Supporting the success of cultural organizations and small businesses
3. Preventing the displacement of communities and culture-keepers of all types, including cultural organizations and small businesses
4. Preserving cultural assets, traditions, and knowledge for future generations

**Table 3. Existing and Proposed City Tools and Resources to Support Cultural Districts**

Goals Supported	Tool	Department
1, 2, 3, 4	<p><b>Cultural District Zoning Overlay</b> – Creating zoning overlays for cultural districts allows the City to create district-level land-use regulations specific to each individual cultural district's goals.<sup>21</sup></p> <p>This tool is being piloted for the Black Arts Movement and Business District (BAMBD), for which it “establishes a dedicated arts and culture district to support Black-owned arts, entertainment, and business establishments, and rejuvenate, streetscape and public areas”. All ground floor land uses within an initial pilot area</p>	Planning and Building (PBD)

<sup>21</sup> The Downtown Oakland Specific Plan includes a variety of zoning-related measures that could be applied within Cultural Districts, including E-2.4: Ground Floor Artisan Production Spaces, C.1.10: Zoning for Arts and Culture Uses, C-2.2: Reduced Barriers for Outdoor Vendors, C-2.4: Streamline Event Permitting, C-3.6: Temporary-Uses, E-2.7: Pop-Up & Temporary Uses, CH-1.8: Encouraging Vendors & Artists in Public Spaces, C-2.2: Community Gathering Spaces (coordination with public institutions).

	must be BAMBD-related activities to be permitted "by-right" (other uses may be allowed with a Conditional Use Permit). <sup>22,23</sup>	
1, 2, 3, 4	<b>Adjusting Scoring or Requirements for Recipients of City Development Funding within Cultural Districts</b> – Additional requirements or scoring benefits could be added to projects within cultural districts applying for City funding or tax benefits. Policy H-2.17 in the DOSP recommends awarding additional bonus points in Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) scoring for projects providing below-market rate commercial space for arts and culture where more than 50% of project is set aside for live-work units for artists <sup>24</sup>	Housing and Community Development (HCD)
1, 2, 3, 4	<b>Leasing City-owned Property for Arts/Culture Uses</b> – Policy C-3.2 in the Downtown Oakland Specific Plan is “Continue leasing City-owned properties downtown at below-market rents for arts and culture uses utilizing the City’s existing process and creating a competitive process for filling spaces as they become available” <sup>25</sup>  Upon designation of new cultural districts, EWDD could be responsible for identifying any underutilized publicly owned property in the district and collaborating with district leadership to promote the opportunity to cultural organizations or small businesses that contribute to the identity and purpose of the cultural district. In collaboration with a cultural district’s leadership, EWDD can facilitate a connection between the district and the entity in control of the property, and/or advise on an equitable tenant selection process for the space.	Economic and Workforce Development Department (EWDD)
1, 2, 3, 4	<b>Adopt Municipal Ordinance to Expand Artist Housing Affordability Requirements in and around State and Local Cultural Districts in accordance with AB812</b> – Under AB812, the State of California gives cities authority to adopt ordinances that require up to 10% of deed-restricted affordable housing units within locally-designated cultural districts, or within .5 miles of state-designated cultural districts, to prioritize artists as occupants. <sup>26</sup>	HCD, State of California (AB812)
1, 2, 3, 4	<b>Assistance with Applications for Historic Property Designation and/or Mills Act Property Tax Relief</b> – Historic preservation staff within PBD could connect cultural district partners to City or State technical assistance resources available for the designation and rehabilitation of historic properties, including property tax relief available under the statewide Mills Act. The City could also partner with local preservation nonprofits to provide technical assistance to historic property owners within cultural districts. These property owners may wish to apply for a historic designation to provide recognition and limited design, environmental, and demolition protections to their property, and/or property tax relief under the Mills Act, in exchange for the rehabilitation and maintenance of their property.  The most useful historic designation for property owners in cultural districts is likely	PBD

<sup>22</sup> City of Oakland, [Downtown Oakland Specific Plan](#) (DOSP), 414.

<sup>23</sup> City of Oakland, DOSP Draft Zoning Amendments, [Chapter 17.101K – D-DT Downtown District Zones Regulations](#).

<sup>24</sup> City of Oakland, [Downtown Oakland Specific Plan](#) (DOSP), 112.

<sup>25</sup> DOSP, 183.

<sup>26</sup> AB 812: Housing development approvals: reserving affordable units in or near a cultural district for artists. 2023-10-11: Chapter 747, Statutes of 2023. Accessed via [Digital Democracy Database](#).

	the less-exclusive “Heritage Property” designation for “properties which definitively warrant preservation, but which are not Landmarks.” <sup>27</sup> The designation provides protection via design review, environmental review, demolition findings, and the California Historical Building Code, and eligibility for Mills Act property tax relief. Properties are designated by actions of the Landmarks Preservation Advisory Board and do not require City Council approval.	
1, 3, 4	<b>Partnerships with Mission-Aligned Real Estate Development Organizations</b> – The Bay Area has several nonprofit real estate developers and other real estate related funds that support preservation of cultural communities through the preservation or production of affordable housing (including artist housing) or cultural spaces. Districts may indicate if they are interested in engaging with such organizations as part of their Community Planning process and EWDD or HCD can facilitate connections.	EWDD, HCD
1, 3, 4	<b>Tenant Education about Tenant Protections</b> – Housing and Community Development can partner with Cultural District leadership to provide cultural district residents education around tenants’ rights in Oakland including the Rent Adjustment Program (RAP) and Tenant Protection Ordinance (TPO). These engagements can also provide opportunities to identify neighborhood-specific education or resources a community needs to support their efforts to remain in-place.	HCD
1, 3, 4	<b>Support to Preserve Affordable Housing</b> – Housing and Community Development is launching a partnership with the <a href="#">Housing Accelerator Fund</a> to provide flexible capital to projects that support the acquisition and rehabilitation of small-scale affordable housing opportunities in Oakland. In the future, cultural districts looking to preserve an affordable housing property within their district may be able to utilize this program.	HCD
2, 4	<b>Façade and Tenant Improvement Grant</b> – In the past, the City has provided up to \$25,000 in grants to small business and property owners for the improvement of exterior and interior of commercial properties. In the future, discretionary business incentive funding could be set aside for properties within culture districts.	EWDD
2,4	<b>Neighborhood Business Assistance</b> – EWDD provides counseling and technical assistance meetings for small businesses online, via email, phone, or in-person at neighborhood locations. <sup>28</sup> EWDD could partner with cultural district leadership to hold culturally-responsive group assistance or counseling sessions in cultural districts or online.	EWDD
2, 4	<b>Culturally Relevant Streetscape Design</b> – The Department of Transportation can work with cultural districts to create design guidelines for rights-of-way within the cultural district that make improvements to pedestrian access, and City-provided street furniture, wayfinding, and lighting.  Alternatively or in addition, cultural districts may work with DOT to develop a “master” encroachment permit agreement with the City that gives cultural district	DOT

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> City of Oakland, [Neighborhood Business Assistance Program](#).

	management entities the authority to manage agreed-upon improvements within the right-of-way (such as landscaping, additional signage, or additional lighting) without having to pursue separate permits for each installation.	
2,4	<b>Enable Temporary Activations in Cultural Districts</b> – Within cultural districts, consider allowing temporary activation of vacant commercial space without a Conditional Use Permit.	PBD
2, 4	<b>Enable Events in Cultural Districts</b> – EWDD currently provides quick special event permitting and may be able to provide some waived fees or special event funding through the Special Events Discounts program for events in cultural districts.	EWDD
2, 4	<b>Technical Assistance or Priority for the Cultural Funding Grant Program</b> – The Cultural Affairs Division of EWDD provides financial assistance, professional development opportunities, and direct services to Oakland-based arts and culture organizations and workers. Funding fluctuates annually, supported by a portion of the Transient Occupancy Tax and by the General Fund.  The City could explore creating a grantmaking category specifically for organizations, artists, or events within cultural districts.	EWDD
2, 4	<b>Assistance Forming Cultural Business Improvement Districts</b> – Some cultural districts may want to explore creating a Business Improvement District as a way to fund cultural projects or other services. BIDs are discrete geographic areas in which property owners and/or businesses have voted to pay a special assessment to fund projects and services, which typically include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintaining cleanliness and presence on streets and sidewalks</li> <li>• Marketing and promoting the neighborhood</li> <li>• Garbage pick-up, landscaping, and graffiti removal in addition to existing city services</li> <li>• Capital improvements to create pedestrian-friendly retail areas</li> <li>• Fostering an environment in which new and existing businesses can thrive</li> <li>• Producing special events, including cultural events<sup>29</sup></li> </ul> Oakland currently has 10 active BIDs. New cultural districts may already overlap with existing BIDs or may wish to create a BID to support the goals outlined in their Strategic Plan. EWDD could provide additional consultation resources to explore establishing a BID. <sup>30</sup>	EWDD

<sup>29</sup> Oakland Chamber of Commerce, [Business Improvement Districts](#).

<sup>30</sup> Note: Establishing a Business Improvement District requires a significant amount of administrative work. For more information on the process of establishing a BID see Oakland, California, Municipal Code, Ord. 12190 § 6, 1999, or contact the Economic and Workforce Development Department.

## 4. Eligibility

### Cultural Districts Definition

The Oakland Cultural Districts Program is designed to support communities with a strong and identifiable cultural identity—places where residents, artists, small businesses, and cultural organizations have built a shared sense of belonging, creativity, and civic life. Many of these communities are also threatened with cultural erasure due to rising housing and commercial costs and displacement. Cultural district designation is one method for recognizing, protecting, and investing in these areas so that their cultural legacy can continue to evolve in place.

A cultural district is defined as a geographic area within the City of Oakland that is central to Oakland’s identity and contains a concentration of cultural assets. Strong candidates for designation will:

- Serve as a hub for community gathering, organizing, or creative and cultural expression
- Contain a concentration of cultural or historic businesses, venues, and arts and culture spaces
- Hold importance to the historical legacy of a community and/or a community’s ongoing struggle for civil rights, equity, and belonging, utilizing culture as a form of expression and resilience
- Feature buildings, spaces, and public art that exemplify or celebrate the community’s legacy and cultural traditions

### Cultural District Boundaries

Potential cultural districts should suggest a defined, contiguous geographic boundary for their district, described using specific streets or natural landmarks. Boundaries should reflect areas where the community’s cultural assets and activities are concentrated and consider how designation could direct resources to meaningfully support long-term stability and cultural visibility.

Recognizing that some cultural assets connected to a community’s heritage may be geographically dispersed, applicants may propose including an annex—a site or group of sites located outside the core district—that holds cultural, historic, or symbolic significance. These annexes should be clearly justified as integral to the district’s story and purpose. Whenever possible, annexes should be included at the original application for designation but may be considered for addition later in the recertification process.

### Eligible Applicants

Only organizational partnerships are eligible to apply. The types of organizations eligible may include: an arts and/or cultural nonprofit or collective, a local business association, or a community development corporation.<sup>31</sup>

Partnerships must include a minimum of two organizations, including at least one arts and culture organization, and one business association or community development organization. Organizations must be located in the proposed boundaries of the cultural district.<sup>32</sup> One organization must be designated as the lead applicant. A lead applicant must be a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3), Oakland-based organization. Organizations that are registered and primarily operate as for-profit corporations/entities are ineligible, even if they have a fiscal sponsor. All applicant organizations must have a principal place of business in Oakland and an Oakland address.

<sup>31</sup> Aligned with California Cultural Districts 2025 Grant Guidelines

<sup>32</sup> Exceptions may be made for associations or coalitions located outside the district with a majority of members located in the district.

## 5. Governance

### Governance Principles

Oakland's communities are experts in community organizing rooted in cultural values. Acknowledging this, the Program does not prescribe a one-size-fits-all governance model but instead allows cultural districts to establish a governing body and decision-making processes that reflect their values and traditions, while providing the structure necessary to maintain a meaningful partnership with the City. The following governance principles are designed to support the Program's goals of preventing the displacement of cultural organizations, businesses, and culture-makers of all kinds while preserving cultural assets and traditions for future generations. Proposed governance structures will be evaluated against the following principles:

- **Diverse viewpoints are represented in advisory bodies**, including but not limited to:
  - Youth (under 18 years of age)
  - Seniors (above 65 years of age)
  - Small business owners
  - Cultural organization leaders
  - Artists and Culture Bearers
  - Neighborhood residents
  - Legacy or long-term Oakland residents *and* newcomers<sup>33</sup>

A majority of members of decision-making bodies should reside or work within the geographic bounds of the cultural district or otherwise be able to demonstrate a track record of cultural production relevant to the assets of the district, or a track record of direct assistance (including volunteering) for people living and working within the district.

Decision-making bodies should reflect dimensions of diversity present within the district such as race, ethnicity, age, sex, national origin, religion, and disability.

- **There is a clear definition of responsibilities.** Districts must, at minimum, designate a clear point of contact who is responsible for maintaining regular communication and coordination with the City.
- **Decisions are made with broad participation or consensus.** While decision-making processes may vary, governance models should propose accountability measures and participation requirements to ensure funding or strategic planning decisions cannot be approved without a certain level of participation and discussion.

### Potential Governance Structures

Cultural districts often organize themselves and receive funding through a not-for-profit organization governed by a Board of Directors that establishes clear bylaws and meets regularly. Oaklanders expressed a desire for alternative governance models for cultural districts that might better align with community values or fit different communities' needs. The application toolkit in **Appendix B** provides a few examples on different models for governance, including Board or Advisory Council, Participatory or Consensus-Based Governance, and Distributed Circle Governance. If one goal of the Cultural District is to partner with the City of Oakland through grants or contracts, the lead applicant will need to be a not-for-profit entity meeting the insurance and governance requirements of the City of Oakland.

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<sup>33</sup> Proportion to be determined by each respective community.

## 6. Application, Certification, and Recertification Process

Recommendations for the application and certification process for cultural districts are grounded in accessibility and transparency. The program design acknowledges that potential applicants may be working on a volunteer basis or navigating competing priorities. It also recognizes that applicants bring diverse professional experiences, cultural values and decision-making approaches, and lived experiences interacting with government. To accommodate diverse applicants, this application process is designed to:

- Provide potential applicants with examples and templates compiled into an Applicant Toolkit
- Align application processes and expectations with requirements for California State Cultural District designation and Business Improvement District establishment where possible
- Set clear requirements and expectations for applicants
- Set clear requirements and expectations for City staff in their response to applications

### Application Components

Applicants will prepare a proposal to submit to the Economic and Workforce Development Department's Cultural Affairs Division. The application will consist of:

- **Cover Letter and Statement of Intent.** The cover letter should clearly identify the lead applicant and point of contact, the other organizational partners in the coalition, each of their respective organizations' missions and current role in the cultural district, and their intent in pursuing the designation on behalf of their community. The letter should be signed by each partner organization.
- **Description of Cultural Identity.** This section should describe what makes the neighborhood unique and what elements of culture the applicants are hoping to promote and conserve, including:
  - A brief description of neighborhood's cultural identity and history.
  - Map of proposed district, with cultural assets labeled. Communities may define "cultural assets" according to their values, to include a wide range of tangible and intangible sites, traditions, people, historical events, etc.
- **Governance Proposal.** Applicants must propose a structure for the entity or coalition that will lead strategic planning and investments for their cultural district if designated. This should include:
  - Proposed governance structure and composition. For example, the proposed composition and decision-making processes of an Advisory Council that would steward planning and programming for the district.
  - A statement of alignment with the Program's governance principles.
- **Demonstration of Community Support for Cultural District Designation.** Applicants must demonstrate that they have broad-based community support for pursuing the cultural district designation, and a track record of engaging community members in activities or programming consistent with the City's Cultural District program. To demonstrate this, applicants must submit:
  - **Proof of Community Support.** A minimum of two letters of support from community organizations or neighborhood groups, with at least:
    - One (1) from an organization focused on arts or culture-related activities or programming, and
    - One (1) from a membership-based organization, such as a Merchants Association, Neighborhood Association, or other community coalition)

These letters should clearly state how the organizations or coalitions will support the activities and goals of the cultural district, including through maintaining a role in governance, convening, programming, promotion, or funding.

- **Proof of Community Engagement.** Applicants should supply materials that show a track record of community involvement in the cultural district or engagement in the designation process, such as:

- Records of previous cultural programming, events, and activities held in the district, including information on attendance (this can be reports, ticket sales, sign-in sheets, etc.)
- Records of community engagement around cultural asset identification or cultural district (reports produced, event photos, sign-in sheets, etc.)
- **Shared Priorities.** Applications should articulate some early community priorities for the cultural district that reflect the desires of different groups and stakeholders.
  - Shared community priorities for the cultural district. What are some common priorities that unite community members to support this effort? (Ex: preventing the displacement of artists, increasing programming to share and celebrate the neighborhood's heritage, etc.)
  - Identify whether the District's priorities are mostly aligned with goals of Cultural Production, Cultural Heritage, or both.
  - Early objectives, providing 2-4 tangible examples of what the district would like to accomplish within its first 3 years of designation.
- **Resource Needs**
  - Using the list provided by the City, indicate what types of programs, resources, or partnerships the district would be interested in pursuing or learning more about (Ex: Heritage Building Designation, expedited event permitting, Cultural District Zoning Overlay, community event subsidy, etc.)
  - **Note:** To keep this resource list current, the Departments of Economic and Workforce Development, Housing and Community Development, Planning and Building, Office of Parks, Recreation, and Youth Development, and Department of Transportation will annually respond to a survey distributed by EWDD to report on available tools, policies, or financial assistance relevant to existing and emerging cultural districts. Responses will be reported to the Cultural Affairs Commission, who will facilitate connecting cultural districts with resources that support their goals.

### Application Toolkit

The application toolkit included in **Appendix B** provides templates, examples, and additional guidance for the application sections listed above.

### Application and Designation Process

1. Cultural district applications will be reviewed by Economic and Workforce Development Department staff (EWDD). If applications meet the threshold requirements for eligibility, clear intent, governance, community support, and shared priorities, staff will make a recommendation to the Director of EWDD to advance the application.
2. Upon the Director's approval, EWDD will prepare a draft ordinance for the designation of the cultural district that includes:
  - a. District name, boundaries, and description of cultural identity.
  - b. Identification of district governance structure.
  - c. District shared priorities.
  - d. City programs and resources that may advance the goals of the cultural district and the affiliated City Departments and points-of-contact for each.
3. The ordinance will be reviewed by the necessary municipal advisory bodies before being advanced to City Council to vote on district designation.
4. Within three months following designation, Economic and Workforce Development Staff will communicate with the lead applicant point-of-contact to offer times for a meeting between cultural district leadership and City staff.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of this meeting will be to discuss the relevant city programs named in the staff report accompanying the ordinance and to identify next steps in connecting cultural districts to appropriate resources, programs, and tools.
5. Cultural districts will be required to develop a Cultural District Community Plan (CDCP) and submit to EWDD within 18 months of designation. Cultural District Community Plans should identify community goals and ideas for programming, partnerships, and capital projects through broad-based community engagement. Required components for community plans and tools to design engagement processes to shape the plan are outlined in **Appendix A**.
6. Progress reports on Cultural District Community Plan implementation will be included within the Cultural Affairs Division's annual reports to City Council.

### Existing Cultural Districts

Legislated cultural districts designated prior to 2025 and the adoption of the Program framework are the Black Arts Movement and Business District, the Latinx Cultural Arts District, and the LGBTQ Cultural District.

1. Certification of the three (3) existing, legislated cultural districts will be renewed upon City Council's adoption of the Cultural District Program ordinance, after which the districts may pursue recertification every five years.
2. Upon adoption of the Program Ordinance, EWDD will provide the resource list provided to new cultural district applicants to existing districts. EWDD will also offer times for a meeting to discuss the list with cultural district leaders and designated City staff affiliated with programs, tools, and resources relevant to the district.

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<sup>34</sup> City staff may also refer cultural districts to real estate development organizations offering partnership and technical assistance.

3. Legislated cultural districts designated prior to 2025 will be eligible to apply for District Launch grants to support the designation of a District Coordinator and the establishment or clarification of governance and planning documents.
4. Emerging or naturally-occurring, non-legislated cultural districts may be eligible to apply for District Development grants to support cultural programming intended to engage interest-holders and advance the development of partnerships for cultural district designation.

## Evaluation and Recertification

### Evaluation

1. The Cultural Affairs Division will include an update on cultural district reporting and Community Plan implementation progress in their annual reports to City Council.
2. Cultural Districts that receive funding from the City will report annually on the progress of attaining or maintaining the requirements of District designation by submitting:
  - o Documentation of regular meeting of governance group and adherence to adopted governance principles or bylaws (as applicable)
  - o Documentation of cultural district programming or activities

Cultural districts will be given a reporting deadline that is at least 120 days prior to Cultural Affairs Divisions' annual report to City Council.

If EWDD determines that a cultural district entity has not been meeting these basic requirements, they will notify the entity of any errors in writing and allow at least 90 days for the entity to rectify the issue or submit a plan for addressing the problem prior to the Cultural Affairs Divisions' next annual report to City Council.

If such plan has not been submitted and the issue has not been rectified by the time of the report, the Cultural Affairs Division may make a recommendation regarding the status of the cultural district designation.

### Recertification

1. In alignment with the State of California, Oakland Cultural District designation shall be for a period of five years.
2. Districts may apply to renew their certification as soon as three years after the designation. Certification must be renewed within five years to remain active. Districts may recertify by submitting the following documentation to the Cultural Affairs Division:
  - o **Statement of Intent to Renew.** Districts must re-verify their lead organization and point-of-contact for the City. This statement must be signed by all organizations in the original partnership that pursued designation. Districts must explain any changes in the membership of the establishing partnership.
  - o **Identification of Governance.** Districts must confirm their adherence to the Program's governance principles and notify the City of any changes in governing or advisory bodies.
  - o **Updated District Priorities or Plans.** Districts must submit their most recent Cultural District Community Plans and/or updated shared priorities to the Cultural Affairs Division.
3. Staff will submit a report and recommendation regarding recertification of the cultural district to the EWDD Director. If approved, recertification legislation will be prepared for adoption by City Council.
4. City Council will vote to approve or deny recertification of the cultural district.

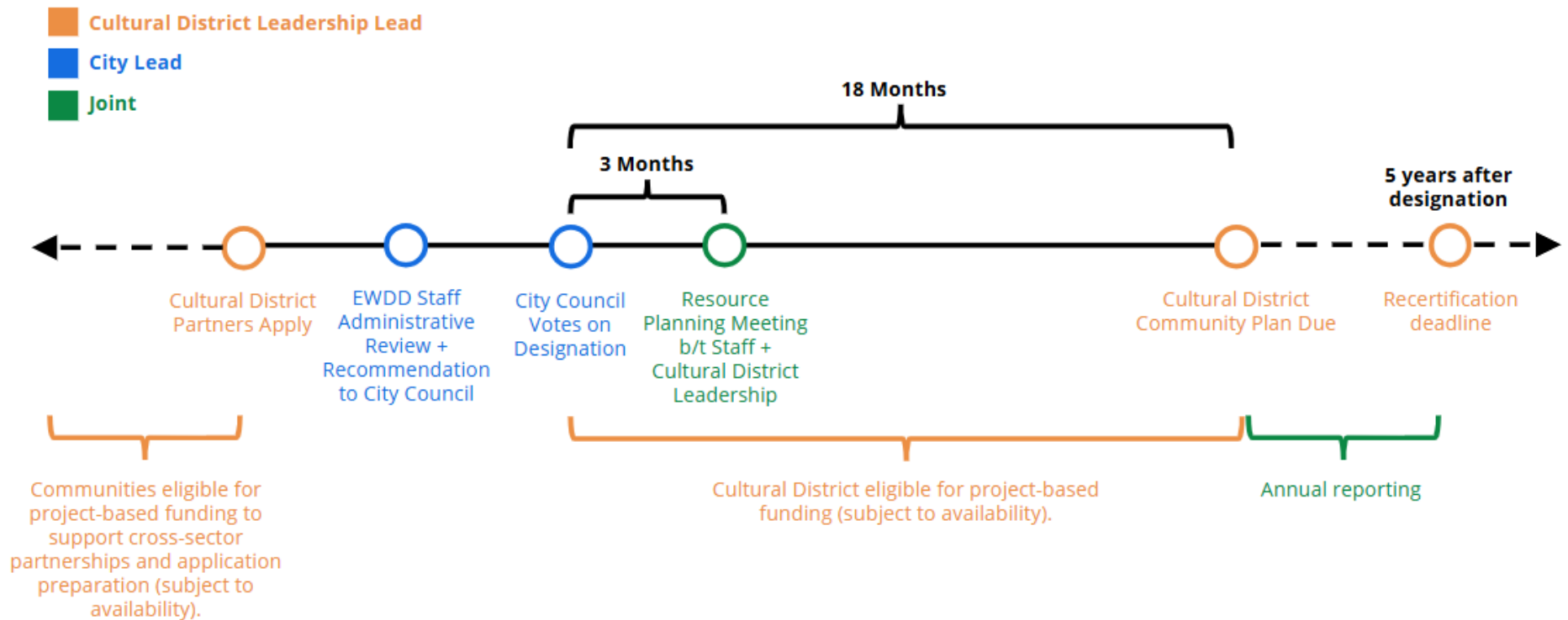
For districts designated prior to 2025 and the adoption of the Program ordinance:

1. Certification of the three (3) existing, legislated cultural districts will be renewed upon City Council's adoption of the Cultural District Program ordinance, after which the districts may pursue recertification after three years, and must recertify within five years to maintain designation.

## Program Timeline

The establishment of a cultural district supports a long-term, continuous relationship between the community and the City, with both cultural district leadership and the City responsible for meeting different program milestones and checkpoints. Figure 1 lays out a representative timeline from pre-application to district recertification, including major milestones in the application and certification process, as well as the cultural district planning process.

Figure 1. Program Timeline



# Appendix A: Cultural District Community Plans

## Cultural District Community Plan (CDCP) Components

Cultural Districts are eligible to apply for funding (subject to availability) to complete a Community Plan to submit to the City of Oakland's Cultural Affairs Division within 18 months of designation. The inputs of this plan should primarily come from community engagement. Understanding that convening, organizing, and planning is a very time and energy-intensive process, the City has allocated limited funds to support existing and emerging Cultural Districts through a competitive RFP to be issued upon City Council's adoption of a Citywide Cultural Districts Ordinance. The anticipated amount available is a total of \$200,000 each year in the current biennial budget, however the actual amount may vary.

Districts are encouraged to be creative and create a plan that works for them. However, each community plan should articulate:

- Guiding Values or Principles
  - What are the values of the cultural district's communities that are guiding the formulation of the plan?
- Description of Cultural Identity
  - Map and list of cultural assets
  - Narrative history or other creative documentation of the community's story or culture
  - *Note: This section may build upon what was submitted for the application.*
- Neighborhood Profile
  - Demographic characteristics of the neighborhood, including demographic change.
    - Who is living in the neighborhood? How has this changed over time?
    - Who is working in the neighborhood? How has this changed over time?
  - Market Characteristics and Pressures
    - What is the state of the real estate market in the neighborhood?
    - What are some pressures that residents, property owners, or businesses are facing? (Ex: rent burden, rising rents, rising operating costs, etc.)
  - *Note: Free resources for completing a neighborhood profile include the American Community Survey and California's Healthy Places Index. For assistance with real estate market studies, the Cultural Affairs Division provides resources referrals in grantee assistance workshops when Requests for Proposals are issued.*
- Summary of Community Engagement
  - List of individuals and organizations engaged, including basic demographic information
  - Results of any surveys or workshops conducted
- Community Priorities and Goals
  - Articulation of community priorities or goals
  - *Note: This section may build upon or adapt the shared priorities submitted for the application.*
- Strategies to Achieve Community Priorities or Goals
  - Strategies for achieving each goal. Each strategy should clearly identify:
    - Who is responsible? Who is the lead, who are partners, what are their roles?
    - What is the timeline?
    - What resources are needed? Are they secured? If not, what is necessary to get them?
    - How will you know if this strategy has succeeded? How will you re-evaluate this strategy to ensure it is having the intended effects, and make any necessary adjustments?
  - The Cultural Affairs Division will facilitate review of draft CDCP strategies by designees of relevant City departments to offer feedback on alignment with City priorities and available programs, policies, or resources.

## Community Engagement Process

Planning processes in cultural districts should reflect their communities' values around gathering, planning, storytelling, and decision-making. The following examples of engagement tools and processes are not meant to be prescriptive; instead, they may provide inspiration or direction to cultural districts as they plan a community engagement process to inform their Cultural District Community Plan.

Several elements of the plan should be grounded in community engagement, namely:

- Identifying cultural values
- Identifying cultural assets
- Telling the neighborhood's story
- Identifying and articulating community goals
- Identifying partners for community implementation strategies

The following sections outline community engagement ideas to help gather information for each section. Before engaging community members, it can be helpful to ask, "What questions am I trying to answer? What information do I need to understand from the community?" Some examples of questions planners might ask themselves are listed in "Key Questions" under each section.

### Identifying Cultural Values

*Key Questions: What are the values that shape how people in your community think, act, relate to one another, and relate to other communities? How can these values guide and shape the work you do as a cultural district?*

Identifying cultural values can be a great place to start when you are building an engagement strategy or a plan. They are a place to return to. When you aren't sure if you are headed in the right direction, you can ask yourself, "Is this decision or strategy aligned with our community's cultural values?"

The very thoughtful example below of using values to guide work and partnerships comes from Hawaii, where a coalition of university research programs, nature reserves, and Native Hawaiian organizations came together to express eight kūlana (standards, values) that guide their partnerships and research.

#### Example: Kūlana Noi'i Working Group: Values to Guide Partnerships and Research

Honolulu, Hawaii

Building and Nurturing Pilina (Relationships)

- Respect
- Reciprocity
- Self-Awareness and Capacity
- Communication

A'o aku, a'o mai/Aloha aku, aloha mai (Knowledge given, knowledge received / Love given, love received)

- Maintain a Long-Term Focus
- Community Engagement and Co-Review
- Knowledge Stewardship
- Accountability

You can read [the full Kūlana Noi'i document here](#), including more about each of the values.

Your planning or engagement team may start with a list of values that you refine as you gather more information from the community, or you may source these values through workshops or interviews of community members.

### Identifying Cultural Assets

*Key Questions: What cultural places, events, traditions, or stories in the community make it special? What are the places or pieces of infrastructure that support arts, culture, and a thriving local economy in the neighborhood? Which (if any) of these assets are at risk?*

### Participatory Mapping and Surveying

A great way to gather information about cultural assets is to ask community members about the places that are important to them. There are many different tools you can use to facilitate participatory mapping, an exercise where community members actively create maps of places that are important in the community.

- [Tabletop Mapping](#) (in-person, using pins or labels) – Traditional analog participatory mapping often involves allowing people to put stickers or pins and labels on a paper map at an in-person event or location.
- [Miro](#) (digital, requires subscription with free trial option) – Miro is a platform that allows collaborative brainstorming and idea-sharing. You can upload a map to Miro and allow collaborators to add important locations through digital stickers, sticky notes, and many other design features.
- [ArcGIS Survey123 and StoryMaps](#) (digital, requires subscription) – ArcGIS Survey123 allows the organizer to create a survey that community members can respond to using a free app. On the app, users can mark accurate locations of cultural resources or important places in the district and submit photographs and other information about the resource. This can be combined with StoryMaps, which allows the organizer to create a digital map of the data collected through the survey. This map can be shared online, along with other stories about the cultural district or information about the Cultural District Community Plan. These tools do require a paid subscription to ArcGIS Online.
- [Surveying](#) – If you have time or volunteers, you may want to physically go out and walk your cultural district block-by-block with community leaders, elders, or other experts to document places of historical or cultural significance. If you decide you'd like to do this, you don't have to start from scratch. The Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey completed a survey of every building in the City in 1997. For more information or to view the survey, contact Historic Preservation staff at the City's Planning and Building Department. As of 2025, contact Betty Marvin at (510) 238-6879 (bmarvin@oaklandca.gov) or visit the [Historical and Architectural Rating System](#) page.

### Telling the Neighborhood's Story

*Key Questions: What parts of our neighborhood's history do we need to understand in order to plan for its future? What parts of our neighborhood's story do we not have as much documented information on? In the past, when people have described our neighborhood's story, who have they left out? How can we include them now?*

Gathering information about your neighborhood's story is a great opportunity to celebrate what makes your community special and gather, archive, and protect stories about your cultural district.

### Community Story-Writing

Storytelling and story collecting can easily be integrated into existing community events. You can set up a table or booth with prompts like "What's your favorite memory in your community?", "What makes this community special?", or "Home is \_\_\_\_\_." You can ask participants to write responses on handouts or postcards to submit, or on larger posters to share responses with other event attendees.

You may also consider collaborating with organizations such as schools, senior centers or programs, or faith-based institutions to conduct letter-writing campaigns where teachers, program officers, or faith leaders can encourage larger groups of people to participate in writing their stories and submitting them to cultural district leadership.

## Oral History

Conducting oral history interviews can be a great way to gather first-hand information about the history of your neighborhood while also creating a resource for future generations to learn from.

If you are interested in researching and/or collecting new oral histories as part of your community planning process (or as part of cultural programming), there are some helpful free resources:

### Resources: Recording Assistance

- [Oral History Center](#) – Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley
- [StoryCorps DIY](#) – StoryCorps offers free online courses on how to conduct interviews, record oral histories, and use storytelling as a tool for building community or addressing challenging issues and topics in your community.

### Resources: Research

If you are looking for historic documentation of community members' stories, you may explore the following resources:

- Oakland Public Library – [Oakland History Center](#) (including Oakland Oral History Project Archives)
- [California Revealed](#) – easy, free online access to the collections of heritage organizations all over the state, including oral histories, historic film and audio recordings, etc.

## Articulating Community Priorities and Goals

*Key Questions: What are common goals that many stakeholders in your district are aligned on? Which goals are most important to community members or most urgent?*

Residents, business owners, property owners, artists, and frequent visitors to a cultural district likely have different visions for the district. As cultural district leaders, it can be difficult to gather and process information about what your community wants, reconciling the different priorities and concerns of different groups. There are a few different ways of engaging community members that can help you gather the information you need to define goals and strategies for the cultural district's community plan.

### What's the difference between a goal and a strategy?

- Goals – describe what the community would like to achieve. For example, "Become a neighborhood where artists can afford to live and work."
- Strategies – describe actions you will take to achieve that goal. For example, "Partner with local nonprofit real estate development organizations to adapt 2 industrial properties on Main Street to artist live-work housing."

## Surveys

Surveys are a good tool for gathering high-level information from broader audiences. For example, you could create a survey that lists what the leadership of your district thinks are likely the top 10 priorities in the neighborhood and ask respondents to rank them. This can help you get to high-level statistics such as, "80% of survey respondents agree that preventing the displacement of renters should be a top priority of the cultural district". If you would like to use a digital survey, there are lots of great free survey platforms that you can find

online. However, [Google Forms](#) is very easy to use and allows you to quickly and easily view insights from your data, including charts and graphs that are automatically generated.

## Workshops

Convening people for productive brainstorming, idea-sharing, and conversation is often the best way to come to consensus around shared priorities and goals. There are many ways to design a good workshop, but the following things are good to keep in mind:

- **Build a safe and collaborative environment.** What does safety look like to your community? How can you set up the workshop to help people feel safe sharing their ideas with others? Here are a few tools that can be helpful:
  - Provide the things people need to feel cared for and comfortable: food, beverages, breaks, accessible seating, clear directions to the restroom and other facilities, etc.
  - Create community agreements before starting the workshop. These are agreements the group makes collectively to each other, such as “treat others with respect” or “share your ideas without tearing others’ ideas down”
  - Provide accommodations for people with disabilities and language access services.
- **Create opportunities for everyone to contribute.** This can be through small-group conversation with good facilitators, or allowing different opportunities to contribute through writing activities, worksheets, or digital tools that allow anonymous participation such as [Mentimeter](#).
- **Use your knowledge of your community to design thoughtful activities and questions.** What makes people in your community feel excited? What makes them feel nervous? For example, if you know that a lot of people in your community love to think visually and creatively – present opportunities to draw or craft to answer questions. Alternatively, if you know that people may feel nervous or uncertain if they don’t understand a concept or question, invest some time in sharing knowledge and teaching before you dive into activities.

You can find more [guidance about designing workshops from Seeds for Change](#) (a UK-based workers' co-op of experienced campaigners).

## Identifying Strategies and Partners for Implementation

*Key Questions: Which organizations or people have the appropriate skills and capacity to lead this strategy? Why? What other partners might they need to successfully implement it? Which organizations or individuals might be willing to help with this strategy because they have mutual interests?*

## Ecosystem or Stakeholder Mapping

Creating a “map” of the ecosystem of stakeholders within and supporting your cultural district can be a good place to start. This article from [Miro](#) provides some helpful guidance on how to use their platform to create a stakeholder map, but this can also easily be done by hand, in a presentation, or in a document.

Some categories of stakeholders particularly relevant for cultural districts might include:

- Decision-makers (elected officials, etc.)
- Funders (public, private, philanthropic, etc.)
- Anchor institutions (key organizations that bring visitors, economic activity, or other key services to the community – these can be museums, theaters, universities, healthcare providers, etc.)
- Culture-makers – artists, performers, craftspeople, chefs, etc.
- Culture-keepers – artists, storytellers, educators, elders, tour guides, etc.
- Property Owners – legacy property owners, for-profit real estate developers, non-profit real estate developers, land trusts or other cooperative ownership organizations

## Stakeholder Roundtables

Consider convening small-group conversations with some stakeholders in your community to discuss their goals, interests, and skills, and how they might align with the cultural district's efforts. Think about what groupings of people might foster productive conversation about future partnerships.

## 1-on-1 Interviews

When in doubt, reach out. If you aren't sure about what a particular organization does or a particular stakeholder's goals in the neighborhood, reach out for an interview to hear more about their goals and discuss potential partnerships.

## Additional Tools and Examples

### Indigenous Planning

Oaklanders expressed interest in using non-Western methods of community planning for cultural districts, and having opportunities to use methods that reflected their cultural values. Indigenous planning creates community plans and strategies through processes and products that are shaped by cultural values such as reciprocity, and informed by Indigenous Knowledge. The following are some examples of Native-led plans from First Nations. These may be helpful or inspiring examples for cultural districts looking to create community engagement processes and plans that truly reflect their community's values:

#### Examples of Indigenous Planning:

- [Doig River First Nation \(DRFN\) Comprehensive Community Plan: A Dream Map for Our Future](#), 2017.
- [Musqueam First Nation: A Comprehensive Sustainable Community Development Plan Update](#), October 2018.
- [Kitselas First Nation Comprehensive Community Plan](#), 2019.

## Appendix B: Application Toolkit

The following toolkit provides templates and additional information to help cultural districts in building their application for designation. The document templates are provided as a resource and example. They should be adjusted and edited as appropriate for each applicant's needs. Applicants may also choose not to use them.

### Cover Letter and Statement of Intent Optional Template

[Cultural District Partnership Name, if applicable]

Primary Contact: [Name, Title, Organization]

Address: [Street, City, Zip]

Email / Phone: [Insert Contact Information]

Date: [Insert Date]

To:

Cultural Affairs Division

Economic & Workforce Development Department

City of Oakland

Re: Application for Designation as the [Name of Proposed Cultural District]

Dear Cultural Affairs Division,

On behalf of the undersigned partners — [Organization/Entity 1], [Organization/Entity 2], and [Organization/Entity 3] — we are pleased to submit our application for designation as the [Name of Proposed Cultural District] under the City of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program. Together, our coalition represents a broad cross-section of the community, including [describe makeup—e.g., local arts organizations, cultural nonprofits, small businesses, residents, and property owners], united by a shared commitment to preserving and promoting the cultural identity of [Neighborhood or Community Name].

Our intent in pursuing this designation is to [insert purpose—e.g., formalize recognition of the community's cultural legacy, strengthen local partnerships, attract investment in arts and cultural spaces, and prevent displacement of culture-bearing residents and businesses]. We see this program as a tool to coordinate City resources with community-led efforts, and to ensure that Oakland's diverse cultural heritage continues to thrive in place.

Each partner brings distinct experience and resources to this effort:

- [Organization/Entity 1]: [Briefly describe mission and role—e.g., long-time anchor institution supporting arts education and cultural programming.]

- [Organization/Entity 2]: [Briefly describe mission and role—e.g., neighborhood business association advancing equitable economic development.]
- [Organization/Entity 3]: [Briefly describe mission and role—e.g., artist collective preserving and activating community spaces.]

Together, we are committed to leading a transparent, inclusive, and collaborative process to shape the district's future strategic plan and governance structure in alignment with the principles of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal. We look forward to working closely with the Cultural Affairs Division to advance this vision in partnership with the broader Oakland community.

Sincerely,

[Name, Title, Organization]

[Name, Title, Organization]

[Name, Title, Organization]

### Description of Cultural Identity

#### Example Description:

The [Community Name] community has played a central role in shaping Oakland's [cultural, social, economic, etc.] landscape. Rooted in [describe community's historical background — e.g., migration history, cultural traditions, creative practices, or social movements], this community has long been a hub for [arts, entrepreneurship, organizing, celebration, etc.]. The proposed [District Name] displays the following characteristics [elements that make the neighborhood unique and that the applicants are hoping to promote and preserve]:

- The proposed district is central to Oakland's identity and serves as a gathering place for [insert community or cultural group].
- The area contains a concentration of cultural and historic assets, such as [insert examples of cultural businesses, arts venues, landmarks, or gathering spaces].
- The district holds historic significance as a center for [describe community's legacy, e.g., labor organizing, artistic innovation, cultural festivals].
- Buildings, spaces, and public art reflect and celebrate the community's culture and history, including [insert examples of murals, monuments, or key sites].
- The district contributes to the community's fight for civil rights, representation, and cultural safety, providing a space where [insert examples — e.g., "artists, families, and small businesses can thrive without fear of displacement"]

The proposed [District Name] encompasses the area bounded by [insert streets, landmarks, —e.g., "East 12th Street to the south, 35th Avenue to the east, Foothill Boulevard to the north, and 23rd Avenue to the west"], including both sides of each boundary street. This area represents the historic and contemporary heart of [Community Name]'s cultural life, where its residents, artists, and small businesses continue to sustain a vibrant creative and civic presence.

## Governance Models

Cultural districts are encouraged to design governance models that align with their values, support implementation of their stated goals, and satisfy the City's governance requirements. A few examples and resources are provided below to assist applicants in crafting their governance proposal.

### Boards or Advisory Councils

A Board is typically composed of 3-30 members that play different leadership roles or participate in different committees, all guiding an organization or district's strategies, decision-making, and overall organizational and financial health.

Note: To receive 501(c)(3) tax exempt status from the IRS, nonprofits must establish a board of directors with a minimum of 3 members. Bylaws that clearly outline the duties of board members, meeting rules (including decision-making processes), officers, committees, and a conflict-of-interest policy must also be adopted. This article has [more information on starting a nonprofit organization in California](#). One important alternative option to establishing a nonprofit organization is fiscal sponsorship, which allows an established nonprofit sponsor to essentially share their 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status with a charitable project so it can receive grants and tax-deductible contributions. This document from the Bar Association of San Francisco explains more of the [basics of fiscal sponsorship](#).

### Consensus-Based Governance

Consensus-based governance is a model where community members work together to reach collective decisions that they can all agree on, even if the final group decision wasn't necessarily the individual's first choice. Many Indigenous cultures around the world use different models of consensus-based governance, with one of the most famous being the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy's governance structure, which [heavily influenced the structure of American democracy](#).

Consensus-based governance could be combined with the Board or Advisory Council model by explicitly writing into the bylaws or agreements of the Board or Council that decisions would be made through a consensus-based process. You can find guides and resources on [consensus-based models of governance](#) under the "Consensus Decision Making" tab from Seeds for Change on the linked webpage.

### Circle Governance or Sociocratic Governance

Sociocratic governance or circle governance is consent-based and decentralizes decision-making power into smaller groups or "circles" that have specific domains that they are responsible for. A key difference between sociocratic governance and consensus-based governance is that the circle model is based on consent, not consensus. As explained by Sociocracy for All, the difference is that "consensus requires agreement. Consent requires that no one disagrees." You can read more about the circle governance model and explore examples of how different organizations use it on the [Sociocracy for All learning page](#).

## Letter of Support Template

[Letterhead or Organization Name]

[Address]

[Email / Phone / Website]

Date: [Insert Date]

To:

Cultural Affairs Division

Economic & Workforce Development Department

City of Oakland

Re: Letter of Support for the Proposed [Name of Cultural District]

Dear Cultural Affairs Division,

I am writing to express [Organization or Coalition Name]'s support for the proposed [Name of Cultural District], which seeks designation through the City of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program. As a [insert role—arts or cultural organization, community organization, neighborhood association, merchants association, etc.] within or connected to the proposed district, I recognize the deep cultural significance of this community and its contributions to Oakland's creative, economic, and civic life.

As part of our support, [Organization/Coalition] has contributed to providing [describe contributions—e.g., staff time, event space, role in cultural district governance, programming partnerships, outreach capacity, technical assistance, fiscal sponsorship, fundraising support, neighborhood activation, or other resources] to help advance the district's goals. These contributions reflect our shared interest in supporting a thriving and sustainable cultural ecosystem.

[In this section, describe your organization or yourself and your connection to the district. If an organization, briefly summarize your mission and role in the community — for example: "Founded in [year], [Organization Name] is dedicated to [mission or focus area]. Our programs, services, and events serve [community, population, or geographic area]." Then, explain why you support the proposed cultural district designation. You may highlight shared goals, overlapping missions, or the ways your organization's work aligns with the district's purpose]

Designation as a cultural district will help to [insert shared goals—e.g., preserve cultural spaces, strengthen community identity, attract investment in cultural programming, or support equitable economic development]. This initiative will ensure that the legacy and vitality of the [community name] community are sustained and celebrated as part of Oakland's broader cultural landscape.

[Organization or coalition name] looks forward to partnering with the City of Oakland and the district's organizers to advance these shared goals through [reiterate specific contribution to district].

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title / Role / Affiliation]

[Signature, if applicable]

### Preliminary Priorities & Goals

The proposed [District Name] Cultural District is grounded in a shared commitment to celebrating and sustaining [insert community or cultural identity]. Our partners—including [list key types of partners: artists, residents, small businesses, cultural organizations, etc.]—have identified the following preliminary priorities to guide this effort:

- **Visibility:** Increasing recognition of the community's cultural identity and contributions to Oakland's broader story.
- **Affordability:** Maintaining access and stability for artists, residents, and small businesses who make the district's culture possible.
- **Belonging:** Ensuring that [Community Name] remains a safe and inclusive place for cultural expression and intergenerational connection.

Within the first five years of designation, the [District Name] aims to:

- Partner with X institution to provide monthly free cultural programming in X square for participants of all ages.
- Pursue City and State historic designation for X building to support its preservation and recognition as a cultural asset.
- Work with a non-profit real estate developer to identify one potential project

These preliminary aims align with the goals of Oakland's Cultural Districts Program and/or the EWDD's Economic Development Action Plan, as follows: [insert brief explanation of alignment].