

Advancing Public Art While Rebuilding

Initiative Summary Statement:

Integrate public art into new and repaired infrastructure.

Initiative Description:

Objective: Integrate art into infrastructure during the rebuilding process to employ the arts and culture workforce, continue to attract visitors, and ensure the County remains a unique and beautiful area for all residents. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure and community facilities is a complex process that not only requires input from stakeholders traditionally involved (e.g., policy makers, engineers, planners, investors) but also offers opportunities to rebuild in a way that advances more than one sector. The arts and culture community contributes significantly to the tourism sector and quality of life within the County. Many municipalities around the region have successfully incorporated art around or into their infrastructure, which creates a draw for visitors and an amenity for residents. The practice of incorporating art into everyday infrastructure is sometimes referred to as “placemaking” and can have many positive benefits such as improved public safety, well-being, and employment opportunities. The arts and culture community can be integrated into the infrastructure planning and rebuilding process to identify opportunities for unique beautification and ultimately assist with building back in a resilient manner, returning infrastructure to pre-lan conditions, and maximizing the benefits of placemaking.

Need: Some of the areas impacted by Hurricane Ian housed public art elements, which were severely damaged and/or destroyed by the storm. Some of the key cultural resource assets that were damaged include the Cape Coral Yacht Club, Florida Repertory Theatre, Cultural Park Theatre, The Fort Myers Beach Art Association and Gallery, New Phoenix Theatre, the Sanibel Historical Museum and Village, Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, The Shell Factory and Nature Park, and the Edison and Ford Winter Estates, to name a few. Impacts to these facilities also affected the arts and cultural workforce, creating the need for interim opportunities and financial support.

Regional Approach: Coordination between infrastructure, economic, environmental, and arts and cultural stakeholders is needed to identify and implement impactful placemaking projects that help restore the community to pre-hurricane conditions and reflect and support the vibrancy of the region. Developing a comprehensive strategy that is inclusive of arts and cultural areas and institutions throughout the County can increase sector resilience across the region and economically benefit a multitude of stakeholders including those in the tourism, hospitality, retail, and arts sectors.

Integrating art into infrastructure can make construction aesthetically pleasing for residents and visitors. Permanent and temporary art installations of sculptures and various other pieces are popular in areas ranging from North Fort Myers to Fort Myers Beach and Sanibel; restoring these installations and/or expanding them to increase community identity and provide additional attractions could be included in the rebuilding process.

Similarly, integrating art into the regional LeeTran bus network is one way that decision-makers can promote art advancement throughout the County, reaching various hubs. Municipal organizations, like Bonita Springs and Fort Myers Art in Public Places, within the region have preexisting sculptures and artwork dispersed around their municipalities ultimately becoming a focal point of the cities. Other forms of public art that can be considered are murals, fountains, street furniture, and landmarks.

A vibrant program to integrate art into infrastructure can also generate employment opportunities and attract the artist workforce to the area. Another tactic for accomplishing this Initiative could potentially be to create an artist in residence in government (AIRG) program to integrate artists more formally into planning processes, incentivize innovation, and highlight the unique talents of the County workforce.

Incorporating art that reflects the diverse community within the Lee County region is also a way to center the voices and needs of the people who use these systems every day. Art can be created directly by artists of the Lee County community, designed to reflect all cultures within the County, and/or created through novel community participation methods. Expansion of public art and related programming into areas that currently have little to no formal placemaking installations may also provide low- to moderate-income or otherwise marginalized community members with more access to experience the arts.

Creating an arts and cultural partnership, with representation from the municipalities and unincorporated areas, to oversee the implementation of effective measures can help ensure that efforts are considerate of the whole community and region.

While art is traditionally incorporated into built infrastructure, there are also opportunities to integrate with Natural Resources Initiatives and Parks. The County currently offers a webcam program to showcase natural species in their habitats and preview waterways. The Calusa Blueway Paddling Trail was developed to attract outdoorsy travelers to waters throughout the region, but it needs infrastructure enhancement throughout the 190 miles of shoreline; this is another opportunity to integrate art and perhaps natural resources education for a unique experience.

Impact: Integrating art into the infrastructure rebuilding process will allow new structures to be designed in a way that maintains or enhances their pre-storm character, maximizes

the benefits of living in beautiful spaces, and creates new arts and cultural job opportunities. Involving arts and cultural organizations in the planning of infrastructure projects can allow for the incorporation and integration of new spaces and ultimately make them more desirable, walkable, and accessible for residents and visitors. Coordinating efforts at the regional level will help provide opportunities throughout all areas of and communities with the County.

Key Considerations:

- Consider including arts and culture as a part of all regional strategic planning efforts.
- Consider identifying new ways to bring infrastructure developments to life as new projects are proposed and aligned with funding.
- Consider designating an existing or new arts and cultural working group to oversee the implementation of this Initiative.
- Consider exploring all potential sources of funding, including a mix of private and public investments as well as continuous financing. For example, tax waivers or incentives may be offered, permits enabled, funding from government agencies pursued, and private investments made.
- Develop a plan for continued financing to ensure the sustainability of the Initiative. This could mean private investment each year, tax waivers and incentives, as well as other fees generated by the district as a whole or its various parts, such as admissions from a performing arts center, art festivals, theaters, or other events.
- Consider retention of artists who may have lived in the art and culture district. Additional housing support may be required if the district itself becomes a fashionable and expensive place to live and work.
- Public art should be integrated into the conversations into both infrastructure and economic development conversations. The private sector business community should also be involved in the conversation on public art.

Co-Sponsoring Branches:

Cultural Resources, Infrastructure, Natural Resources

Stakeholders:

- Municipal experts in Arts and Culture sector
- Arts and cultural institutions and organizations in Lee County
- Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs)
- Nonprofit organizations in the Arts and Culture sector

Potential Funding Sources:

- National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)
- National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
- United States Department of Transportation
- National Assembly of State Arts Agencies
- United States Department of Health and Human Services
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs
- Florida Division of Arts and Culture
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Private and nonprofit funding organizations:
- Bloomberg Philanthropies, Arts Innovation and Management
- Craft Emergency Relief Fund
- South Arts
- Florida Division of Arts and Culture
- Arts and Innovation Management