

## 11 Arts, Culture & Creative Economy Element

### 11.1 Context:

The people of Durango celebrate their city's beautiful terrain, boundless creativity, and history as well as optimism for the future. It's an inclusive and active community engaged with the natural environment, civic endeavors, social activity, and its people's many stories. Durango extends a welcoming and helpful hand to neighbors, visitors, and newcomers alike. Together, the people of Durango value and pursue ongoing learning, continuous problem-solving, and sustainable ways of living.

Arts and culture are vital components of Durango's life and the local economy. An increasing array of locally made products, arts, crafts, and cultural activities are consumed locally and exported. A growing commitment to keep spending local also stokes the economic engine.

Local artists and crafts people produce valuable goods ranging from paintings, jewelry, and ceramics to clothing and leather accessories for local use, export, and sales to visitors.

Multiple historic, natural and cultural attractions bring many tourists to and through Durango. Three of the most significant include:

- The Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, a steam-powered train that began operation in 1882 and now carries passengers on a 90-mile round trip through the scenic Animas River valley from downtown Durango to the historic mining town of Silverton;
- Mesa Verde, a National Park and United Nations World Heritage Site west of Durango contains spectacular, multi-story cliff dwellings of ancient Pueblo peoples unoccupied for about 800 years; and
- Purgatory Resort, (formerly Durango Mountain Resort) just north of Durango, one of Colorado's major ski slopes with year-round activities and the site of the annual Music in the Mountains festival.

These and other assets help drive many sectors of the local economy, with visitors being attracted to the City's wealth of cultural assets. Visitors often

**Definition the Creative Economy:** *For purposes of this Comprehensive Plan, an inclusive definition is employed, one that embraces human diversity and ways of life and the different ways people form community, learn, and express themselves. Included are the arts and cultures of Durango celebrated and supported through formal and informal nonprofit and for-profit organizations and individuals. They involve the creative arts, cultural traditions or practices, historical recognition, and scientific exploration and activities related to producing, presenting, learning/teaching, and preserving these forms. They include dance, music, theater, literature, visual arts, film and media arts as well as other forms of creative and cultural expression. Business enterprises in the creative sector also include advertising, architecture, crafts, design, games, fashion, publishing, research and development, software, toys, radio and TV. Additionally, and especially important to the culture of Durango, are activities in which people interact with, experience, celebrate, and steward the natural environment as well as practices and traditions related to production, preparation, and collective enjoyment of food. It is understood that individuals and groups of different ethnic, national, or cultural backgrounds make, experience, and share creative and traditional cultural forms, and explore the sciences differently. The City endeavors to recognize, accommodate, and support them through appropriate and equitable policy choices.*

decide to stay upon discovering the City's wealth of social and community involvement opportunities, walkable town center, cultural and educational activities. Fort Lewis College is an important element of this attraction, bringing not only dollars and new people but creative and entrepreneurial thinking to the community. Durango's increasingly mixed local economy and human resource pipeline have increased stability and the potential for growth.

The relative isolation of Durango is considered positive by many who live there, and surely is by most who visit as it has helped preserve much of the historic and natural environment. The Pueblos at Mesa Verde sat untouched for hundreds of years. Hundred-year-old buildings in downtown Durango were largely spared, due partly to preservation activists over the past 30 years. Isolation brings added benefits in terms of a spirit of interdependence.

The duality of independence and interdependence is recognized as community assets. Participation in civic activities is high and institutions such as the library, local schools, Powerhouse Science Center, Durango Art Center, Animas Museum, and several local theater companies are highly valued and pushed to achieve greater quality of service. Similarly, the quality of local cuisine is widely regarded.

The aesthetics of the natural environment and opportunities for immersive experiences are highly valued. Historic structures and a downtown core built at a scale and speed of people and horses are also highly valued – although perhaps taken for granted. The open and welcoming community favorably distinguishes Durango from other Colorado mountain communities where growing wealth disparities have become a barrier between people and community involvement. In Durango, pride in place is palpable and the creative economy is a vital source of this pride and the City’s quality of life.



**The creative economy is central to every aspect of life in Durango.**

*Economic data shows that the formal nonprofit arts and cultural sector accounted for \$9.1 million in economic activity in Durango in 2011 (Americans for the Arts Economic Prosperity IV Study) Tourism and education account for a very significant portion of the local and regional economy as well. The Colorado Tourism Office reported that 77.7 million visitors in 2015 spent an all-time high of \$19.1 billion statewide, generating \$1.13 billion in state and local taxes, an increase of almost 7 percent from 2014. The Durango Area Tourism Office reports similar year-over-year increases in tourism. A 2014 Economic Impact and Analysis Study conducted by Fort Lewis College found that the institution contributed more than \$150 million to the regional economy in 2012 and 2013.*

## 11.2 Why Include the Creative Economy in the Durango Comprehensive Plan?

Creativity, the arts, culture, science, and heritage (collectively, referred to as the creative economy) stand out in Durango as in few other places. As a community, Durango is strongly associated with, and its economy is driven by, its unique identity and by ways of life valued by its residents and visitors. The regional economy is tied to the imaginations of those who live in the region, their close relationship to the physical environment, and the historic and natural resources in and near the City. People here have long raised livestock and crops, extracted precious ores, oil, and gas, grown a variety of farm products, and shared enjoyment of the region’s dramatic seasons, slopes, and waterways.

On a day-to-day basis, artists, performers and other creative people harvest the beauty and intrigue of Durango. They put it on canvas, the page and the stage. Residents, visitors, and students who identify with a wide variety of cultures both enjoy and contribute to the social and economic life by celebrating and sharing foods, music, and other cultural practices with neighbors and tourists. Learning about creative and cultural practices is

central to education for people of all ages and to forming a highly functional, inclusive community. Capacity for communication and dialog across differing subgroups of the community and capacity for problem solving that considers those differences is directly linked to the development and exercise of creativity and empathy – both direct outcomes of a strong arts and cultural community.

Research has also shown that arts activities in communities help revitalize neighborhoods, attract and develop talented workforces, and increase levels of innovation and productivity across all kinds of industries.

In addition to the economic impacts, researchers around the world have explored social impacts of participation in the creative economy. In at least several arenas it has become clear that participation improves lives. Specifically:

- Creative economy activities and celebrations bring people together in a shared identity and shared sense of place that promotes stewardship and civic engagement.
- Arts participation in early childhood promotes social and emotional development. For example, teachers report fewer instances of shy, aggressive, and anxious behavior among preschoolers taking dance classes, and toddlers receiving music instruction demonstrate increased social cooperation with other children.
- Student participation in structured arts activities enhances cognitive abilities and social skills that support learning, such as memory, problem-solving, and communication.
- Participatory arts activities help maintain the health and quality of life of older adults. Singing improves mental health and subjective wellbeing; taking dance classes bolsters cognition and motor skills; dancing and playing a musical instrument reduce the risk of dementia; and visual arts generate increases in self-esteem, psychological health, and social engagement.

- Arts therapies contribute to positive clinical outcomes, such as reduction in anxiety, stress, and pain for patients. Music interventions tend to dominate studies in this area.

### 11.3 Creative Economy Goals, Objectives and Policies

**Goal 23: Enhance the quality of life and regional economy by coordinating, focusing, empowering, and celebrating the community’s creative and cultural resources.**

**Objective 23.1: Creativity as a Community Resource:** Advance understandings of the ways the cultural and creative sectors contribute to the community fabric, economy, and well-being of the people of Durango and the region; strategically apply this knowledge in ongoing decision-making.

**Policy 23.1.1:** Highlight and enhance the value of Durango’s local art along with other locally made products by including them in economic development investments and incentives.

**Policy 23.1.2:** Foster a unique tourist experience by promoting the city’s historical and creative character:

- Continue to allocate lodger taxes for tourism marketing, and encourage the investment of some of these dollars to support and promote local creative economy assets; and
- Employ unique creative and cultural assets when developing City character districts to best complement their identity and capitalize on district assets.

**Policy 23.1.3:** Continue to conduct, interpret, and strategically apply economic research to expand the understanding of the impact of the creative economy on various aspects

of Durango’s economy and quality of life. To carry out this policy:

- Work with economic development, and arts entities to collect and evaluate data on the entire creative sector and identify policy and investment choices that strengthen the creative economy;
- Engage with Colorado Creative Industries, Americans for the Arts, and other research organizations to identify relevant data to illustrate benefits leveraged by the cultural and creative sector; and
- Make strategic investments in arts and cultural resources to achieve City goals.

Policy 23.1.4: Enhance education opportunities for young people by expanding partnerships with area arts, heritage, and science organizations and schools as well as other community organizations.



Policy 23.1.5: Identify synergies, partnership opportunities and complementary relationships to achieve the City’s creative economy goal and objectives.

**Objective 23.2: A Naturally Creative and Welcoming Community:** Foster and promote an internal and external brand identity grounded in Durango’s breadth of cultural activities, wealth of creative people, and welcoming nature.

Policy 23.2.1: Expand collaborations among educational, tourism, governmental and creative sector organizations of all sizes to incorporate and represent the full range of activities and events into Durango’s creative economy scene (e.g. from Rodeos to Ragtime and from Bear Dances to Beethoven) and adjust messaging and branding to reflect the community’s diversity.

Policy 23.2.2: Create a stronger presence for local artists and cultural offerings within tourism promotion and coordination efforts through:

- Partnerships with entities that promote local and regional tourism through direction of funding to support collaborative promotion activities between tourism and local creative and cultural entities and activities; and
- Coordination and promotion of tours of artist studios, makerspaces, and other creative sites.

Policy 23.2.3: Ensure that the City’s Community Relations Commission, the Youth Advisory Commission and Creative Economy Commission (See policy 23.3.1) work closely with each other to build a more diverse and inclusive community by partnering to support surveys, community dialogues, and other activities.

Policy 23.2.4: Support celebrations that include diverse cultural groups (e.g. Fiesta Days Cinco de Mayo, Pride Festival, festivals at Fort Lewis College, Pow Wows, Taste of Durango, and others) by exploring ways to expand funding for community celebrations and working with appropriate representatives.

Policy 23.2.5: Nurture constructive relationships between the City, School District 9R, Fort Lewis College, Southwest Colorado Community College, and other educational entities and engage with student organizations and their leaders in ongoing cultural activity planning and promotion. Ensure input to the Creative Economy Commission (See policy 23.3.1) from educational entity representatives and representative student groups.

**Objective 23.3: Communicate, Convene, Collaborate:** Develop a more collaborative and engaged creative and cultural sector capable of marshaling its resources for the improvement of the wider community.

Policy 23.3.1: Form a **Creative Economy Commission** to serve as a collective voice and coordinative body that includes among its goals and activities to:

- Foster coordinated scheduling among event and cultural activity programmers, tourism attractions, the City, educational entities, and civic organizations;
- Help identify and coordinate opportunities for shared spaces for performance, exhibitions, celebrations, meetings and other needs of artists, cultural programmers, and tourism promoters;
- Explore shared administrative or back office operations among key nonprofits;

- Provide City staff support for Commission activities;
- Support the development of marketing, business, and professional development assistance; and
- Identify and pursue dedicated funding sources.



*Durango Trail by Annette LeMaire*

Policy 23.3.2: Structure the Creative Economy Commission to include broad interests of the community to best advance goals and objectives established in this Plan; provide the Commission with appropriate authority for making recommendations on policy and distribution of allocated funds from public or private sources.

Policy 23.3.3: Formulate a plan for a creative district that achieves recognition by Colorado Creative Industries (CCI); and join networks of such districts, learn from others, and tap into related funding networks. The planning process should:

- Include and convene key stakeholders, of an identified geographic area, and make application to CCI; and
- Maintain active membership through staff and key volunteer involvement in training, annual gatherings, funding partnerships, and other activities of CCI.

Policy 23.3.4: Support and promote creative entrepreneurs and artists working with economic development and tourism leadership. Adjust definitions of business start-ups and small businesses to include artists and creative sector enterprises.

**Objective 23.4: Space to Make and Partake:** Improve and expand facilities and spaces needed for creative and cultural activities, artist live/work spaces, and for support of arts and cultural organizations.

Policy 23.4.1: As part of economic development strategies, identify opportunities and facilitate establishment of artist working spaces, maker spaces, and co-working spaces. These efforts should:

- Seek appropriate spaces for varied types of uses including heavier uses among industrial and former industrial areas;
- Develop working studio spaces needed by artists and other makers (e.g., like those within Smiley Building; potentially the firehouse when it relocates; industrial buildings in Bodo; and others);

- Facilitate development of affordable creative workforce housing; explore partnership with Colorado Creative Industries, Artspace and similar entities, to develop new live/work housing; and
- Explore opportunities to create additional live/work and live/work/sell units in appropriate zoning districts.

Policy 23.4.2: Foster development of spaces that support creative activities along the Animas River Trail from the Durango Recreation Center to Santa Rita Park.

Policy 23.4.3: Participate in the Area Plan for Ewing Mesa to explore opportunities to support the creative economy, including:

- Support development of an outdoor music and events venue within Durango to accommodate 5,000 to 15,000 people.
- Support La Plata County efforts to relocate the existing fairgrounds and to explore creative reuse of the existing fairgrounds site.

Policy 23.4.4: Assess the need for and feasibility of establishing a new moderate-size indoor performance facility by engaging with key community groups, performing/presenting entities, and others to review best options and collaborative agreements for widely shared use. To make the most efficient use of available resources, consider the creation of a flexible facility to address the needs for conferences and performing arts.

Policy 23.4.5: Assess opportunities for expansion of spaces for visual arts exhibitions within existing public buildings, retail spaces and other appropriate venues.

Policy 23.4.6: Establish a revenue stream for support of the creative economy (e.g., facilities, organizations, events, programs and small enterprises) through an extension of the lodger tax, special assessments, grants or other funding mechanisms.

**Objective 23.5: Stories of Place and Legacies:** Expand the City Public Art Program to recognize and tell stories of the City’s geology, diversity, heritage, and aspirations in meaningful places across the City.

Policy 23.5.1: Continue and focus efforts to enhance the appearance of State Highways and development along critical corridors and key entry points to commission and install iconic public art that reinforces the identity of the City’s character districts and improves the visitor and daily traveler experience.

Policy 23.5.2: Allocate a portion of City capital construction costs for public art, with a set-aside for maintenance.

Policy 23.5.3: Consider a development assessment or other source for establishment of public art throughout the City.

Policy 23.5.4: Target key public transit hubs, (e.g. the Transit Center, Ft. Lewis College, Mercy Hospital, and the Library) for public art projects to denote and improve aesthetics and function of these destinations.

Policy 23.5.5: Formalize public art opportunities in conjunction with the City trail system for commissioning artwork that celebrates and educates about meaningful cultural, natural and historical sites and enhances user experiences.