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# MILAN WORKING PLAN



*Initial steps for  
implementing the  
Washtenaw County  
Cultural Master  
Plan in the  
MILAN Area*



ArtsAlliance®

**Arts, culture, and creativity** are among the core elements that make Washtenaw County a special place. Look at any of the “best of” awards that the communities in this county regularly win and there’ll doubtlessly be listed a reference to the area’s high quality of life, with its arts and cultural assets typically highlighted.

**Arts and culture** have a long history in Washtenaw County. This longevity and the lively appearance of the arts and cultural community, however, mask the true fragility of this sector. Peer behind the polished facades of many arts and cultural organizations or talk to the artists practicing their craft here and you’ll find a vulnerable industry struggling to survive.

***The Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan is a response to that challenge.***

## Cultural Plan Background Information



The Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan is the result of an 18-month, community-based planning effort that emphasized the participation of cultural, educational, civic, business, and government representatives from each of the county’s key population centers: Ann Arbor, Chelsea, Dexter, Manchester, Milan, Saline, and Ypsilanti.

The plan reflects the direct input of nearly 5,000 Washtenaw County residents as captured in an online survey, an artists’ census, a study of the area’s creative economy, and in 29 interviews and community forums.

From the master plan, each population center has worked to customize the plan to its own local needs and interests.

***The Milan Area Working Plan is a local response to this county-wide challenge.***

The overall planning process has been coordinated by the Arts Alliance, an organization serving the arts and cultural sector of Washtenaw County.

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## LOCAL PROCESS

The Arts Alliance partnered with its Milan Community Leaders, Kym Muckler, Mayor, City of Milan; Judith Spike, artist; and Leslie Sobel, artist, to arrange three public meetings in Milan to discuss the future of arts and culture in their local community. Nine Milan residents participated in at least one of these meetings to identify the key strategic areas from the Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan that their community needed to address. They then developed and prioritized specific action steps, identified key implementation partners, discussed next steps, created a time line, and detailed measures of success for their community over the course of the next five years.

The six strategic areas identified in the Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan, include:

- Lifelong Arts and Education
- Creative Economic Development
- Capacity Building, Funding, and Investment
- Communications, Audience Development, and Advocacy
- Cultural Facilities
- Diversity and Access

Milan area residents decided to focus on the following strategic areas in Milan:

- Cultural Facilities,
- Creative Economic Development / Capacity Building, Funding and Investment, and
- Communications, Audience Development and Advocacy.

The group identified specific recommendations to address each of these strategic areas.

Community leaders understand that the future growth and success of the county is inextricably tied to the health and well-being of arts and culture that contribute to the area's quality of place. In a true collaborative effort, these leaders along with hundreds of grassroots individuals, have played and will continue to play a critical role in identifying the challenges outlined in the Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan and Milan Area Working Plan and will continue to help develop the recommended actions.



**Milan Fire Barn**

# MILAN PRIORITY ACTIONS

## Recommendations for Cultural Facilities

### **Cultural Facilities Vision Statement**

**To provide better access to new and existing facilities (both arts and non-arts facilities and empty buildings); to enable artists to pursue their craft at all levels; and enable arts and cultural organizations to fulfill their missions in a stable and resource-efficient environment.**

*-Vision statement taken from Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan*

- **Create an inventory of arts and cultural organizations, venues, and artists in Milan.**

**What?** A centralized list of the arts and cultural organizations, creative businesses and artists located in Milan will exist. Community members will be able to search for information about what is available in their area. Artists will be able to connect with each other and identify what venues are available for them to display, perform, or show their artwork. This list will be updated frequently and be available online.

**Why?** There is no central information source that includes information about the arts and cultural organizations, creative businesses and artists located in Milan. Artists often do not know where to look for information about available venues or how to be in touch with other artists, and likewise community members and arts and cultural organizations may not be aware of the opportunities available for them to become involved in.

- **Identify an appropriate facility that can be used as an arts center, place for classes and home to a Milan arts group.**

**What?** A facility that houses classes, performances, and exhibition space will be present in Milan. This will be a community facility and a space for a Milan arts group. Artists will be able to use the space for performances and showing their work, and community members will be able to use the space to participate in classes and other programs.

**Why?** Artists want to gather together to ideas and resources. There are a surprising number of artists in the Milan area, but they are unrecognized because there's no place for there to come together in a critical mass. There is a desire by artists of all types to offer classes to area residents but no place to do so.

- **Develop a curriculum for the arts center.**

**What?** A diverse program of various arts classes (visual, literary, and performing) will exist, and qualified instructors will be identified to teach various courses and workshops. The community will be actively involved and regularly participate in the arts center's robust offerings.

**Why?** It's one thing to have a space available for the arts and cultural community to utilize in Milan, but without diverse and interesting programming, the arts center will not be able to sustain itself. A curriculum needs to be in place before an appropriate facility is selected.

- **Increase community use of available and existing facilities.**

**What?** Artists will be aware of and will better utilize space in available and existing facilities for arts and cultural programs. There will be increased partnerships between artists and both traditional (schools) and non-traditional (churches) facilities for collaborative use of space. A database will exist that includes the spaces for arts and cultural programs that are available and the arts and cultural activities that are permitted in each space.

**Why?** A number of buildings and spaces within buildings are currently vacant and could be used for arts and cultural purposes. Lively arts and cultural activities in currently vacant downtown buildings can attract new and increased foot traffic and potentially increase business for downtown merchants.



**View of Main Street, Milan**

## Recommendations for Communications, Audience Development and Advocacy

### **Communications, Audience Development and Advocacy Vision Statement**

*To communicate the value of arts and culture to area residents, public officials, and visitors in a way that engages them and increases their awareness and understanding.*

*To foster a sense of creative community amongst cultural organizations and individual artists where communication can exist through media outlets, gathering spaces, and affinity groups.*

*-Vision statement taken from  
Washtenaw County Cultural  
Master Plan*

- **Increase communications between artists and city, community, and schools; increase online presence of arts and cultural information, organizations, and individuals in Milan; and increase awareness about arts and culture in Milan.**

**What?** There will be increased communications within the Milan area community between the arts and cultural sector and the city, schools, government, business and the public. Individuals will have better access to information about arts and cultural events, programs, and activities and the arts and cultural sector will have more visibility – both online and offline.

**Why?** The communications system that currently exists between various entities in Milan is fragmented. Residents and representatives from various communities (civic, business, education ...etc) may not be fully aware of the arts and cultural opportunities available to them because Milan lacks a centralized communications system.

- **Increase communications about local arts and cultural events to young families and children; Identify and / or provide more local arts programming for youth (summer camps and outside of school).**

**What?** More youth and family-focused arts and cultural activities will exist in Milan. These events and activities will coincide with existing programming in the community (ex. summer festivals & events). Arts partnerships with the schools will be strengthened. Information about youth and family-focused arts and cultural happenings will be easily accessible, and events and programs will be well attended by the community.

**Why?** Families with young children who live in Milan do not know about what is happening. Youth need to have things to do in the summer and after school to stay out of trouble. Arts classes and after school arts and cultural activities have been shown to increase children's future success in school and at work.

**Creative  
Economic  
Development  
Vision Statement**

**To foster cultural arts, artists, and creative businesses (for profit and not-for-profit) so they become self-sustaining and contribute to the economic stability of the county.**

*-Vision statement taken from Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan*

**Capacity Building,  
Funding and  
Investment  
Vision Statement**

**To envision a publicly and privately financed fund that exists in perpetuity to support a stable, vibrant arts and cultural environment that will contribute to the economic and personal well-being of Washtenaw County residents, workers, and visitors.**

*-Vision statement taken from Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan*

## **Recommendations for Creative Economic Development / Capacity Building, Funding and Investment**

*Note: Recommendations in this section have been combined as they reflect an overlap between these two strategic areas.*

- **Establish a Milan arts group to work on implementing the cultural plan.**

**What?** A Milan arts group will be established and charged with implementing the cultural plan in the community. This group will consist of community advocates and volunteers interested in arts and culture in the Milan area.

**Why?** Without the formation of an arts group or similar entity responsible for implementing the recommendations of the cultural plan, there is no guarantee it will be done. It is necessary to have a group responsible for working on this plan, and such a group does not currently exist in Milan.

- **Establish a community arts coordinator to serve as liaison between the arts community and schools.**

**What?** A community arts coordinator will help foster increased communications between the arts and cultural community and the schools. Residents will be aware of the arts and cultural activities, events, and programs that are taking place at the schools and visa versa. The position will be build recognition among the general public for the importance of the arts in education. Fund will be available to sustain the position.

**Why?** There is not a strong connection between the schools and the arts and cultural community, and often times having arts infused into the curriculum is not as appreciated and valued as it could be. There are not many partnerships that currently take place between the schools and local artists.



- **Build a stronger and more diverse funding base for facilities, programs, and the arts and cultural community in Milan.**

**What?** The arts and cultural sector in Milan will be supported and valued by the community. The option to apply for relevant grants will exist and there will be efforts made to explore and implement new funding models. The community will be actively involved and interested in the health of its arts and cultural assets.

**Why?** A sustainable funding model for the arts and cultural sector does not exist, and in many cases, arts and culture is not as valued as it could be in Milan. There is a need to identify new models and ways to support the sector.

Recommendation	Implementation Partners	Start Date	First Steps	Resources
<b>Cultural Facilities</b>				
Create an inventory of arts and cultural organizations/venues/individuals & services in Milan	City, arts and cultural organizations, artists, chamber, trade workers	Near/Medium term: 6 months - 3 years	Create a complete list of what/who is in town and identify what they do	Arts Alliance, Artists' Census, library
Identify an appropriate facility that can be used as an arts center, place for classes and 'home' to "Milan Arts Alliance"	DDA, City	Near term: 6 - 12 months	Create a list of available properties; identify artist's space needs and resources available	Arts Alliance, City, other communities in county, local realtors, Milan Community Foundation
Develop a curriculum for the arts center	Local artists, DIY community, parks and recreation	Medium term: 1 - 3 years	Determine what skills and teachers are available in the community and invite instructors to participate in program	Chelsea Center for the Arts, Ann Arbor Art Center, 212 Arts Center, schools
Increase community use of available facilities	Schools, churches	Medium term: 1-3 years	Create a database of what exists and what types of activities are welcomed in the space	Schools, churches, local businesses, City, library

Recommendation	Implementation Partners	Start Date	First Steps	Resources
<b>Creative Economic Development / Capacity Building</b>				
Establish a Milan arts group to work on implementing the cultural plan	City, school, volunteers, Arts Alliance	Near term: 6 - 12 months	Determine who should be involved in the process and invite interested individuals to participate	Regional Cultural Leaders, Arts Alliance, schools, library
Establish a community arts director/coordinator to serve as liaison between community and schools	Theater boosters/music boosters, City, Milan Community Foundation	Medium/Long term: 1-5 years	Educate community about importance of position; seek and brainstorm potential funding avenues	Saline, Dexter, Arts Alliance, schools
Build a stronger and more diverse funding base for facilities, programs and arts and cultural community in Milan	Arts Alliance, city, schools	Near/Medium term: 6 months - 3 years	Brainstorm ways that resources can be shared and partnership can be developed; time banking/bartered services	Arts Alliance
<b>Communications, Audience Development and Advocacy</b>				
Increase communications between city, community and schools; increase online presence of arts and cultural information, organizations and individuals in Milan; and increase awareness about arts and culture in Milan.	Library, Arts Alliance, Media, School, Discover Milan News, Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber	Near term: 6 - 12 months	Brainstorm session of next steps; conversations with Arts Alliance as new county-wide website is currently being developed; develop list of websites that currently post event/program information	Arts Alliance, CVB, media
Increase communications to young families and children; Identify and / or provide more local arts programming for children (summer camps and outside of school)	Parks & Recreation, schools, library, art teachers	Near/Medium term: 6 months - 3 years	Communicate to new families about family programming; partnership with schools and community for program/activity awareness; develop relationships with other area children's programs to discuss shared services / classes	Parks & Recreation, schools, library, best practices from other communities

# WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ARTS AND CULTURE IN WASHTENAW COUNTY

Arts and culture are important to the quality of life and well being of Washtenaw County. This fact was well documented in the data collected to create the Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan.<sup>1</sup> The following provides highlights of what we know about arts and culture in Washtenaw County and comes from the information gathered in the cultural plan's online survey, focus groups, artists' census, and creative economy analysis.

## **People in Washtenaw County Value Arts and Culture**

- 63% said arts and cultural programs were very important to their choice to live in Washtenaw County.
- 75% said that business support for arts and culture made a difference when they chose what businesses to patronize.

## **Many Businesses Recognize the Value of Arts and Culture to the Bottom Line**

- 63% said that access to arts and culture was important in their decision to locate or keep their businesses in Washtenaw County.
- 57% thought access to arts and cultural programs was important in helping to recruit and retain qualified workers.

## **The Creative Sector Plays a Distinct Role in the County's Economy**

- 4.6% of the county's total workforce works in the creative economy.
- 10% of the county's total payroll is generated by the creative economy.
- 823 students from the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University earned degrees related to the creative economy in 2007.

## **The Quality of Our Cultural Offerings is Generally High, but not Everyone has Access to Them**

- 88% were satisfied with the quality of arts, heritage, and interpretive science programs in their community.
- 66% felt that good science and arts education is not equally available to students throughout the county.

## **Artists (visual, performing, and literary) are a Significant Force in Washtenaw County**

- 2,530 individuals responded to the Artists' Census and were classified as *Washtenaw County Artists*. Of these, 1,173 individuals satisfied criteria and were identified as *Working Artists*.

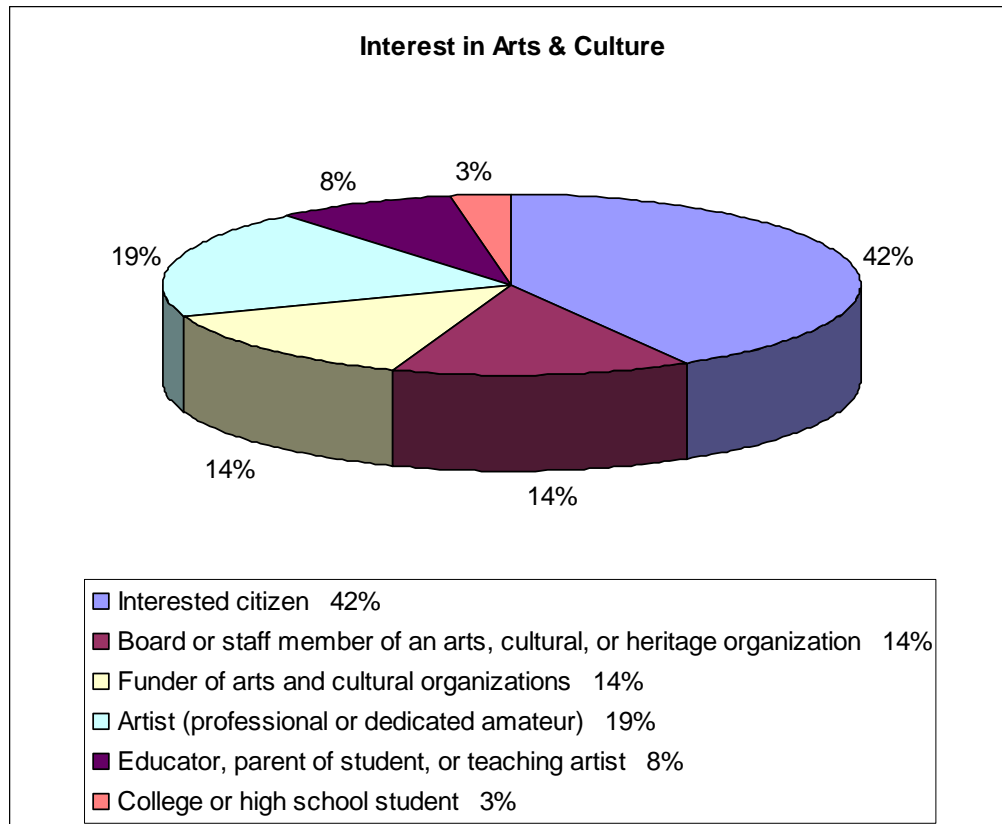
<sup>1</sup> This data is reported in the following documents, which can be accessed at [http://a2artsalliance.org/initiatives\\_culturalplan.asp](http://a2artsalliance.org/initiatives_culturalplan.asp):

- *Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Online Survey Report*
- *Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Community Forums Full Archival Report*
- *2008 Artists' Census Report*
- *The Creative Economy Analysis conducted by Ann Arbor SPARK, 2008*

# WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ARTS AND CULTURE IN MILAN

## ONLINE SURVEY

The Arts Alliance conducted an online survey between October 2007 and January 2008 to gather information about residents' attitudes toward arts and culture in Washtenaw County. Twenty-three Milan residents responded to the 52-question survey, representing 1.5% of all 1,535 survey respondents. Milan residents identified themselves as follows:



## ARTISTS' CENSUS

The Washtenaw County Artists' Census was administered by the Arts Alliance as part of the cultural plan. This census ran from April 1 through May 17, 2008. Thirty-one artists from Milan responded to the artists' census, representing a 1% response rate relative to Milan's population. Eleven Milan artists were identified as *Working Artists*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Working Artists were classified based on meeting all of the following criteria 1) self-defines as an artist; 2) works as a visual, performing, or literary artist; 3) spends 40 or more hours a month on his/her creative field; and 4) shares his/her artwork beyond family and friends. Criteria was adapted from *Crossover: How Artists Build Careers across Commercial, Nonprofit and Community Work*, a publication produced by Dr. Ann Markusen of the University of Minnesota.

## FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

As part of its research for the Washtenaw County Cultural Plan, the Arts Alliance held three small discussion groups, or “community forums,” in Milan to gather in-depth resident input. These forums were held between October 2007 and January 2008. Some of the key issues that came up in these forums included:

### Milan Cultural Assets – What’s special about Milan?

- **Auto culture** Milan is home to a popular and busy drag strip that attracts many competitors and audiences. There is a weekly auto show throughout the summer. Forums report the highest concentration of highly skilled workers in the state. Their skills include automotive and aeronautical – “tinkerers” working as inventors in their garages, innovators, and entrepreneurs.
- **History and heritage** Many beautiful homes have been preserved. The city has beautiful parks and access to rivers. Ford Lake, in the center of downtown, is going through a clean-up process so recreational access can be developed.
- **Location** Milan’s proximity to Saline and Ann Arbor gives residents ready access to cultural opportunities.

### Milan Challenges

- **Downtown development** Forum participants described the downtown as underdeveloped.
- **Economy** Industries have closed. Municipal planning doesn’t attract businesses.
- **Bedroom community** Many residents commute to Toledo and Ann Arbor. Many citizens do not seem as interested in participation in civic affairs and cultural programs.

### **A Vision for Milan: *What might this community look like in five years?***

- **Innovation drives a creative economy** By 2013, inventors and other innovators build creative businesses that employ the area's many skilled tool and die makers in high-end, specialized automotive, aeronautic, and other high-technology products.
- **Parks and trails** In five years, more parks and greenways help improve and make the city more walkable. Trails connect parks to the Saline River. Parks host art shows. An outside performance amphitheatre adjacent to Ford Lake is developed.
- **Community pride** By 2013, visionary community leaders inspire more pride of place. Local businesses grow. People are proud of their diversity.

*The above data about Milan drawn from the Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Online Survey Report, Washtenaw County Cultural Assessment Community Forums Full Archival Report, 2008 Artists' Census Report, and The Creative Economy Analysis conducted by Ann Arbor SPARK, 2008.  
Data from forums collected and narrative written by Cultural Plan Associate Consultant, Susan Badger Booth.*

## MILAN COMMUNITY INPUT

The following individuals participated in at least one of the three public meetings held in Milan to work on the Milan Working Plan. Meetings included a public forum and two working group meetings.

These individuals have demonstrated a strong interest for arts and culture in their community. They could serve as the nucleus to oversee the implementation of this plan.

Dennis Albers  
James Anderson  
Sue Barney  
Kari Falk  
Rod Hill  
Suzanne McPherson  
Kim Rhoney  
Shannon Ross-Albers  
Leslie Sobel



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Special thanks to all the individuals who have helped the Milan Working Plan come to fruition.*

*Every effort was made to include the names of those individuals that participated in this process. Please excuse any omissions, misspellings or other oversights.*

### Photo Credits

#### **Front Cover:**

*Row (from left to right)*

Main Street, Downtown Milan - Angela Martín-Barcelona

Ford Lake - Angela Martín-Barcelona

Milan Fire Barn – Leslie Sobel

*Column (from top to bottom)*

Ford Lake - Angela Martín-Barcelona

Sign, Welcome to Washtenaw County - Angela Martín-Barcelona

Child doing pottery

#### **Background Information:**

Milan Senior Center – Leslie Sobel

Women doing ceramics

#### **Contents of Plan:**

Angela Martín-Barcelona

Leslie Sobel

*The Milan Working Plan, Initial Steps for implementing the Washtenaw County Cultural Master Plan in the Milan Area* was written in June 2009 by Angela Martín-Barcelona, Marketing Director, Arts Alliance. Susan Badger Booth, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication & Theater Arts at Eastern Michigan University wrote the summation of the Milan focus group meetings. Tamara Real, President, Arts Alliance, served as Project Manager.

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*The Arts Alliance serves all of Washtenaw County, working to create an environment where culture and creativity can flourish and the arts are accessible to all.*

**ArtsAlliance**<sup>®</sup>

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