



Brief History of the District

In 2010, the National Trust for Historic Preservation distinguished Bastrop as one of its national “distinctive destinations.” In 2012, The Texas Commission on the Arts recognized Bastrop as one of the state’s emerging Cultural Arts Districts.

The Bastrop Cultural Arts District is bounded by Hasler Boulevard on the west, State Highway 95 on the east, Delano & Elm Streets on the north, and State Highway 71 on the south.

The vision for arts and culture in Bastrop is built on what we’ve heard from parents, performers, artisans, and advocates. Each pointed to a community defined by resiliency, community, and creative production – and all in a way that reflects the authentic sense of place in Bastrop.

Mission Statement:

“Bastrop’s art and culture – historic, artistic, and natural assets generating a dynamic and diverse creative economy, harnessing local talent and the strength of its environment, creating a vital, authentic sense of place.”

This Cultural Art’s Master Plan vision is built directly from the City’s existing vision:

“The Vision of the City of Bastrop is to be a welcoming community with a compassion for our diversity, a tapestry of people, arts, and structures; preserving our history and character while embracing progress around our unique environment.”

The City of Bastrop’s vision for arts and culture recognizes residents’ desire to support and grow an arts and culture community that is wholly different from its neighbors in Elgin, Smithville, and Austin. It is a vision that builds on the City’s variety and strength of its arts and culture assets and recognizes that its economy, sense of place, and authentic character are all deeply intertwined.

Several cultural and arts organizations operate within the boundaries of the district, including the Bastrop Cultural Arts Commission, Bastrop County Historical Society, Bastrop Fine Arts League, Bastrop Opera House, Art Institute of Austin, and the Bastrop County Multicultural Group.

The City of Bastrop took responsibility for the Texas Cultural Arts District in 2019, speaking to the City’s commitment to building the Cultural Arts community in the city of Bastrop.

Impacts of District

As well as a Cultural Arts District designation, Bastrop also carries Texas Music Friendly and Film Friendly Capital of Texas designations.

The district has experienced significant increases in commercial property values, substantial decreases in vacancy rates, and is enjoying a period of thriving business development.

In 2010, the population of the District's retail trade area was 51,228. By 2022, that population has grown to 65,919.

The Bastrop Cultural Arts District is host to many major events including the 3-day Bastrop Music Festival that brings local and national musical acts to venues all over the district. Table on Main is a farm-to-fork event held directly down Main Street in the heart of the cultural district, highlighting area restaurants and local producers. The month-long Lost Pines Christmas event takes place in multiple locations in the district, with events including a Christmas Tree Lighting with choirs from local schools performing, Art Trees decorated by students in the school district, and culminating in a Lighted Christmas Parade. Other events that are part of Lost Pines Christmas are Wassail Fest and the Historic Homes Tour, both of which take place on Small Business Saturday. The Lost Pines Art Center hosts Art After Dark, a free event highlighting the works of featured artists held on the first Saturday of every month. Art Immersion Weekend is the annual art conference of the Lost Pines Art Center, offering workshops and master classes in a specific medium each year. Main Event Bastrop TX is a Facebook page that promotes arts and cultural experiences in downtown Bastrop. The Main Event's First Friday Art Walk occurs the first weekend of every month, with art and live music in various venues in the downtown area.

Several major improvements to the Cultural Arts District were made within the last decade.

In August 2019, the Art Institute of Austin announced plans to open a campus in Bastrop in 2020. The Bastrop EDC agreed to construct a 9,000 square foot facility in the heart of the Cultural Arts District for the school to lease. They also helped facilitate agreements for the Art Institute to have classes at two other locations in Bastrop. The Art Institute of Austin offers a variety of programming across the three proposed facilities. The Art Institutes' film and production courses are a featured program at the campus. The school also offers degree programs in the areas of design, fashion, media arts and culinary.

The Bastrop River Loop Trail Project aims to connect surrounding neighborhoods to the Cultural Arts District area, making walking to attractions more attractive to residents. Paved sidewalks are 6 to 10 feet wide, depending on the amount of road space allowed in certain areas. The trail will have a 1.8-mile perimeter along Main Street next to SH 71 and Frontage Road and up Highway 150 and back into town.

The Main Street Rehabilitation Project included sidewalk improvements from Farm to Chestnut Street, along with proposed sidewalk improvements and roadway resurfacing from Spring to Water Street. There were also improvements to existing sidewalks & roadways, with new sidewalks built from Pine to Water Street. The upgrades included the installation of street trees, widening of the walkways, installing new streetlights, and providing a planting strip. The result is a Downtown District that is a delight to drive, dine, and dwell in and centers on creating a thriving, lively, and vibrant cultural arts district space with Main Street and the Colorado River at its heart.

The Lost Pines Art Center is a comprehensive regional arts center including four silos that were recently renovated and will be converted into working studios, a large green space for festivals, and an amphitheater. Construction on the art center began in January 2016 and was completed in time for a Grand Opening in December 2016.

Bastrop Art in Public Places (decommissioned since the creation of the Cultural Arts Master Plan and replaced with the Cultural Arts Commission) held several calls for art over the past decade, from sculpture to art on electrical transformers throughout the district. The Toads In Town sculpture series is designed, created and produced by Clint Howard, owner of Deep In The Heart Art Foundry in Bastrop. These small bronze sculptures, modeled after the endangered Houston toad, are scattered around the district waiting to be found. Hither Dither by Benjamin McVey sits on the lawn of City Hall and memorializes those who perished in the events of 9/11. There have been more than twenty pieces of sculpture displayed in the district since 2012, with more than ten being placed permanently. 2 murals were added to the restrooms in Fisherman's Park, and the Youth Advisory Council for the city plans to add a third in the downtown area.

Goals of the District

Bastrop's Cultural Arts Commission has defined its priorities around Diversity and Inclusion, Partnerships and Collaborations, Political, Social, and Economic Stability of the Arts, Accountability and Transparency, Effective Management of the Cultural Arts Master Plan, and Promotion of Bastrop as an Arts Destination. (See complete work plan in attachment)

The City of Bastrop supports its Cultural Assets through Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funding in pursuit of these goals. The Cultural Assets are the Bastrop Opera House, Bastrop County Historical Society and Visitor Center, and the Lost Pines Art Center. These organizations report to the City Council quarterly regarding their programming, performance, and metrics.

The district aligns with the many strategic goals outlined in the Cultural Arts Master Plan. See the attached plan for more details.

A major priority of the creation of the Cultural Arts Master Plan was the encouragement of partnerships, collaboration, and the breaking down of "silos" that have historically kept our dedicated cultural organizations inwardly focused and separated. Through Visit Bastrop, the City's destination marketing organization, multiple programs have been developed with area hotels to coordinate entertainment, dining, and lodging packages that span the entire cultural district.

Bastrop has seen an influx of privately owned and culturally significant businesses. Painted Porch Book Store, owned by Ryan Holiday, has an international reach and often hosts influencers, authors, and others. Store House restaurant and the farm East of Eden that supplies its produce, have been featured in Texas Monthly for their contributions to the farm to table movement. Bastrop is home to distilleries, breweries, and wineries that are all fan favorites.