

SPACE | Las Vegas

Strategic Plan for an Arts & Culture Environment Las Vegas, New Mexico

Economic Empowerment Through the Arts
Roy Montibon: Draft v4c 9.12.07

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“Nationally, the nonprofit arts and culture industry generates \$166.2 billion in economic activity every year—\$63.1 billion in spending by organizations and an additional \$103.1 billion in event-related spending by their audiences. The \$166.2 billion in total economic activity has a significant national impact, generating the following:

- 5.7 million full-time equivalent jobs
- \$104.2 billion in household income
- \$7.9 billion in local government tax revenues”

- From the *Arts & Economic Prosperity Report*
by Americans for the Arts

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Strategic Plan for an Arts & Culture Environment
 Las Vegas, New Mexico

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SPACE | Las Vegas

Strategic Plan for an Arts & Culture Environment Las Vegas, New Mexico

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Introduction

Las Vegas and its surrounding region form a unique, complex and ancient tapestry – woven from overlapping threads of cultural, social, technological and geologic history.

Located in the transitional zone where the Sangre de Cristo range tumbles down into the High Plains to the east and the Chihuahuan desert to the south, the Las Vegas region has served as a gateway between east and west for nomadic Apache and Comanche tribes, French fur trappers, Spanish explorers, westward migrating pioneers, fevered gold miners, outlaws on the run, east coast merchants, movie crews from Hollywood, roving retirees in RVs, bikers on Harleys, tourists in search of the authentic Wild West, and most recently, urban expatriates seeking the perfect place to live life on their own terms.

Despite this magnificent history, Las Vegas is at a crossroads. Like many small towns across America today, its buildings are crumbling, its elders are aging, its children are leaving, its future is uncertain.

As with many small towns, it can seem that the only choices are bad ones: a future of soul-killing sprawl and low paying service jobs; polluting factories (with its attendant corporate dominance of civic life); or slow economic death.

This Strategic Plan presents a better choice: a vibrant future for Las Vegas and its surrounding region as a dynamic cultural community and a nationally recognized arts destination.

This is a choice that will provide lasting, broad-based social and economic benefits to the community, while preserving and enhancing the unique character of Las Vegas and its surrounding region – and defending it against characterless development and sprawl.

We envision Arts & Culture as a key component in the total economic mix of Las Vegas. Arts & Culture (plus related design, light manufacturing and technology business) represent clean, locally-owned, “basic sector” industries. They support the economic base by pulling in revenues from outside of the area. Also locally-owned business profits tend to stay local. Arts & Culture encourages tourism, which is also a classic basic sector industry. An Arts & Culture economy is, by nature, stable: scores of independent, locally-owned small businesses can generate the same number of jobs as one large employer, but do not carry the risk of economic disaster that a single large employer does when pulling out of a community.

This document lays out a step-by-step plan to realize this vision for Las Vegas based on its ***unique assets***; its ***untapped resources***; and the ***creativity of its citizens***.

The Purpose of SPACE | Las Vegas

The purpose of this plan is to: clarify goals; inspire action; identify opportunities; and define guiding principles in the hands-on creation of a healthy future for Las Vegas and its citizens.

This Strategic Plan is a practical and comprehensive action plan – encompassing *talent development, economic assistance, infrastructure development, community coordination and coherent marketing.*

Centered in a new Arts & Culture district which overlays the entire MainStreet Corridor and beyond, a focus on multi-faceted creative activity and entrepreneurialism in Las Vegas is the key to unlocking a rich and vibrant future for our community. (The Main Street Corridor includes the Railroad District, the New Town area of Grand Avenue and Douglas, 12th Street to the Old Town District of Bridge Street and the Plaza. The Arts & Culture District will reach out beyond the Corridor to include adjacent art studios, art supply stores, galleries, design studios, performance venues and other related businesses.)

The city of Las Vegas is at a crucial juncture in its history, and has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to seize control of its destiny. The history of the city and its surrounding region is one of constant change: ancient native cultures; early Camino Real trade; the arrival of Spanish explorers and the establishment of missions; the introduction of the horse to tribal cultures; the Santa Fe Trail as a conduit for westward migration; the Santa Fe railroad as a conduit for large-scale commerce; and Route 66 and its automobile-enabled outflow from small towns toward employment in large cities; With these changes came growth and expansion, followed by a long economic decline in the last half of last century.

Today, with the arrival of the 21st Century and its full transition from industrial to knowledge-based economies, there is an Internet-enabled exodus of urban professionals moving from large congested cities back into smaller cities, including Las Vegas. *Jobs are not what they once were – today, economic connectivity and quality of life are key.* This new development is nearly entirely made possible by the Internet and other communications and database technologies.

Change is inevitable and stasis is not an option. The future will “happen”—for better or for worse—regardless of whether we plan for it or not. Left on their own, things (i.e., buildings, roads, bridges, infrastructure, entire cities) will self-destruct. Better to envision and creatively work towards a positive future that preserves our unique natural and historic assets, than to find our selves facing either a bland and characterless corporate future, or slow economic suicide.

Las Vegas is in the enviable position of being able to avoid the irreversible mistakes made by other communities such as Sedona, AZ, (unplanned growth caused by passive civic leadership resulting in the rapid destruction of the very thing that makes Sedona unique); Menifee, CA, (unrestrained developer-driven building – over 5,000 development applications being processed currently in Riverside County, according to the LA Times – resulting in total, Stepford Wives-style carpet-bomb suburbanization of the formerly open landscape); or many communities everywhere, (now virtual ghost-towns), who have sat idly to watch as their industrial-age economies slid into oblivion.

This Strategic Plan is both a *tool of inspiration* – and a *roadmap to an environmentally clean and economically healthy future for this community*, one that is based upon a broad—and deep—cultural foundation. We will create a higher standard of living for everyone by focusing on nurturing the creative elements of our community.

Executive Summary: The Strategic Plan at a Glance

Las Vegas is a confluence of rare attributes and centuries of overlapping histories. It has unique assets and resources that cannot be found or replicated elsewhere.

Beginning with the establishment of the Las Vegas Arts & Culture District that links both sides of our town together, we will focus on building the elements necessary to transform Las Vegas into a vibrant arts community and a dynamic cultural destination.

By valuing creativity and taking a comprehensive approach towards solving problems, we can build a thriving economy based on clean, base sector art, design, technology and culture industries that protect the unique character of the city and preserve its surrounding region.

VISION

Las Vegas, New Mexico as a National Treasure.

MISSION

Build Las Vegas into a thriving Arts Community and Cultural Destination

OBJECTIVES

1. Enable talent to flourish
2. Support local community/arts and culture programs and locally-owned, small-business activity
3. Develop a robust arts, design, culture and technology infrastructure
4. Significantly improve the overall quality of life for the entire community
5. Build local and regional audiences

STRATEGIES

1. Build a *coherent* brand for Las Vegas as a unique Arts City.
2. Develop financial and professional support for arts organizations and businesses
3. Identify, nurture and help establish new talent
4. Develop and implement innovative arts, design and technology education programs
5. Grow a robust arts and artist networking infrastructure
6. Support existing arts venues / create new art venues in the Arts & Culture District
7. Coordinate closely with existing businesses and community organizations
8. Create opportunities for related service, consulting and retail businesses
9. Develop and implement coherent, cooperative marketing initiatives
10. Provide a fabulous experience for visitors and event attendees

TACTICS

1. Talent Development
2. Economic Assistance
3. Infrastructure Development
4. Community Coordination
5. Coherent Marketing

Section 1
**Envisioning the Future:
What We Can Become**

VISION

Las Vegas, New Mexico as a National Treasure.

Our vision is Las Vegas recognized as a *National Treasure* by people everywhere for its *history*, its *architecture*, its *cultural diversity*, *artistic vitality* and its *surrounding natural beauty*,

Las Vegas is already unique. By taking a comprehensive approach, and further differentiating the city as an Arts & Culture Community, Las Vegas can move boldly into its next historic phase while preserving its historic character and protecting its natural and cultural attributes.

MISSION

Build Las Vegas into a thriving Arts Community and Cultural Destination

By centering the regional economy around arts, design, culture and technology, Las Vegas gains the myriad advantages outlined by Richard Florida in his book, *Rise of the Creative Class*; avoids the pitfalls encountered by other communities without a comprehensive economic strategy; and enjoys the benefits of a creative engine driving the economy, including imaginative civic problem solving and an increased quality of life—characterized by expanding choices and opportunities for the residents of Las Vegas.

The benefits of a future-oriented economy driven by knowledge, creativity and innovation (as opposed to the 20th Century industrial model of factory-like education, raw capital and large-scale corporate profit imperatives) is clearly described in Alvin & Heidi Toffler's 2006 book, *Revolutionary Wealth*. As we swiftly approach the first decade mark in the 21st Century, we must exercise thoughtfulness and wisdom in choosing a forward-looking strategy to encourage creativity and uplift our community while preserving the very things that make this community special.

Las Vegas will be the epicenter of creative activity for the entire surrounding region—its energy radiating outward, with artistic centers beyond the city limits radiating creative energy back in.

OBJECTIVES

1. **Enable talent to flourish**

Culture is built from the bottom up. Talent that is enabled to flourish naturally expands both its depth (traditional to contemporary) and its range (weaving and ceramics to digital media). Culture *industry* spontaneously blossoms out of artistic *activity*.

2. **Support local community/arts and culture programs and locally-owned small business activity**

Once a critical mass of creative energy is formed, it becomes self-perpetrating. A little additional knowledge, mentoring and technical assistance goes a long way. Developing a *creative community mindset* that values creative insight will provide dividends to the entire community in ways that we cannot even imagine.

3. **Develop a robust arts, design, culture and technology infrastructure**

The arts require **space**. Space to imagine, space to work, space to exhibit, space to exchange ideas and network. Creative professionals also need ready access to the right support services (i.e., art supplies, digital equipment, technical services, tools, cameras, lighting, equipment rentals, etc.) at the right time (i.e., right *now*). Rapid prototyping and production are crucial, because delays in access lower the creative energy level—and the ambient level of creative energy is contagious. A handful of energized individuals “charge up” others.

4. **Significantly improve the overall quality of life for the entire community**

Access to world-class cultural offerings (art, plays, music, poetry, literature, etc.) are a key component to any definition of “quality of life”. A healthy environment, access to quality educational resources, and access to opportunity (both creative and career-related) are three additional quality of life benchmarks that Las Vegas already has, but these elements can be more effectively utilized and elevated, integrated and grown, to very high standards.

5. **Build local and regional audiences**

Building awareness for our Arts & Culture activities and events, both internally and externally, will allow us to encourage local participation (crucial to elevating quality of life for local citizens) while also generating arts tourism.

STRATEGIES

1. **Build a coherent brand for Las Vegas as a unique Arts City.**

Technically, since brands are reputation based, they are grown and nurtured, not “built”. However, we can begin to elevate our internal awareness of our “brand” (while propagating it widely), by developing a very strong city logo, tag line and comprehensive approach to all media and collateral materials. The tag line will not in any way reference any other city... we are our own place, with our own identity. “Made in Las Vegas, New Mexico” will become a point of pride.

2. **Develop financial and professional support for arts organizations and art businesses**

Every artist, arts organization, and design- or technology-related business this is establishing themselves or expanding here, should have top quality business support mechanisms available to them. This is key to retaining talent in the area as well as attracting new talent. This is also crucial to assuring that individual artists, entrepreneurs and culture organizations have every opportunity to enjoy success in Las Vegas. Their success is the foundation of our future.

3. **Identify, nurture and establish new talent**

Beginning in elementary school, through middle school, high school and college, we can work with educators to identify and nurture up-and-coming local talent as well as encourage that talent to establish a career here, rather than moving immediately to a large city to establish themselves. Also, we should keep in contact with talented individuals who do leave. As our creative scene grows and prospers, they may consider a move back home.

4. **Develop and implement innovative arts education programs**

As described below, a comprehensive arts education program is not only key to developing talent and raising scholastic performance, but is also crucial to developing flexible *problem solving skills* that can be applied to every aspect of life. Having this skill set is *the* dividing line between a happy, productive life and a difficult, problematic life.

All art making involves envisioning multiple outcomes and choosing wisely. All art making involves hundreds, if not thousands, of decision steps and requires prioritization, sequencing, elimination of elements that aren't working (i.e., optimization) and arriving at a coherent result—on purpose, not by accident. Artists start with *nothing* but an idea, and end up with *something extraordinary—over and over. Every one of these skills is crucial for living a productive and fulfilling life.* Significantly, every one of these skills is also crucial for success *in business.*

5. **Grow a robust arts and artist networking infrastructure**

Artists in all varieties don't exist in a void. It's just as important for painters to connect with dealers and buyers, as it is for authors to connect with editors and publishers, or for theatrical producers to connect with set designers, lighting technicians, stage managers, actors and ultimately, audiences. Developing a comprehensive networking database, plus a live scene where talented people (including patrons and investors) can meet spontaneously is a crucial element to kick the Arts & Culture initiative up to a higher, self-perpetrating “growth” level.

6. **Support existing venues / create new art venues**

Venues that can host a variety of events, exhibitions, performances and installations can be:

- designed into renovated historic structures

- built from scratch in a way that is compatible with the tone and history of the town (i.e., not necessarily a pseudo-historic structure, but a new structure that is integrated into its site and local context – for example, a new building on Bridge Street would necessarily look much different than a new building in the Rail Road District which may be much larger and warehouse-like)
- integrated into currently empty spaces, indoors or out, or
- hosted in existing venues (i.e., a Tuesday-only art event in a restaurant)

7. Coordinate closely with existing businesses and community organizations

This will include everything from coordinating a comprehensive visitor experience during events (i.e., restaurants and cafes open late), to working with local service organizations (i.e., Rotary, Kiwanis or Key Club) and the Chamber, EDC or various government agencies to implement specific programs to support community arts & culture events.

8. Create opportunities for related service, consulting and retail businesses

Many businesses will benefit from the transformation of Las Vegas into an Arts & Culture region. Besides galleries, restaurants and hotels, this initiative will also directly benefit clothing stores, gas stations, other retail stores, fast food establishments, etc., particularly businesses in our Downtown areas, the Railroad District and along our “gateway” roads: Grand Ave., and 7th, north of Mills. It also indirectly benefits banks, real estate agents, professional service providers, (such as accountants and lawyers), plus city and county government through the collection of increased tax revenues.

9. Develop and implement coherent, cooperative marketing initiatives

Marketing Las Vegas as a tourist destination is a key element of this Strategic Plan. Marketing and PR will directly support our brand position as well as bring in both local and outside audiences for Arts & Culture events. Additionally, it’s an opportunity to get the word out about our local talent and arts scene and give our artists, designers and cultural leaders regional and national recognition.

10. Provide a fabulous experience for visitors and event attendees

Being mindful of the totality of the experience that visitors to our city receive is crucial to our success as an Arts & Culture destination. *Every visitor is an ambassador for Las Vegas... and should be treated that way.*

TACTICS

Talent Development

- Support existing talent with training and marketing
- Develop up-and-coming talent
- Attract new talent
- Develop comprehensive Arts Education programs with local schools
- Develop Art Mentorship programs with local designers, artists and entrepreneurs
- Coordinate educational Studio Tours to local students
- Schedule open and curated Group Shows
- Organize regularly recurring Student Shows in the Arts & Culture District
- Host a monthly Arts & Culture District Artwalk
- Produce Symposia, Workshops and Panel Discussions
- Offer Quarterly Public Studio Tours
- Creation of a county-wide “4-H” arts program for high-school students
- Design specific “starter” programs for young Artists, Musicians, Theatrical Producers (and Artists), Architects, Web Designers, Graphic Designers, Digital Filmmakers, Textile Artists, Jewelry Designers, Furniture Designers, etc.

Economic Assistance

- Develop entrepreneurial training programs in coordination with local colleges
- Offer start-ups comprehensive business and professional support services
- Offer low-interest loans and micro-loans
- Offer ongoing business support networking
- Develop a constantly evolving “self-serve” networking database
- Host meetings, mixers, presentations
- Develop an enterprise-zone style / pro-active business environment
- Attract and retain talent with economic incentives

Infrastructure Development

- Develop physical Infrastructure
- Expand digital infrastructure
- Augment educational infrastructure

Community Coordination

- Involve and coordinate:
 - businesses
 - service organizations
 - community organizations
 - neighborhood groups
 - individual volunteers

Coherent Marketing

- Develop the Brand
- Implement coherent communications
- Manage a comprehensive “self-serve” Arts and Public Event Calendar
- Build an accurate Contact Database
- Track feedback online

Section 2

Overview and Assessment: A Reality Check

Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities

We can do more—much more—with what we have, while avoiding the pitfalls that other communities have drifted into due to lack of foresight. Three keys to effective planning are to: know your *strengths* and *weaknesses*; be acutely aware of *threats*; and accurately *identify and evaluate possible opportunities*.

STRENGTHS

Assets

Architectural Heritage

Las Vegas has a significant architectural heritage with excellent examples of period design spanning four centuries, and is home to more buildings and homes listed or nominated on the National Register of Historic Places than any other city in the U.S. regardless of size—over 918.

The unique architectural heritage of Las Vegas, has been well preserved: passively, by decades of economic decline; and actively, by the hard work of many dedicated preservationists and renovators.

Such a rich architectural heritage, this well preserved, is valued and sought out by others. During Santa Fe's Design Week, Italo Lupi, Editor-in-Chief of *Abitare Magazine* from Milan, Italy leads a tour called, *Architectural Majesty of Northern New Mexico*, that includes the Dwan Light Sanctuary at United World College and the Victorian homes of Las Vegas.

Beauty of Surrounding Landscapes

Local ecological zones include: pristine grassland (where the deer and the antelope roam); high desert scrub; sub-alpine aspen- and pine-covered mountains; and pastoral green valleys—all within a 15 mile radius.

One feels like a khaki-clad naturalist on a National Geographic Special while observing thousands of migrating birds congregating on Crane Lake in November. Dropping into the Mora Valley via Ledoux at sunset feels like one is entering Brigadoon... pinch yourself to make sure it's real. And one wouldn't be too surprised to suddenly hear Julie Andrews on one's car stereo, singing, "The Sound of Music" while cruising towards Pandaries. South of town, the drive from Ribera to Villanneuva State Park is one to savor. *No matter which way you go, the area surrounding Las Vegas is drop dead gorgeous.*

Clean Air

The region boasts some of the cleanest air in the country, and is nationally known as a top location for star watching. The January, 2006 issue of *Outside Magazine*, in a cover story called, "*50 Ways to Live Large: 50 feats, quests, and*

random acts of adrenaline that are guaranteed to blow your mind”, listed as number 7, a visit to Las Vegas, New Mexico and the Star Hill Inn. Many Hollywood stars live in proximity to the Las Vegas region, but the most impressive stars are the ones seen swirling in the cloudless night sky.

Cultural Diversity

Las Vegas boasts a deep and historic cultural diversity. Home to a variety of Native American tribes, the Las Vegas region was later claimed as Spanish Territory by early Spanish explorers. From 1821 to 1848 this entire area (and a good chunk of the west) was a part of Mexico. New Mexico was annexed to the United States as a Territory in 1850, but wasn't admitted to the Union as the 47th State until 1912. The city of New Mexico is a naturally bi-lingual city.

Natural Limits to Sprawl

Las Vegas is surrounded by landscape features that also form natural limits to sprawl: the Santa Fe National Forest to the west; expansive ranchlands to the north and east; and the 8,672 acre Las Vegas National Wildlife Preserve to the south east. Assuming our local ranchers don't sell out to condo and strip-mall developers, *these protected and semi-protected features, combined with a limited water supply, will help limit sprawl.*

Resources

Three Colleges

We are home to three colleges – amazing for a city of only 16,000. Together, *New Mexico Highlands University, Luna Community College and United World College* (the only American campus of an international leadership prep school founded by Lord Mountbatten and was subsequently headed by Prince Charles, then HM Queen Noor of Jordan and Nelson Mandela) are home to roughly 5,875 students.

All three colleges have programs (in addition to general liberal arts studies) that turn out skilled and talented students in a variety of creative fields: from wrought iron work to painting; from music to digital filmmaking; from writing to welding and custom auto body work to media arts. Many of these talented students simply... vanish... or end up working in a dead-end job. *Las Vegas can do a much better job of retaining its talented graduates.*

A Pro-Active Community

This community is home to a number of very active volunteer organizations: the Citizen's Committee for Historic Preservation, MainStreet Las Vegas, the Las Vegas Arts Council among them. In addition, there are numerous neighborhood groups dedicated to a variety of causes: combating heavy truck traffic through historic neighborhoods; capturing, neutering and placing feral cats; fighting unfair taxation on natural gas; agitating for better water management; advocating for alternative energy; cleaning up litter; assisting the elderly with home maintenance; and building low-income housing. *This level of community interaction is impressive for a town this size, and highly valuable. This level of community involvement is also a prerequisite to building a true arts and culture-based community.*

A Strong Preservation Ethic

The fact that Las Vegas has over 900 homes and buildings listed or nominated on the National Register of Historic Places is stunning. Every home or building that is renovated has a positive impact on the property values, perception and psychology of its neighborhood. Many property owners in Las Vegas are serial renovators—setting a strong example and contributing well beyond the norm to the uplift of the community.

It is largely due to the dedication and hard work of these preservationists, responsible property owners and renovators that Las Vegas has developed a well-earned reputation as an architectural showcase. *It is a priority of the Arts & Culture District, and of this Strategic Plan to preserve this irreplaceable architectural heritage.*

Local Talent

The arts have always played a significant role in New Mexico culture. Las Vegas and its surrounding region has a sizable population of painters, photographers, writers, poets, musicians, designers, weavers, carpenters, custom car and motorcycle builders, etc. *We have an opportunity for the entire community to recognize and promote our local talent to the wider world.*

WEAKNESSES

Infrastructure

Limited Water Supply

The town's limited water supply is both a weakness – and a *preservation resource* (as described above). Since the water supply will limit the amount of physical development that can occur in and around the city, the natural physical beauty of the area will tend to be passively preserved. Complimented with our active preservation efforts, and an emphasis on a clean Arts & Culture economy, the town's historic and physical assets will not be ruined.

This limit to physical growth necessitates creative responses to the challenge of ***enhancing economic development while minimizing physical development.***

This Plan is an answer to that challenge.

Limited Cultural Facilities

Though Las Vegas does have some excellent arts and performing arts facilities (such as Ilfeld Auditorium), in order to grow our base as an arts community, and to attract and retain top-tier talent, more quality arts facilities are needed. These include art studios, loft apartments, galleries, multi-function art spaces, small stages for music, workshops and theater, music rehearsal spaces, recording studios, audio and digital video post-production studios, small sound stages, screening rooms and movie theaters.

These facilities may take the form of: renovated structures partly funded by grant monies; new structures built and operated by private companies; or ad hoc spaces put to use by artists themselves (such as mounting temporary exhibitions

on the ground floor of empty buildings with the permission of the property owner).
All three approaches are necessary for a vibrant, well-rounded arts scene.

Economy

Limited Outside Investment

Because of the area's decades-long economic stagnation, and despite the presence of three colleges and two hospitals, outside investment in the town has been limited. Like the restricted water supply, this is a mixed blessing. This lack of outside interest has limited chain-store/strip-mall-style development to a small area along Highway 518 north of Mills and along Grand and Hwy. 25.

However, we must also acknowledge our *local* business owners who have made a substantial investment in one or more franchise business. Investing in a franchise operation is not cheap. We need to support them while also offering economically viable alternatives for potential future investment that makes good business sense while preserving the unique character and heritage of Las Vegas. In Las Vegas, there is SPACE for a variety of locally-owned business approaches.

However, ***implementing this Strategic Plan will require attracting certain levels of outside investment.*** Some of this will come in the form of government or foundation grants; some in the form of small business entrepreneurs relocating or launching their businesses here; and some in the form of direct investment by individuals and corporations (i.e., partnerships in real estate, renovation and/or business development).

An example of direct investment that benefits the community would be an architectural firm purchasing a historic building on the Plaza, renovating it and establishing their residential design offices there.

Another example would be an artist-couple purchasing a commercial building in the Rail Road District, obtaining an *adaptive-reuse, live-work special use permit*, renovating the building and establishing their home and studios there.

Attracting this kind of outside investment will require marketing, PR and business environment incentives (limited tax breaks, historic grant assistance, service network recommendations, etc.)

Limited Economic Growth

As mentioned above, decades of economic stagnation has been a blessing in disguise for architectural preservation. But without continuous investment in proper maintenance, buildings don't last forever. We are at a crucial point in the lifespan of our architectural heritage. *Our large stock of unused buildings, architecturally significant or not, are beginning to collapse.* A major effort will be needed to save the remaining stock. This effort will require a huge investment of time, effort, money, engineering and construction resources, and skilled labor. This effort needs to begin immediately, before our architectural heritage crumbles before our eyes.

A city and region-wide emphasis on developing an Arts & Culture economy can address two issues simultaneously:

- strengthening the local economy via *basic-sector business* (i.e., business that pulls in dollars from outside the region, as most artists, designers and small technology companies tend to do)
- and directing our efforts towards preserving our existing underutilized architectural stock by renovating buildings for Arts & Culture uses

Empty commercial buildings can be strategically converted by *adaptive-reuse* into artist housing and live/work studios. Or, as is necessary, some historic homes in disrepair may be renovated and converted into galleries or small design offices. Each approach saves a home or building from certain destruction while creating a space for art, design or culture activities that contribute to the general economic well-being and cultural diversity of the community.

Public Education

Low National Rankings / Below Average Literacy Levels

New Mexico ranks low in national educational metrics. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is that the population of New Mexico is small and the per capita income of New Mexico residents ranks lower than the national average. However, this is no excuse for depriving our youth of educational opportunities that could open up their futures. The State generates a large amount of revenue from oil-related businesses, yet has not been re-investing as much as it could into public education. This is a problem, but it's also an opportunity. We can demand more investment in public education, but as had been shown elsewhere, money alone is not a panacea to our educational woes. We must ask ourselves, what can we do directly to improve the situation locally? There's a lot we can do that doesn't cost much money... and there's a lot we can do that generates money locally... additional revenues to invest locally into arts education. An investment into creativity and problem solving skills is invaluable for anyone in today's society.

A vibrant arts & culture environment will also attract top-notch educators.

In a knowledge economy, a child that doesn't learn to read is at a severe disadvantage. The good news is that it's possible to learn how to read at any age as long as the student wants to learn – even as an older adult. There are often social issues tied up in the inability to read, leading to embarrassment and a lack of willingness to even acknowledge that there is a problem.

If a student had other skills and abilities to offset the lack of reading skills, there would be less embarrassment. After all, not everyone can draw well, or sing, or play an instrument beautifully, or build a cabinet, or rebuild an engine, or create ceramics or jewelry with flair. Less social stigma translates into more willingness to seek out help and learn.

The Educational Challenge

As mentioned above (Strategies: 4) the skills learned from art activities have lifelong repercussions. The core skill in art making involves envisioning multiple outcomes and choosing wisely. This is also a core life skill.

Additionally, art-making involves discovery. This requires developing an active intelligence and acute perceptual abilities – also highly valuable for living life well.

In art, decisions are made *on purpose*, and successes are *repeatable*. Even if random or otherwise uncontrolled processes are incorporated into a work, a good artist makes it work because they are totally in control of their abilities, like an accomplished jazz player, improvising with a number of other players. Again, applied to the vicissitudes of daily life, this is a hugely valuable skill.

So, it's not surprising that Champions of Change, a compilation of research studies assembled by Americans for the Arts found that:

- Youth involvement in the arts leads to measurable improvements in reading and math.
- For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, learning various subjects “through the arts” can help “level the playing field”.
- Young people who participate in the arts for at least three hours, three days a week for at least one full year are:
 - 4 times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement
 - 3 times more likely to be elected to positions of leadership in their schools
 - 3 times more likely to win an award for school attendance
 - 4 times more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem

Exposure to a variety of art-making (i.e., creative process) classes also allows people to discover their passions – hugely valuable in a region where choices can seem limited.

Also, all creative process education (including such things as jewelry making, ceramics, web design, wood shop, metal shop and even auto shop) are all about *problem solving*. Anyone with good problem solving skills can survive the curve balls that life hurls at them. They also have many more choices available to them in terms of employment or business opportunities. Talented problem solvers are highly valued in the real world, and compensated accordingly.

Exodus of Talent

Why the Young and Talented Leave Town

The primary reason that our graduates leave town is the perception that there are no opportunities here. With the local economy in a slump for decades, that perception is not far off the mark. However, there *are* opportunities – there is the opportunity to start an art- or design-related service or production business here and sell work elsewhere. The costs of doing business are far less here than they are, in say, Los Angeles or even Santa Fe.

- A painter or sculptor could establish a studio here and sell their work through a dealer in Santa Fe.
- A web-designer or software coder could establish a small office here and work with clients across the country—online.
- A photographer could set up a studio here and produce work for stock photo agencies in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York.
- A children's book illustrator could set up shop here and pitch ideas to publishers in New York.

- A writer could work here, self-publish through Xlibris, and sell their book through Amazon.
- A musician/composer could set up a basement recording studio, record their music and sell recordings via CD Baby or iTunes.
- A teacher could set up an office here, produce online courses and offer them through a multitude of universities and specialty schools offering online distance learning courses.

The key is to help young graduates understand this... and do it. Adaptive-reuse, live-work studios, three-year tax breaks, low interest loans, micro-loans, and basic business management courses would get the ball rolling. Continuing workshops in accounting, online marketing, brand and identity design, distance education and communication skills will help raise the success ratio and keep young local entrepreneurs thriving.

Incoherent Vision

Working at Cross Purposes Creates Bad Experiences

Las Vegas has hosted many large events. It's also not uncommon that during, or after, a large event, there will be very few restaurants or cafes open. Not only is this a wasted business opportunities for our existing businesses, it creates a bad experience for visitors and makes it less likely that they will drive in again for another event.

When people drive in an hour or two, then an hour or two back home, and they spend hours walking around, it is absolutely crucial that restaurants and cafes be open. After all, people will be hungry, thirsty, and will want to sit down and rest while they enjoy a good meal. Thinking through all the components of a coherent experience – and providing them – is crucial to creating a positive experience that people will tell their friends about later.

If people have a bad experience, they'll still go home and tell all their friends about it: how *bad* it was. This creates a negative perception, which feeds into a negative brand. All the good marketing in the world will not overcome this bad word of mouth.

A brand is simply a reputation for what is actually delivered. As a city, we have to be cognizant of how we are perceived and dedicated to consistently delivering a good experience for visitors to our town. To not do so negates all the hard work that our event organizers do to get people here in the first place.

The Need for a Shared Vision

The multitude of benefits provided by a clean Arts & Culture-based economy can be undercut if all parties in the City and County are not on the same page. There is a need for a *shared vision*. We have to agree on a fundamental level that our assets and resources are unique, irreplaceable, and worth preserving. We have to agree to use our creativity to create a vibrant economy that is non-polluting and that supports the values of the community.

The beauty of the surrounding area—a key asset—will be irrevocably damaged if we allow businesses into the area that pollute the environment or carve up the

hillsides. Damaging our key assets is an effective way to subvert our efforts to create an arts-driven, culture and tourism-based economy.

A good example of this is the proposed expansion of the cement plant in the Mora Valley. Such plants generate huge amounts of diesel fumes, particulate pollution, smoke and carbon monoxide and sulfur dioxide emissions. Toxic chemicals are used in the processing of the rock resulting in a future super-fund site where children once played. The air pollution (both the toxic fumes and particulates) cause lung cancer and exacerbate childhood asthma.

A similar plant in similarly beautiful Cuddy Canyon, California (in the Los Padres National Forest) created some good jobs—but at what cost? It hampered the recreational economy there, made residents sick, and left the once clear air dirty and stinking of diesel fumes. The plant also burns tires as fuel, emitting dioxins into the atmosphere. The economy and people of Frazier Park are certainly worse off now than they were before. All they needed to do was to build some lodges and restaurants and market the beauty of their valley to people who want to escape the smog and traffic of LA. They could have set up equestrian trails, dude ranches or a whole host of other businesses that could have leveraged the natural beauty of the area. But that opportunity is now lost. (The cement factory has paid out over \$1.5 million in settlements with federal officials over air pollution violations and reporting irregularities.)

By contrast, art, design, culture, clean light manufacturing (i.e., weaving, hand-made furniture) and technology services (i.e., programming, database development) are “industries” that:

- require minimal real estate development;
- create minimal environmental impact (i.e., low water usage; no light, air or water pollution)
- support existing local businesses
- are oriented toward “unique spaces”, thus saving decaying historic buildings from certain destruction
- help cut crime with round-the-clock activity
- clean up neighborhoods by removing blight and fixing up facades
- generate local tax revenues for local school districts
- create a variety of cooperative educational opportunities
- initiate investment in local infrastructure
- create entrepreneurial opportunities
- provide a wide range of new jobs
- lessen the burden of poverty on those with fixed incomes by encouraging volunteerism and neighborhood improvement programs.

THREATS

These are issues to be avoided. Any of these issues, if unaddressed, can seriously undermine the value of working towards an arts & culture environment and diminish the quality of life for all residents.

Pollution

Air Pollution / Light Pollution

As described above, creating an Arts & Culture-driven economy requires *not doing* things that destroy the assets that an Arts & Culture economy is based upon. *People have to want to come here.* Right now, one reason people come

here is because *the air is clean and you can see the stars*. This seems like a small thing, but it's not. Clean air is now a rarity in the United States, and despite the EPA and governmental leaders such as California's AQMD, air pollution in general keeps getting worse. Anything that causes air pollution in Las Vegas or its surrounding region will quickly diminish one of our key differentiating features.

Of course, the same is true of light pollution. There is already a Night Sky Ordinance in Las Vegas and as we move forward into an Arts & Culture economy, every effort must be made to not only comply with this ordinance, but to minimize light pollution in general. Star gazing could be integrated as a core component of our outlying evening events.

Industrial Pollution

Incoherence in the decisions made by the city and county regarding other (non-Arts & Culture) industries can also have a profound effect on the local economy. Again, being on the same page will make us all much more effective. Even industrial decisions made outside of our region can have a negative effect on our local economy and quality of life. Nuclear and toxic waste dumps, uranium mining, strip mining, tire recycling plants, coal-fired power plants and other similar heavy industrial uses of the New Mexico landscape only serve to make New Mexico less and less "The Land of Enchantment", and more and more like any other polluted state. New Mexico gets such an extraordinary amount of sunlight, distributed solar energy should be made the official power source for the entire state. Creative industries are more likely to lead the way in incorporating passive heating and cooling, plus solar or other alternative energy solutions into their infrastructure.

Pollute the environment and people will avoid the area.

Unplanned Growth

A Cautionary Tale: Sedona

Sedona has only recently started to pay attention to growth and sprawl issues. If one visits Sedona today, one will see houses built right up to the edge of the spectacular red bluffs. Mini-malls and ugly stucco box motels are proliferating everywhere. Sprawl is out of control. The natural beauty of Sedona has been greatly diminished and is on the verge of being utterly destroyed. Not only is this sprawl unsightly, as we have seen in recent years, Sedona is situated in the narrow Cottonwood Canyon and is very vulnerable to flooding and wild fires. From any perspective, sprawl in Cottonwood Canyon doesn't make sense, but the uncontrolled development mentality of nearby Phoenix has migrated to Sedona and nearby Prescott. This is a loss for everyone.

Another example of unplanned growth destroying the natural beauty of an area is St. George, Utah. People, once attracted to the scenic beauty of the area and its golf courses, are now confronted by massive Orange County-style development that is slowly marching up hillsides and obliterating the landscape.

Sprawl

Big Boxes, Mini-Malls and Chain Stores

Similar to Sedona, Las Vegas and its surrounding region are possessed of a number of unique natural and historic assets. Sprawl is the death of uniqueness.

Big Boxes and chain stores are the same everywhere. After all, sameness is their raison d'être.

Los Angeles County is composed of 86 different cities. Yet, get off the freeway in nearly any of those cities, and chances are you won't know where you are. Every city becomes more and more identical with each passing year. A few cities have managed to preserve their downtowns... now mere islands of uniqueness in a stifling blanket of conformity.

The Costs of Sprawl: Southern California

According to a recent article in the LA Times, the greater the extent of sprawl, the more it costs, per person, to maintain infrastructure as the population grows. The further out sprawl ranges, the more expensive it becomes to build and maintain the basic infrastructure of roads, water lines and electrical service, not to mention providing basic services such as schools, fire and police protection, etc.

There is no economy of scale when it comes to sprawl.

From the June 28th article, ***Tahoe Fire Shows Cost of Paradise is Still Rising:***
"In 1950, when California's population was almost 11 million, state spending per \$100 of personal income was roughly \$5, according to the state Department of Finance. In 1975, when there were about 22 million of us, state spending amounted to \$7.50 per \$100 of income. Today, with 37 million Californians, Sacramento is spending \$9.60."

Population growth becomes its own form of fiscal hell.

Destroying the Visual Landscape: Colorado Springs

If you exit I-25 at North Academy and heads east, up Briargate towards Lexington then loop south toward East Woodman, you will be shocked and horrified at the density of the housing developments that have completely obliterated the hills where horses once roamed. The former equestrian ranches there look vaguely like the nastier parts of a third world city from a distance – hideous swaths of thousands of rooftops devouring the landscape like a voracious cancer.

Loss of Community

Any sense of community in such towns have most likely been severely damaged, if not obliterated. When development is out of control, everyone becomes a *stranger... in a strange land.*

Loss of Character

Like Phoenix, Arizona, Ontario, California and Las Vegas, Nevada, Colorado Springs is now a completely generic version of corporate America. Every three blocks there's another Border's or B&N, every two blocks another Olive Garden or Chili's, every block another Starbucks. This is the new America, where the unique character of any town is obliterated in numbing sameness.

Showcasing our local talent, preserving our architectural legacy, and being very creative about generating economic benefit from arts, culture, design, technology and tourism, is the best way for Las Vegas to still *feel like* Las Vegas in 20 or 30 years. It is the best path to economic growth while retaining our history, culture

and *authenticity*. Even Tombstone, Arizona hasn't managed to do that, having veered too far toward the disneyfication of their historic wild-west town.

Negative Perceptions

Been to Las Vegas – Couldn't Find It

MainStreet Las Vegas recognized early on that one of the fundamental economic problems with Las Vegas is that people *can't find it*. They can get off the freeway, but roaring down Grand Avenue at highway speeds they never see the Rail Road District, Douglas Avenue, The Carnegie Library, Bridge Street, NMHU or the Plaza. For most motorists, Las Vegas simply *doesn't exist*.

This creates an extremely negative impression, but one that MainStreet is already working to change

MainStreet's current initiative, (to slow traffic on Grand with islands, crosswalks, diagonal parking and roundabouts, divert traffic into the Rail Road District and our *two* historic Downtowns, and beautify the entire route with solar street lighting, benches, trash cans, trees and plantings), will help highway travelers *discover* Las Vegas. But going well beyond that, to turn the entire MainStreet Corridor into an Arts & Culture District, will transform the energy of Las Vegas from a sleepy and somewhat gritty town drifting through its twilight years... towards a talent-driven, dynamic arts destination.

Problematic North and South Gateways

Another perception problem when arriving in Las Vegas by highway is the north and south entrances to Grand Avenue. The first thing one sees while exiting the highway from either end is unsightly automotive junkyards. Not the best gateway for our new Arts & Culture town.

There is nothing wrong with auto junkyards – they can be a great source of parts for automotive tinkerers and restorers, and in an Arts & Culture town, for sculptors as well. A simple Arts & Culture solution would be to erect tall walls along the junkyards facing the roadway and have local art students design and paint an east and west Gateway Wall Mural for the city of Las Vegas. There could be an annual competition to design the two walls. Each year the winning walls and the young artists who created them would be photographed and documented as a part of the ongoing history of Las Vegas. Each year the wall panels would be removed and replaced. Older wall panels could find their way into sets for plays that are set in Las Vegas, or rotated periodically as large outdoor works in our monthly Las Vegas Artwalk.

This is a basic example of how to turn liabilities into assets with a little creativity. An eyesore becomes a literal "Welcome to Las Vegas" gateway at minimal, or no cost to the property owners.

Nothing to Do, Nowhere to Go

Another common negative perception (that is simple to change) is the perception that there is nothing to do, and nowhere to go in Las Vegas. Anyone who has arrived here after 5:00pm on a weekday or anytime on a Sunday knows exactly what is being described. Cafes and restaurants are closed, stores are closed, the streets are empty. As mentioned above, this is particularly problematic if there is

a special event going on that day. Being hungry and thirsty and finding no place open for business makes people... angry. They'll remember it, and their bad experience will forever stick in their craw.

The simple solution is to work with café and restaurant owners to keep their establishments open later. Doing so, of course, requires additional staff, so it's a chicken-or-egg situation. An Arts & Culture environment will bring more people to openings and galleries, so more people will be on the streets looking for somewhere to eat... but this won't happen overnight. The best solution is for the entire town to focus on the evening of a monthly Artwalk, when café and restaurant owners will know that keeping their doors open will most likely pay for itself.

As more galleries, and more openings, plays, musical performances and other events occur in town, keeping your eatery open later becomes less of a risk. The bonus goes to the first movers – those enterprising souls who take the risk to become known on the street as *the* place to go when one is in town.

Where are All the Students?

Las Vegas is the college town that's not *really* a college town. Walk around town on any late afternoon, and it's rare to see even a single student out and about. Where are they? Well, to turn that question around, is there anyplace in town that *really* caters to students? Can you think of another town that would ignore the potential business of 5,875 people?

In an Arts & Culture town, there would be plenty for students to do, and plenty of places to go... that were open until midnight. After all, students drink coffee and eat doughnuts or spaghetti or pizza until midnight... or later. A high level of art events would encourage businesses to stay open later... which would in turn make Las Vegas a much more student-friendly town. Galleries, cafes, bookstores, record stores and hip / vintage clothing stores go together. This in turn spawns higher-end restaurants, wine bars, furniture stores, clothing stores and other establishments for "grown ups". All of this gives residents more freedom of choice, and more evening entertainment options.

Signs of Not Caring: Blight, Roving Dogs, Collapsing Buildings

When people visit any town, the sight of roving packs of dogs and the rubble of collapsed buildings does nothing for the town's image. Seeing such things conveys the feeling that the town does not care, or worse, does not comprehend how it comes across to others... like someone showing up at a wedding or business meeting dressed in total disarray, with their hair messed up and their pants torn.

A town serious about being perceived as an Arts & Culture destination will act on these negative impressions. The bricks from a collapsed building could be seized by the city and used to build a special walkway... or a memorial... or sold off for a pittance ("own a piece of our history") to raise money for a good cause... or otherwise put to creative use.

The capture of packs of roving dogs could be documented as a work of digital video art. The sad story of these abandoned dogs could be turned into a children's book... a cautionary tale regarding the importance of being responsible for animals in one's care. Some of these dogs were probably raised in a

household and were recently abandoned, thus could be rehabilitated by people willing to take them in. A dog's life could be saved.

Every problem is an opportunity to get creative. In a town that values creativity, solutions will be plentiful.

Crime

Artists and designers tend to work late into the night. Having studios and businesses with their lights on and people working at 10 or 11 pm, or later, discourages crimes of opportunity. Cafes and restaurants open late have the same effect. Buildings that are kept up, and kept clean, attract less vandalism.

More importantly arts and culture businesses create jobs at all wage and skill levels. Working in a small business (as opposed to a large plant or corporation) gives one the chance to experience a wide range of responsibilities in a short amount of time, and to learn a wide range of job skills. Being employed, and having a wider range of skills to leverage should one ever become unemployed, is key to starting out life on the right foot.

It is a well-known fact that high unemployment and high dropout rates correlate with high crime rates. Comprehensive arts education can inspire students to stay in school and thus avoid the discouraging experience of serial unemployment that often accompanies dropping out.

Solid creative process skills (visualizing, planning, designing, building, refining, optimizing, and developing repeatable processes) enables one to overcome a wide range of problems that could easily derail a person possessing little of those skills. Having access to a full range of arts education opportunities and learning creative problem solving early in life correlates with much higher educational achievement plus lifelong success and fulfillment.

OPPORTUNITIES

Expanding the Local Talent Base

Making Las Vegas into a True College Town

Currently, as mentioned above, ***the town turns its back on its students***, so, as one would expect, ***its students reject the town upon graduation***.

Our colleges are a vast untapped resource for Las Vegas. A deep reservoir of talent, knowledge, training, cultural interchange and entrepreneurial energy are simply leaving town every day. Let us not mince words – ***it is a tragedy for Las Vegas that these resources are currently being lost***. *It is also a tragedy for students to attend college in a town that makes little effort to recognize their existence, much less provide a welcoming environment.*

We have an opportunity to transform Las Vegas into a true college town. Not just a place where students can feel comfortable hanging out in cyber-cafes eating pizza at midnight, but a place where *graduates feel empowered to start careers and establish businesses* here.

It is the responsibility of the colleges to educate their students, but it is also *our* responsibility to convey crucial information to our students. **They need to know,**

and we need to *demonstrate*, that launching a career or business *here*, today, will provide them with *certain competitive advantages* that they would not have elsewhere. We need to let our students know that we *acknowledge the value that they bring to the picture*, and that we are committed to not only help them launch their futures here but will provide the tools and ongoing resources that will help sustain their ventures and increase their chances of success.

Retaining our Graduates as a Part of Our Community

It is a priority to address this wasteful historic disconnect, and build strong links between downtown Las Vegas revitalization efforts and our three local colleges... and local high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.

A vibrant Arts & Culture District will provide a stimulating and inspiring environment for students, plus venues to showcase their work. Effective programs in Talent Development, Economic Assistance, Infrastructure Development and Coherent Marketing will help us retain some of the talent and brainpower that our colleges and schools are nurturing.

Introducing the Idea of Owning One's Own Business in Elementary School

The concept of entrepreneurship needs to be introduced early—in elementary and middle schools. Studies have shown that being introduced early on to the idea of owning one's business significantly increases the likelihood of business leadership later in life. This is the stage where students are actively discovering future possibilities—what “one wants to be when they grow up”. As a small business owner, the possibilities are wide open for *combining one's passion in life with the means to make a living*. Studio artists, art dealers, graphic designers, web designers, actors, furniture designers, restaurateurs, hoteliers, freelance software and database programmers, independent recording musicians and filmmakers are all also... small business people.

Increasing Awareness and Discussion of Problems

Media Coverage

We have started to see increasing media coverage of local problems. Shedding light on local issues is key to constructive debate and problem solving.

There is an opportunity to address pressing issues via our talent base. One option is to have local graphic designers create *information graphics* that can be used by city agencies or local newspapers to help describe a problem in detail or convey the extent of a problem. This may take the form of maps, charts, diagrams, etc.

The second option is to invite creative professionals from a variety of disciplines to participate directly in solution brainstorming and problem solving. Creative professionals can bring a fresh perspective to issues that may appear daunting from a bureaucratic viewpoint. Often, solutions to problems become apparent simply by changing one's point-of-view. As mentioned above, artists and designers are used to envisioning many outcomes and choosing wisely.

Every problem is an opportunity to get creative.

Community Forums

Community forums, in the form of moderated email lists, online discussion boards, or live meetings have tremendous value in generating lots of ideas for solving problems. They generate a lot of complaints and general griping, but filtering through that reveals many real gems. Any discussion raises awareness of issues... multiple viewpoints reveal the complexity of issues. Again, in a community that values discussion and creative thinking, there will be no shortage of solutions.

Turning Mud and Straw into Adobe

Transform Negative Perceptions into Positive Perceptions

Working with City and County officials we can eliminate the sources of negative perceptions and accentuate positive perceptions of Las Vegas. Additional dollars flowing into the City coffers through increased business activity will help fund additional police, fire, animal control and code enforcement personnel—as well as raise pay scales for those who make our lives safer. An elevated local tax base will also provide additional funds for increasing police and firefighter salaries and will help raise the general level of crucial City services.

Micro-loans and low-interest loans will help fund property owners repair building facades, leaking roofs and restore weathered or broken signage.

Efforts by organizations like MainStreet Las Vegas, supported by grants, loans and volunteer effort will help slow traffic, beautify streetscapes, repair and paint city landmarks, and raise money for special projects.

Coordinated efforts by groups like the CCHP and MainStreet will help save buildings in a serious state of disrepair and convert them to arts and culture uses.

Coordinate Our Efforts for the Common Good

Area businesses, organizations and City services can be coordinated to create great experiences for visitors, in addition to more shopping, entertainment and service choices for area residents. These enhanced choices and experiences will in turn benefit area businesses with a higher level of economic activity across the board.

Enhance the Quality of Life for Everyone

Coordinating extensive educational programs between our three colleges, local elementary, middle and high schools, with local and guest creative professionals will create new and inspiring opportunities for the youth of Las Vegas, help retain our graduates and nurture business start ups and preservation projects. These combined activities will help raise overall academic performance in our schools, elevate general educational levels across the community and inspire broad-based community volunteerism, fostering an active, results-oriented approach to life. People-helping-people elevates the quality of life for all.

See Las Vegas as We've Never Seen It Before

Las Vegas has been described as a “gritty little town”. We have an opportunity to see Las Vegas as something more than that—as a unique small city with deep

historic roots, blessed with beautiful natural surroundings and powered by dynamic, creative citizens who wake up every morning, roll up their sleeves and actively build the best city they can possibly imagine.

Create a Great Experience for Visitors

The economy of Las Vegas can be driven by art & culture dollars pouring into town from the rest of the country – and the world. This happens via a combination of outbound sales of art works and locally designed and produced goods, as well as by attracting cultural tourism. With our wild west heritage, we also have a major opportunity for international tourism.

The core imperative of tourism in any form is to create—and consistently deliver—a welcoming and memorable experience for visitors to our community. Positive experiences create happy memories and positive word-of-mouth. The results are far more compelling than any marketing campaign can be.

Enhance the Unique Character of Las Vegas

Call Attention to Overlapping Histories

As mentioned earlier in this document, Las Vegas and its region are the beneficiaries of the complex overlapping histories of native peoples, explorers, pioneers, merchants, railroad workers, gold seekers, wanderers, travelers, and urban expatriates. Each wave of human activity has left its trails, its architecture, its families and its legends and lore. We have an opportunity to not only keep these histories alive for historians but to bring these histories alive for every visitor and every resident – through music, storytelling, historic theater, literature, poetry, photography, painting, filmmaking and interactive media.

Create a Unique Brand and Back It Up

As mentioned earlier, a “Brand” is a vision of what one’s reputation should be. One’s actual reputation over time is one’s *real* brand.

Creating a brand requires identifying attributes that one wants to be associated with. Propagating a brand involves not just taking-the-talk but walking-the-walk (i.e., *consistently* delivering on those attributes).

If a town wants to have *clean* as one of its brand attributes, it cannot tolerate graffiti or piles of trash along its roadways. If a town wants to have *creative* as one of its brand attributes, then *creative approaches* need to be incorporated into its civic dialog and problem solving.

Because brands are reputation-based, one has to back up that reputation with action, not words. This is a classically *Western* concept. We are a *Western town*.

Rising Santa Fe Real Estate Values

Commercial Development Pushes Artists Out

We are not Santa Fe, and we don’t want to become a “mini-me” version of Santa Fe. But we can benefit from mistakes made by Santa Fe and other cities. Sprawling commercial development is driving Santa Fe artists out of their studios

and out of the city. They are ending up in studios all over the surrounding countryside. Some end up in Las Vegas.

Both Santa Fe and Taos are now dealing with an unintended side effect of their success as art cities... a stratified socio-economic structure. We can avoid this kind of hard stratification through the prioritization of educational and economic opportunities for our local citizens, as we've been discussing above.

Sante Fe Artists on the Move

The cost of owning a building or a studio in Las Vegas is much lower than a comparable space in Santa Fe. It is crucial for an "arts community" to include working artists. As art cities become more expensive, artists leave and re-establish themselves elsewhere. This has happened in former art communities like Manhattan where the artists have fled rising real estate costs. Is Santa Fe heading in the same direction?

Towns like Carmel, California were never truly art communities in the first place, despite the plethora of galleries there (Carmel recently passed a new ordinance limiting new galleries – visitors were complaining that there weren't enough places to eat in town). Carmel is a town of multi-millionaires – it's simply too expensive for artists to live there, so it lacks any kind of a vital "art scene".

Las Vegas has a rare opportunity to position itself as a bona-fide arts community – one that values creativity, is affordable and is measurably artist-friendly. The vitality that will be created by consciously putting the elements into place that are needed to build and sustain a creative community will pay for itself many times over, both economically and in terms of quality of life for all of our citizens.

New Mexico is Already Perceived as a Cultural Destination

According to Paul Narbutas of the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs, "New Mexico is very much perceived as a cultural destination." Statewide, the culture industry in the state generated more than \$2.8 billion in direct economic impact in 2005. \$1.3 billion of that is spent on arts and culture industry expenses. The remaining \$1.5 billion is spent by tourists on cultural activities and related services like restaurants and hotels.

As reported in the Las Vegas Optic, dated 11-27-06, the state's culture industry employed at least 43,000 people in 2005, eclipsing manufacturing, which employs 38,000 workers in New Mexico.

What does this mean for Las Vegas? It means we have a head start in making our city into a cultural destination. We're not located in North Dakota or Arkansas –we're located in a state already well known for its natural beauty and cultural significance. Consider two things:

- The knowledge, experience and expertise to accomplish what we need to do *already exists in our backyard*.
- Over a million people travel to Santa Fe from all over the world every year specifically to buy art, particularly hand-crafted work—both traditional and contemporary. Santa Fe is only 45 minutes away from Las Vegas. Can we entice some of those visitors to take a short side trip to visit Las Vegas? Yes, we can, if we are perceived as an arts destination.

A Coherent Vision

Leverage Assets and Resources

We have an opportunity to intelligently leverage our assets and resources to elevate our town without ruining it. Every decision made will either take us toward our goal or away from it.

If we can collectively agree, and publicly defend, that we value:

1. our environment
2. our educational resources, both institutional and individual
3. creative approaches to solving problems
4. non-polluting basic-sector business
5. the talent of our students and graduates
6. the vision, drive and talent of creative professionals
7. community volunteerism
8. protecting and preserving our history
9. cultural diversity and vitality
10. arts & culture tourism
11. enhancing our quality of life

...we can create a future that will truly be amazing. Las Vegas will lead by example.

Orchestrate Action

Implementing this Strategic Plan will require the coordinated efforts of many organizations, governmental bodies and individuals. Having an unambiguous shared vision will help us identify opportunities and fulfill our objectives in a timely and effective manner. Every individual, organization and government agency has specific skills and resources to contribute to the achievement of our vision.

Guided Implementation

The strategic guidance of tactical initiatives is crucial to our success in transforming Las Vegas into a nationally recognized Arts & Culture community.

The Strategic Plan itself has mechanisms to help identify opportunities, prioritize activities and guide the implementation of specific projects. It's important to be efficient with our brainpower and energies, and strive for *effective* outcomes. Every project should be a key piece of the puzzle. Anything that isn't simply burns up time and energy and takes us away from our goals.

The primary tactical (program and project-based) initiatives can be grouped into categories, prioritized and guided on a day-by-day, decision-by-decision basis to keep our work on track. Progress can be tracked against a coordinated timeline. Achievements can be measured against a pre-determined set of metrics.

We have everything we need to accomplish the vision, mission and goals outlined in this document. We just need to get going.

Section 3

A Tactical Roadmap: Getting There – On Schedule

This section details the tactical threads that will be woven into a strong and beautiful community tapestry.

NOTE: This section is still in development. More details will be added as programs are identified, expanded and scheduled.

Some of these tactical initiatives are ongoing programs that, once started, will continue indefinitely. Some are projects, with a definite beginning, middle and end. Some of these programs or projects are already in existence, but need to be integrated into, and supported by, the overall Strategic Plan.

Some of these initiatives are new, and already underway, such as **SPACE / STATION One** on Bridge Street (a juried, artist-operated exhibition space for local talent)—a MainStreet project. Additional artist-operated exhibition and performance spaces will eventually be located in the New Town and Railroad districts.

Also, many of these initiatives are interdependent – meaning that they are contingent upon the implementation or completion of others. Thus, we need to prioritize, schedule and coordinate these activities and projects from the very beginning. Quarterly reviews of our progress are essential to keeping our efforts coordinated and on-track.

The Tactical Roadmap consists of five interrelated components:

- **Talent Development**

Identify, attract and nurture both local and incoming talent

- **Economic Assistance**

Emphasize locally-owned arts & culture small business development and growth

- **Infrastructure Development**

Provide affordable physical and digital infrastructure to the creative community

- **Community Coordination**

Coordinate community resources to optimize benefits for the entire community

- **Coherent Marketing**

Consistently market Las Vegas in a positive, creative and comprehensive manner

INITIATE IN YEAR ONE

Talent Development

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS (in coordination with local schools)

- Support existing talent with training and marketing
 - *Help emerging local arts professionals establish themselves and grow through basic business training and cooperative marketing*
- Develop up-and-coming talent
 - *Identify young artists and craftspeople and provide them with special educational and business opportunities including arts entrepreneurship workshops, guest lectures and field trips to local studios.*

SHOWCASE LOCAL TALENT

- Organize regularly recurring Student Shows
 - *Student shows of top talent chosen by instructors at our local elementary, middle and high schools and colleges, hosted in the Arts & Culture District during monthly Artwalks provide recognition for young talent*

COMMUNITY-WIDE ART EVENTS

- Second Saturdays: a monthly Arts & Culture District Artwalk
 - *A regular Las Vegas Arts & Culture District Artwalk called **Second Saturdays** hosted on the second Saturday of every month (including mounting temporary shows in the ground floor spaces and display windows of empty buildings and on the sidewalks.)*
 - *Work with local businesses, organizations and individuals to provide parking and horse-drawn carriages for end-to-end corridor transportation.*
 - *Work with local restaurants and cafes to stay open late for **Second Saturdays**.*

COMMUNITY-WIDE CULTURAL ENRICHMENT EVENTS (Joint EDU / ORG)

- Produce Symposia, Workshops, Panel Discussions and Art Demonstrations
 - *Support the development of arts and design symposia, workshops and panel discussions hosted by our local colleges and working art studios*
 - *Schedule these events during the afternoon prior to **Second Saturday** Artwalks.*

CREATIVE COMMUNITY ORIENTATION PROGRAMS

- Design separate “starter” packet for Artists, Musicians, Theatrical Producers and Artists, Architects, Web Designers, Graphic Designers, Digital Filmmakers
 - *A starter packet would include assistance with finding studio space, getting involved in monthly Artwalks and quarterly Studio Tours, showing in artist-operated **SPACE / STATION** exhibits, meeting other local artists, designers, writers, etc.,*

Economic Assistance

ENTREPRENEUR / BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- Develop cooperative or multi-focus entrepreneurial training programs
 - *Provide artists, musicians, designers, etc., with regularly-scheduled training by local experts in how to start and operate a business in Las Vegas.*

PRO-ACTIVE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

- Offer low-interest loans and micro-loans
 - *Develop a community bank to offer entrepreneurs and property owners low-interest and business start-up micro-loans*

NETWORKING

- Develop a constantly evolving networking database
 - *This database would include artists and craftspeople in every category, gallerists, business services, community organization contacts, etc.*
- **Friday Night Lights:** monthly networking meetings and mixers.
 - *Host a variety of community networking and professional development events for creative professionals*
 - *Host these events on the Friday nights before **Second Saturdays**.*

ORDINANCES

- Develop an enterprise-zone style / general business environment
 - *Goals: art / media related business license fees waived for three years; emphasis on arts, design, culture, multimedia, educational, technology and intellectual property-generating business*

CO-OP PROGRAMS

- Attract and retain talent with economic incentives
 - *Assure a supply of low cost studio space, low cost co-op exhibition space*
 - *City-wide co-op marketing programs (i.e, regular full page Las Vegas ads in The Magazine, Pasatiempo, New Mexico Magazine, The Santa Fean, Santa Fe Trends, and local and regional newspapers, The Optic and The Las Vegas Times*
 - *Provide low-cost PR services for openings, performances, workshops and other events and recognitions*

Infrastructure Development

JOINT CITY / MAIN STREET / EDC / CofC / BUSINESS INITIATIVE

- Develop physical Infrastructure
 - *Comprehensive database of building inventory*
 - *Initiate adaptive-reuse building renovations to create residential artist lofts*
 - *Invest in the development of individual and co-op art studios*
 - *Encourage the launch of more galleries*
 - *Fund workshop venues (offset the costs of hosting workshops, symposia, etc.)*
 - *Work with property owners to make windows available for art window displays*
- Expand digital infrastructure
 - *Work with Quest and other providers to provide extensive broadband access*

Community Coordination

JOINT ORG / BIZ INITIATIVE

- Involve and coordinate during Arts & Culture events:
 - *Businesses that directly benefit (cafes, restaurants, galleries)*
 - *Arts support businesses (supplies, digital printing, recording studios, framers)*
 - *Business services (banks, real estate, professional services, etc.)*
 - *Service organizations (Rotary Kiwanis, Key Club, Church Groups, etc.)*
 - *Community organizations (MainStreet, EDC, CofC, LVAC, etc.)*
 - *Neighborhood groups (Neighborhood Watch, Las Vegas CATS, Neighborhood Associations)*
 - *Volunteers (events, shows, openings, guides, etc.)*

Coherent Marketing

JOINT INITIATIVE

- Develop the Brand
 - *Develop a very strong brand for Las Vegas as an Arts Community and Destination*

- *Build the brand one step at a time (continuous guidance and constant evaluation of evolving reputation)*
- *Design and build a stunning Las Vegas Arts & Culture District website*

JOINT INITIATIVE

- Implement Coherent Communications
 - *Craft messaging*
 - *Coordinate all communications and PR for consistency*
 - *Develop community-wide cooperative marketing programs*
 - *Develop and fund city event marketing programs*

JOINT ORG / EDU INITIATIVE

- Supercharge our Existing Arts and Public Event Calendar
 - *Build and operate a comprehensive, detailed and accurate online events calendar*
 - *Implement an open, interactive, “self-serve” calendar content management system for updating the calendar*

JOINT ORG / EDU INITIATIVE

- Build an Accurate Contact Database
 - *Allow artists, businesses, organizations and event organizers to self-update their contact information as needed*
- Implement an International Sister Cities Program
 - Identify European, South American and Asian cities for cultural exchange program (many European and Asian travelers LOVE the wild-west thing).

INITIATE IN YEAR TWO

Talent Development

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS (in coordination with local schools)

- Develop up-and-coming talent
 - *Identify young artists and craftspeople and provide them with special educational and business opportunities*
- Develop comprehensive Arts Education programs
 - *Augment the arts programs offered by our public schools and colleges with the expertise and experience of our local artists and craftspeople*
- Initiate Art Mentorships
 - In coordination with our colleges, develop and offer comprehensive, accredited arts mentorship programs, including studio internships.

SHOWCASE LOCAL TALENT

- **Plan and host open and curated Group Shows**
 - Regular open group shows provide local artists exposure... regular curated shows provide our artists recognition

COMMUNITY-WIDE ART EVENTS

- Offer Quarterly Public Studio Tours
 - *LVAC is already doing this, but this could occur quarterly: Las Vegas Fall Open Studio Tour, etc.*
- Other Special Arts Programs
 - Architectural Tour, Ghost Tours, Yard Art, Motorcycle Art, Ghost Signs, etc.
- Unique arts programs to tie-into county 4-H program for high-school students
 - *An annual comprehensive arts showcase and competition for high-school students in a wide variety of disciplines – sponsored by local businesses*

Economic Assistance

ENTREPRENEUR / BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- Offer start-ups comprehensive business and professional support services
 - *Offer initial free, and limited-period discounted professional support services (accounting system set-up, basic legal advice, basic tax information, etc.)*

Infrastructure Development

JOINT CITY / MAIN STREET / EDC / CofC / BUSINESS INITIATIVE

- Develop physical Infrastructure
 - *Set aside spaces for community sculpture gardens – and fund them*
 - *Fund public art*
 - *Develop and encourage the private development of alternative concert venues*
- Expand digital infrastructure
 - *Implement citywide wireless access*
 - *Fiber optic system in conjunction with new commuter rail service*
 - *Purchase, install and operate strategically-located kiosks w/digital displays (on Via Valencia, New Town, Rail Road District)*

JOINT EDU / CITY / ORG / BIZ INITIATIVE

- Augment educational infrastructure
 - *Purchase, install and manage web conferencing tools and software*
 - *Fund community media labs, digital printmaking labs, silk-screening shops, etc.*

Coherent Marketing

JOINT INITIATIVE

- Develop the Brand
 - *Propagate the brand via multiple channels (print, television, online, etc.)*

JOINT ORG / EDU INITIATIVE

- Track Feedback
 - *Implement and track online feedback on the Las Vegas Arts & Culture website*
- Implement an International / Intercontinental Sister Cities Program
 - Work with tour operators

Section 4
Summary:
What Is Imagined Can Be Achieved

What is actively visualized can be achieved. In fact, this is the only way to achieve anything that is complex or difficult.

Having a clear vision of the future allows for effective planning and guided implementation. It allows for the creation of logical benchmarks to evaluate progress. Without vision, life “happens”.

Great achievements don't happen by accident.

Every city has artists living and working within its boundaries. Yet, the vast majority of cities are not seen as art cities. It's easy to forget that Santa Fe was not always an internationally recognized “arts city”. Nor was Taos. At one time even New York City was not recognized as the arts capital of the world. In each case, by intent or by accident of fate, each city was transformed in the eyes of people everywhere into something special.

Las Vegas has everything it needs to begin the work of transforming itself into a vibrant Arts Community and Cultural Destination.

Las Vegas is already a National Treasure... we just need to consciously recognize that fact and publicly commit to make every effort to preserve and extend the natural and historic assets and resources we are already blessed with.

Publicly committing to make this effort puts our personal reputations on the line. But it is important to remember that a town, or a city, in and of itself, cannot have a “reputation”. Las Vegas, like any city, is the composite of the vision, skills, knowledge, expertise, character and courage of its citizens, nothing more. The landscape exists. Cities, nations and even empires come and go. It's up to us, the citizens of Las Vegas to make this city into what we collectively envision it can become in this next phase of its existence.

Every morning when we awake, and we contribute our fair share to the process of reinvigorating this town -- one project at a time -- we move Las Vegas a little closer toward our vision: a small, unique, historic city, recognized worldwide as the National Treasure that it is.

We can achieve this.

Time to get to work...