

Columbia Hillman Arts & Cultural District

October 2, 2017

Seattle Office of Arts and Culture
700 5th Avenue, Suite 1766
PO Box 94748
Seattle, WA 98104

To the Review Panel,

We write to formally request that the Columbia Hillman Arts and Cultural District be designated as an Arts and Cultural District of Seattle. Southeast Seattle enjoys a cultural richness unlike any other part of the city. The numerous artists who live and work in our neighborhoods have activated them, making them more interesting places in which to reside, work, and visit. Designation as an Arts & Cultural District will provide positive exposure for our cultural spaces and organizations, and it will provide access to a “toolbox” of city programs for marketing, for cultural preservation, and for incentivizing the addition of new arts and cultural spaces in our communities. The tools will support artists, art and cultural heritage organizations and businesses, and our neighborhoods. The arts have been, and will continue to be, a driving force in the economic development and social fabric of our community. Additionally, our wealth of cultural activities have a multiplier effect on our local economies -- folks going to see a play, performance, or attend an art opening also spend money at restaurants, and on babysitters, dry cleaning, parking, etc. As Southeast Seattle is undergoing rapid development, we understand that we must act now to ensure that the arts, cultural activities, and our creative economy are both preserved and advanced.

Background

Planning for the Columbia Hillman Arts and Cultural District began in February, 2016, when a group of individuals from the Columbia City Business Association, the Hillman City Business Association, SEEDArts, Community Arts Create, and arts activists met to discuss the need to promote and preserve the arts and cultural vibrancy of our neighborhoods. This core group met monthly, and held six meetings for community stakeholders; attendance averaged 20 people. Stakeholders encouraged neighborhood arts spaces and individual artists to sign up on the City's Cultural Space Inventory. On October 18, 2016, we held a public meeting at the Royal Room; 120 artists and supporters of our effort to become a designated Arts and Cultural District were in attendance.

We then set our sights on coordinating an event to satisfy the requirements of the City's Challenge Grant and to demonstrate our ability to work together. After designation, we envision

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the creation of an *Arts Walking Tour* – an interactive arts & culture themed audio tour for residents and newcomers that will highlight our cultural assets and link the two neighborhoods. To that end, we coordinated an Arts Hackathon and Salon on April 29, 2017, at the Columbia City Theater. The goal of the Arts Hackathon and Salon was to create a prototype of the Arts Walking Tour in a single day with as much community input as possible. 24 participants broke into five teams and had three hours to accomplish their goals. The teams were: Website/App Development, Audio & Narration, Design, Marketing, and Logistics. By the end of the day, we had a sample website, 3 prototype apps for an arts walking tour, a professionally recorded introduction and sample audio clips for 3 cultural spaces: the Columbia City Theater, the Columbia City Gallery, and the Black and Tan Hall. At the Salon, which was held simultaneously and was open to the public, we captured 74 artists in a photo booth (manned by Youth in Focus), collected recordings of 18 residents sharing their stories about local arts and culture highlights, and filled in a large map of our community with sticky notes containing locations and stories from participants.

We have created a short video that shows highlights of the Arts Hackathon and Salon event and demonstrates the prototype Arts Walking Tour app. Click on this link to view the video: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0Bz89CC9aYzX7Uk5Cb2UzSDFtNTQ/view?usp=sharing>.

Our Neighborhood

About 94,000 people live in Southeast Seattle, home to Columbia and Hillman Cities. For decades, this mosaic of communities has been among the most ethnically diverse region in the State. Seventy-one percent of our residents are nonwhite, and 40-53% are immigrants. Forty ethnic groups live in Southeast Seattle, and 59 different languages are spoken. Thirty percent of the population is under age 18. Southeast Seattle has the highest poverty rates and the greatest percentage of low-income residents within the City of Seattle. In certain parts of Southeast Seattle, the unemployment rate hovers at 16-20% -- about triple the current Seattle unemployment rate of 3.9%. One out of 5 residents live in poverty, and 1 in 3 children are poor. Sadly, because the demographics couldn't support arts spaces, Southeast Seattle has been largely ignored by the mainstream arts organizations. Yet lower property values and rents have attracted artists, artisans and creative entrepreneurs for decades. Our community enjoys one of the highest densities of artists in the city. The Creative Vitality Index for Southeast Seattle is 1.83, well above the national average of 1.0. (from "*Snapshot of the Arts in SE Seattle*," WESTAF © Creative Vitality™ Suite 2017). In 2014, there were 2,756 creative jobs in Southeast Seattle, including photographers, graphic designers, musicians, and writers (*ibid*). We hope that designation as an Arts & Cultural District will formally recognize and reward the creative contributions from this previously marginalized community.

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Columbia City has experienced rapid development and growth in the past decade. Columbia City is well known as a music destination, and is home to several longstanding arts venues. The Rainier Arts Center, formerly the Rainier Valley Cultural Center, sits at the northern entrance to Columbia City at the intersection of Alaska St and Rainier Ave S. A stately civic building, the Center has brought diverse performing arts to the community for 20 years. A few blocks south, the Columbia City Theater is celebrating its 97th birthday – it is one of the oldest vaudeville style theaters in the nation and played a major role in the Seattle Jazz boom in the 40's. The Royal Esquire Club and the Royal Room also host live music. The Columbia City Gallery shows and sells the work of its 30 member artists, as well as 65 guest artists and 85 artisans each year.

To the south, Hillman City has emerged as a hotbed of innovation and creativity. Rents in this neighborhood are still relatively low, so the community has seen an influx of artists and creative entrepreneurs. New cultural spaces like the Hillman City Collaboratory and the SEEDArts Studios have opened and become a resource for the creative community. The Black and Tan Hall, a music venue, is opening soon with a bold business model – it is cooperatively owned and operated as a for-profit business. Currently Hillman City only has a handful of arts spaces, with a disproportionately large number of resident artists. We envision a proliferation of arts spaces, artist services, and creative enterprises to serve them as the neighborhood continues to develop.

In the past, Columbia City and Hillman City have worked independently to market their distinct characteristics. Columbia City is a designated Historic District with a well-established business core; Hillman City prides itself as a quirky, funky, and innovative entrepreneurial strip. We anticipate that the physical gap between the two neighborhoods, referred to as the Rainier Avenue s-curves, will be completely redeveloped in the near future. In anticipation (and celebration) of this linkage, the neighborhoods wish to work together as an Arts & Cultural District. This district is the first step in bridging the gap between the two communities. We want to be proactive, and work towards the formation of new arts and cultural spaces to serve our many artists and cultural activists. The existing tools for Arts Districts and from the City's **CAP Report** will be critical. We, in partnership with the City, are committed to seeing that new development will incorporate the arts into their design, and will also provide new spaces for performances, exhibits, and resources for artists.

District Mission and Goals

The mission of the Columbia Hillman Arts & Cultural District is to celebrate and enhance the authentic and culturally diverse soul of the Columbia City and Hillman City neighborhoods through identification with, and the advancement of, arts and culture. We want to celebrate the

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historic contributions the arts have played in these communities, preserve and promote our current art spaces, and most importantly, proactively guide our future by ensuring that new art spaces are included in future developments. We recognize that designation can bring opportunity to artists & cultural spaces, but also to the myriad of cultures that allow Southeast Seattle to be such a great producer of arts & cultural experiences; this diversity must be maintained.

In furtherance of this mission, the Columbia Hillman Arts and Cultural District stakeholders are committed to:

- Activation of the Southeast Seattle creative economy;
- Retention and preservation of existing cultural spaces;
- Inclusion of new arts and cultural spaces in future development;
- Ensuring the availability of affordable commercial space for arts/cultural businesses and affordable live/work space for artists;
- Arts programs and projects with racial and social equity as a primary driver;
- Sustain and protect the cultural landscape that makes our neighborhoods unique;
- Development of increased youth engagement in the arts.

The Creative Placemaking Toolkit

We have identified the following components of the Creative Placemaking Toolkit as priorities:

District Identification: The district will be clearly identified through the use of public art, sidewalk kiosks, or pole banners. We would like to collaborate with local artists to design and fabricate small works of public art (signs, banners, kiosks) that will be placed throughout the neighborhoods to identify the district, with an emphasis on the north and south borders along Rainer Avenue (Alaska and Orcas respectively) and in the s-curves between the two neighborhoods.

Wayfinding: Our primary wayfinding project will be the development of the Arts Walking Tour, a digital app that identify arts spaces and entertainment options in our neighborhoods, and serve as a link between the two neighborhoods. Each cultural space in our district will have a sticker in the window that identifies it as a “member” of the Arts & Cultural District. Users of the app will be able to engage with content featuring locations in the District when they come upon markers, either by manually launching the app or by allowing their device's GPS feature to

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trigger the content. The app will also have the flexibility for the producers to easily add or remove content as necessary.

Pop-up Space Activation: We will work with Storefronts Seattle to activate vacant storefronts with art installations. This will provide opportunities for the numerous working artists in our community, and enhance our streetscape.

Implement ideas from the City's CAP Report to preserve and promote current assets: We will work with the city to implement ideas from the **CAP Report**. To promote and preserve our current assets, we would like to utilize concepts from the "Cultural Space Certification" list. We hope to maintain the character of the two neighborhoods, and hope the section titled, "Incentivize Cultural Uses in Older Buildings" will be of assistance.

Implement ideas for the City's CAP Report to incentivize future cultural space development: The **CAP Report** contains excellent suggestions in areas related to the creation of new cultural space. As the Rainier Ave S-curves continue to develop, many of the CAP Report tools will be useful, including Bonuses for Cultural Space (#4), Create Height Additions for Cultural Space Projects (#5), and all of the tools to facilitate the permitting process for cultural spaces.

Governance Structure

Stakeholders for the Columbia Hillman Arts & Cultural District have been meeting since February 2016. This process has been an incredible opportunity for us, as we have already increased the amount of collaboration between our arts spaces and artists, and established an equitable approach to planning.

The stakeholders include (1) owners, operators and representatives of arts/cultural spaces and organizations, (2) individual neighborhood artists of all types, and (3) other community members enthusiastic about and interested in supporting the arts and cultural district. Once we receive designation, our stakeholders will identify members to serve as an advisory council. Policies and procedures will be developed to guide the operations of the advisory council, which will oversee the direction and programs of the district. SEEDArts will provide administrative and fiscal agency support. SEEDArts is a 30 year-old program of SouthEast Effective Development; its stability, its commitment to the Arts & Cultural District, and its well established connections in the community will ensure proper administration and financial oversight.

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The Columbia Hillman Arts & Cultural District will celebrate the historic contribution of the arts in our community, preserve and promote current arts and cultural spaces, and work towards ensuring the future development of new arts and cultural spaces. We thank you for your consideration.

Signed,

Tarik Abdullah, Chef, Black & Tan Hall

Haimi Ayele, Community Arts Activist

Jennifer Bennett, Artist, Teacher, Black & Tan Hall

Debra Boucheignies, dbCreative Services Group, LLC

Sally Brucker, Igimo Arts Station

Heather Curran, Theater artist, Community Activist

Guy Davis, Musician, Columbia City Business Association

Chris Digangi, Media Artist

Julie Dillon, Community Arts Activist

Lori Duckstein, Artist

Betsy Fetherston, Columbia City Gallery

Kathy Fowells, SEEDArts

Francisca Garcia, Rainier Arts Center

Erik Hanson, Jazz Night School

Kate Harkins, Artist

Beau Hebert, Lotties Lounge

John Helmiere, The Collaboratory

Rodney Herold, Black and Tan Hall

James Hong, Vietnamese Friendship Association

Ben Hunter, Community Arts Create, Collaboratory, Black & Tan Hall, Musician

Lara Lavi, Columbia City Theater

Frank Martinez, SouthEast Effective Development

Tia Mathies, Royal Room

David McRae, Ark Lodge Cinema

Rob Mohn, Columbia City Business Improvement Area

Connie Ostrowski, The Makery

Ethan Pollack, Illustrator

Joan Robbins, Artist

Joe Seamons, Musician, Black and Tan Hall

Talia Silveri Wright, Community Arts Activist

Mia Stephenson, SEEDArts Studios

Matthew Stubbs, Hillman City Business Association

Barbara Earl Thomas, Artist

Mary Melinda Wellsandt, Artist

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The following is an additional list of people that have expressed support for the Columbia Hillman Arts & Cultural District and have participated in one or more of our meetings or events:

Sonia Lynn Abenojar	Gibran Hashimi	Emily Naftalin
Scott Amick	Whitney Hazzard	Brian Nichols
Sam Anderson	Beau Hebert	Amy Novo
Tonia Arehart	Heather Hitt	Miya Nqobile
Megan Arnaud	Jimmy James	Jeannie O'Brien
Laurie Becker	Rob Jaull	Karen O'Brien
Pat Bennett	Karin Kallander	Deeann Partlow
Douglas Berger	Wynona Karbo	DL Powers
Manole Bogdana	Shari Kaufman	Deedric Prince
Beliz Brother	Laureen Kelly	Melissa Purcell
Liz Brown	Pat Kelly	Kathy Quenzer
Sally Brucker Brucker	Julie Kerby	Janelle Quibuyen
Pat Burnett	Chrys Kim Kim	Aurelia Rael
Joan Cihar	Eliaichi Kimaro	Riz Rollins
Sara Colling	Bennett Kling	Crista Schneider
Caitlin Cotter	Tom Koontz	Beth Scott
Randy Cross	John Kramer	Jessica Scruggs
Charlie Cunniff	Genessa Krasnow	Ken Selander
Heather Curran	Jennifer Lapensee	Sincere Shiota
Andrea Davis	Annie Lewis	Mike Solvestig
Lauren Davis	Molly Magai	Art Stone
Liz Davis	Daniel James Maguire	Victor Straube
Carolynn Daye	Julie Maher	Sergio Talamoni
Carina Del Rosario	Danny Manier	Amanda Teicher
Stephanie Dickie	Bogdana Manole	Senait Tilahcen
Rick Duque	Lance Matteson	Justoh Wells
Kerri Eden	Ann McBurney	Warren Wilson
Dave Egan	Kim McCormick	Revel Wolf
Osa Elaiho	David McGraw	Virginia Wright
Karla Esquivel	Andrea Misiano	Charlie Yaris
Sandra Fleming	Sultan Mohamed	Linda Zahava
Katie Funderburk	Dave Montoure	Ali & Emily Zuberi
Rob Green	Annie Moorehouse	
Becca Hall	Monica Munro	