



Cultural Master Plan Executive Summary

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“How and why do arts, culture and heritage matter and what should be done to advance cultural development as an asset for the vitality, prosperity and livability of Bradenton?”

The purpose of Realize Bradenton was to engage citizens and leaders in this question. The idea to undertake cultural planning was sparked when the Bradenton Culture and Business Alliance and the Knight Foundation recommended merging downtown revitalization and cultural development strategies after the 2007 Downtown by Design planning process surfaced interest and possibilities.

The Realize Bradenton Cultural Plan process, from April, 2008 through March, 2009, involved extensive community engagement and research, including: key interviews, focus groups, public forums and hearings, a community survey, an economic impact study, market research, a cultural organization capacity assessment, comparable cities/ programs research and ongoing work with a steering committee and advisory groups to review findings and shape the Plan. Over 1,500 citizens and leaders participated in this comprehensive process. The result is the Realize Bradenton Cultural Master Plan, which encompasses a vision, analysis of challenges and opportunities, overarching recommendations, 66 strategies, implementation steps, outcomes and rationales for cultural development. The Plan is organized into an introduction, six topical chapters and a section on implementation first steps.

The following are key findings and strategies of Realize Bradenton — the big, “tipping point” ideas, that synergistically address the greatest opportunities during the first 6 – 12 months of implementation:

- Bradenton has arts, cultural and heritage assets which significantly contribute to its vitality, quality of life and ability to attract the enterprises and creative talent it needs to compete in the 21st century economy. Its nonprofit cultural organizations and venues are a strong economic engine in their own right. An Americans for the Arts economic impact study, commissioned for Realize Bradenton, indicates that spending by Manatee County organizations and their audiences in 2007 generated \$29.5 million in economic activity, 441 full-time equivalent jobs, \$9.2 million in household income to local residents, \$607,000 in tax revenue to local government and \$1,312,000 in tax revenue to state government¹.
- The economic impact study underscores the significant impact of cultural tourism. Of the \$17 million in event related spending by audiences in 2007 (restaurants, shopping, parking, hotels, etc.), almost \$9 million was by nonresident attendees, who spend, on average, \$54.18 apiece, compared to \$21.36 by resident attendees. **The Realize Bradenton Plan suggests further investment in cultural tourism marketing, packaging and infrastructure such as a website/calendar of events and ongoing support**

¹ *Arts & Economic Prosperity III: the Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Cultural Organizations and their Audiences in Manatee County*; Americans for the Arts Study, commissioned for Realize Bradenton, 2009. The complete national study analyzed economic impact data from 156 communities representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

for the downtown cultural anchors which help to draw tourists to Manatee County and increase their stays and spending. A key strategy is to secure a dedicated portion of the proposed County bed tax for these purposes. Bed tax is one of the most commonly earmarked public revenue sources for supporting arts, culture and heritage and is utilized by dozens of Florida counties and hundreds of communities across the country.

- Area residents value arts, culture, and heritage opportunities. On the community survey², the 1,231 respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning "not at all" and 10 meaning "very much," "how important is public support for arts, culture, and heritage?" Over 90% rated the importance as 6 or better; almost 80% rated the importance 8 or better and over 50% rated it as 10.
- Bradenton's downtown retains its historic core and sense of place, and is a regional cultural, government and commercial center. Arts, culture and heritage venues and programs add immeasurably to the City's identity and vitality – and along with increased retail, restaurants, offices and housing, are critical to its success as an attractive and vibrant place to live, work, visit and play. **Downtown revitalization is a major theme and goal of the Realize Bradenton Plan. The plan recommends establishing at least one new signature cultural event – a Singing River Festival, collaborative cultural programming encompassing numerous downtown organizations, integrating more cultural elements into existing events, drawing more people to Village of the Arts events, initiating public art projects, enhanced wayfinding and promoting awareness and access to downtown cultural activities. Also critical to a culturally vital downtown is completion of the Manatee Players facility and resolution of the ArtCenter's location as an anchor institution, downtown.**
- Consumer demand for the arts is strong in Manatee County. Market research for Realize Bradenton indicates that 40% of County residents are "culturally inclined" but are currently not participating at the rates expected. Analysis of Manatee County households affiliated with the major downtown cultural institutions indicates only 6% "penetration into all County households."³ Results of the Realize Bradenton Community Survey⁴, point to high interest in cultural activities, but low awareness of opportunities. More than 70% of the 1,231 survey respondents indicated that better awareness would have high impact on increasing their participation. **Enhanced and joint marketing initiatives, already underway, will increase participation in cultural activity and, thereby**

² Realize Bradenton Community Survey Report, based on responses from 1,231 residents. January 2009; Decision Support Partners, Inc.; Surale Phillips; in partnership with Creative Planning, Inc.: Bill Bulick.

³ Market Study Report, August 2008; Decision Support Partners, Inc.; Surale Phillips; Research conducted for the Realize Bradenton Cultural Master Plan.

⁴ Realize Bradenton Community Survey Report, based on responses from 1,231 residents. January 2009; Decision Support Partners, Inc.; Surale Phillips; in partnership with Creative Planning, Inc.: Bill Bulick.

strengthen the revenue base for cultural organizations – and enhance their vitalizing and economic stimulus role for downtown and the region.

- There is pent-up interest in jumpstarting a public art program in Bradenton because citizens and leaders are aware of its contribution to community identity and sense of place from their experience in other communities. The Downtown Development Authority is ready to fund some initial projects as part of its strategy to vitalize and animate downtown. **Realize Bradenton recommends that the public art task force remain active to steward first projects, establish a permanent Public Art Board, and explore policy options to encourage integration of public art into both private and public development.**
- Cultural vitality – and its economic and community impacts -- cannot occur without individual artists and a climate that supports their ability to create, connect to the community and sell their work. The Village of the Arts is a unique and vitalizing asset for Bradenton and the region – 47% of community survey respondents had attended a Village event in the last year⁵. Façade improvement grants, zoning changes, signage and other support have been provided by the City and DDA in order to attract and retain artists in an affordable enclave. But the reality is that few, if any, artists living in the Village make their full-time living from their art. **Realize Bradenton recommends that the coordinating organization, the Artists Guild of Manatee County, must be strengthened so that it can increase Village events, traffic, collaborations with other cultural organizations and sales – and ultimately open and run a Welcome Center Gallery as a highly visible center for promotion and sales.**
- Stable, effective organizations that develop and use resources wisely in serving the community are another backbone of successful cultural development. Many planning participants noted the lack of collaboration among organizations – before planning. **The Realize Bradenton Organizational Capacity Assessment⁶ identified several areas for improvement among downtown cultural organizations: marketing, collaborations and partnerships, board development and fundraising. The Community Foundation of Sarasota County Nonprofit Resource Center has expressed interest in providing training and workshops in these areas. The planning process itself has already sparked collaborative projects, joint marketing efforts, and has surfaced potential new board leadership.**
- Private philanthropic support to cultural organizations is startlingly low in Manatee County compared to Sarasota County and national averages. Data provided by the Sarasota Community Foundation for FY 2006 indicate that Sarasota has triple the number of foundations (including

⁵ Realize Bradenton Community Survey Report, January 2009; Decision Support Partners, Inc.; Surale Phillips; in partnership with Creative Planning, Inc.: Bill Bulick.

⁶ Realize Bradenton Organizational Capacity Assessment Report, December, 2008; Decision Support Partners, Inc.; Surale Phillips; in partnership with Creative Planning, Inc.: Bill Bulick.

many family foundations) as Manatee County and that they gave almost five times as much -- \$54,311,890 compared with \$11,028,258. **It is critical that cultural and civic leaders promote awareness of the role and value of arts, cultural and heritage assets as background for specific efforts to increase fundraising effectiveness and launch collaborative initiatives.**

- Arts education and youth programming were not prominent topics in the Realize Bradenton process – until the youth who are involved in the process spoke up to remind adults that, thinking long term, youth are our future – the creative talent who will develop the enterprise, jobs and wealth of our future economy, the future artists who will make our communities more vital and prosperous, and the future audiences and patrons of culture. **Realize Bradenton recommends further inventorying and assessment of in-school and out-of-school cultural learning activities as a basis for developing “systemic” initiatives to promote increased access to cultural education for all youth in Manatee County, and increased opportunities to showcase youth talent in existing and new cultural events.**

The Realize Bradenton Cultural Plan process was specifically designed to identify, engage, inspire and motivate the leadership needed to move cultural development forward. Several dozen leaders have come forward during the process and many are already at work on implementing strategies, as outlined above.

The Realize Bradenton Cultural Plan identifies three critical leadership groups that must work together on the short and long term to achieve the vision and outcomes of the Plan:

- **Realize Bradenton Implementation Coalition:** made up of steering committee members and additional leaders who emerged during the process, this group will communicate the Plan to the community and seek endorsements, additional advocates and resources for implementation. They will oversee implementation, hosts periodic forums for community input and report on progress. Individual members will lead and work on specific initiatives, including downtown cultural events and promotion, joint marketing and public art, via working subcommittees. This group should quickly evolve into a permanent, 501 c 3 nonprofit cultural advocacy alliance that will continue to work actively on behalf of downtown cultural revitalization.
- **Downtown Development Authority:** will provide crucial funding and staff support to immediately launch major initiatives, including downtown cultural events and promotion, infrastructure improvements and signage, public art projects and further support for the Village of the Arts.
- **Arts Council of Manatee County:** Realize Bradenton recommends reformulating and building the capacity of the board and staff to enable the Arts Council to fulfill critical “umbrella cultural agency” roles. Key roles include: information services, resource development and

allocation, technical assistance and coordination of joint initiatives in marketing, fund-raising, cultural tourism, and arts education.

Bradenton's arts, culture and heritage venues, programs and activities are significant assets which contribute to its identity and vitality, its economy, the success of its downtown and the quality-of-life for residents. They are worth preserving -- and enhancing them will yield a rich return on investment. The Realize Bradenton Cultural Master Plan provides clear strategies to fully exploit the potential for cultural development by building upon existing programs, increasing private and public support, and continuing to nurture and tap the collaborative spirit and leadership that have characterized the planning process.

"We need to get people to grasp how to use arts as an economic engine. It will improve neighborhoods and attract quality businesses. From an economic development standpoint – people will go where they want to live, companies will start up where their employees want to live. Arts and culture play a big role in the quality of life that is sought".

⁷ Emblematic quote from a key interview participant