



Los Alamos Creative District A Designated New Mexico Arts & Culture District

In response to an application developed by Los Alamos MainStreet, the State of New Mexico designated a New Mexico Arts & Culture District (one of five in the State) in downtown Los Alamos in August 2008.

Overview

The Los Alamos Creative District will focus on sharing the unique *creative* heritage of Los Alamos. Think of our ACD as a *creative culture district*, anchored at its eastern end by the Bradbury Science Museum and at its western end by our historical district including Fuller Lodge, the Historical Museum, the Art Center at Fuller Lodge, and other cultural institutions. Our story of world-changing scientific and technology creativity is told at the Bradbury Museum and the Historical Museum. Fuller Lodge has long served as a cultural center in our community musical performances, lectures, art and craft fairs, and the activities of the Art Center, a gallery and fine arts education center all take place at Fuller Lodge and its lawn. Fuller Lodge is an historic structure of considerable architectural significance that resides in the center of the historical district assets of Ashley Pond and Bathtub Row. The commercial area connecting the two anchoring areas is the acknowledged pedestrian core of the MainStreet district. Parades, festivals, the summer concert series, and pedestrian oriented retail activities are concentrated in this area.

The development of the Los Alamos Creative District will serve as a catalyst for supporting and developing service, restaurant, retail and hospitality businesses within the proposed district. We estimate that some 300,000 visitors and tourists come to the Los Alamos area each year and the Lodger Tax Board is working to retain and increase that number. These visitors and tourists bring considerable benefit to the community in the form of business activity for merchants, restaurants, and lodging establishments. Visitors and tourists staying at hotels generate an estimated \$470,000 in local GRT and \$250,000 in lodger tax obligations annually. Day visitors generate about \$100,000 in local GRT for each \$10 in average expenditures. However, we are not currently taking full advantage of the market opportunities presented by visitors and tourists.

The benefits that our community can derive from visitation/tourism go beyond just the direct economic effects. Improvements for visitors and tourists can also improve quality of life for current residents and make our community a more attractive place to recruit and retain workers for the Lab and other employers as well.

Our preliminary work has identified three general alternatives for increasing the economic benefit of visitation and tourism: 1) Promoting increased day visitors and increased expenditures by day visitors; 2) Increasing lodging utilization; and 3) Further development/and packaging of attractions. Within each of these strategy alternatives, there are a number of general opportunities for capturing economic benefits from visitation/tourism: hotel/lodger sales, retail sales, restaurant sales, service sales, attraction admissions, and corresponding indirect economic benefits from all of these activities.

The Los Alamos Creative District will improve our community's capacity for economic benefit from visitation/tourism by creating a stronger, more focused argument for visiting and spending time in our downtown. Creating an environment that locals increasingly visit "just for fun," that tourists and visitors to the region (particularly those interested in cultural and heritage tourism) have on their radar as a reason to spend additional time in Los Alamos, and that provides additional impetus to groups and tours to spend more time here will increase transactional opportunities for businesses and attractions both within the district as well as in the broader community. At the same time, the District will work to utilize the provisions of the NM Arts & Cultural District Act to provide assistance and incentives to development of businesses and activities that will increase the economic potential and success of the district.

Existing Cultural Assets

Although they have not been developed with the concept of the ACD as the driver, there are many established and emerging events and activities within or adjacent to the ACD to build upon including:

- Museums
- Historic district
- Historic walking tour
- Art Center at Fuller Lodge (gallery and workshops)
- Art Fairs
- MainStreet events (Halloweekend, Winterfest, Next Big Idea Festival, Fair & Rodeo Parade, small events)
- Chamberfest
- Los Alamos Little Theater
- NM Dance Theater
- Library gallery and series
- Fuller Lodge events (performance, lecture, etc.)
- Summer concert series
- Public art

- Proposed Manhattan Project National Park unit

In addition, we would look for opportunities to assist the broader range of “creative culture” programs and activities throughout the community. For example, the Los Alamos Concert Association (LACA) and other groups produce excellent performances at our high school auditorium which is not located downtown. LACA has a long history of bringing emerging and renowned classical music performers to our State and community. The ACD will look to connect with such groups and activities for mutual benefit.

Targeted Customer

The most recent visitor market analysis performed by the Los Alamos Meeting & Visitor Bureau identified three target market segments that are relevant to the ACD. The targeted customer of the ACD will include the general visitor target market segments for the community as a whole. Effective development of the ACD will improve the “product” that can be offered to match up to the needs and desires of these segments. Excerpts:

Business visitors represent most of the overnight stays in Los Alamos. They are estimated to account for 85-90% of overnight stays at local lodging establishments. Business visitors are looking for convenient, comfortable, quality lodging and services. Perceptions about the availability of quality of hotel rooms and lack of dining options after 7 PM are considered to be issues that discourage business visitors from staying in Los Alamos. Business visitors are quite often repeat visitors and like to build relationships and some level of personal connections with the places they visit. Very frequent business visitors like to be recognized and treated as “regulars”. There is some potential for encouraging business visitors to stay over, bring spouse/family along on visits, or return for pleasure travel. The business visitor segment is dependent on the vitality of external business opportunities with local businesses, particularly the Laboratory.

Individual tourists are looking for interesting, welcoming experiences and have often already committed themselves to an itinerary and base of stay for their visit prior to their arrival in NNM and Los Alamos. To the extent that visitors come back to NNM, there is an opportunity to impress them and influence them to base their next visit at Los Alamos. The individual tourism segment is dependent on overall economic conditions and disposable income for pleasure travel. Individual tourists often learn about or become aware of the opportunity to visit Los Alamos once they arrive at their hotel in Santa Fe or Albuquerque through visitor guides, tourism brochures, or word of mouth. Distribution of the visitor guide or other informational materials, ads in destination visitor guides, and word of mouth are the most likely prompts for a day visit to Los Alamos.

A significant number of tourism visitors to Los Alamos are brought here as members of tours. In such cases, the tour operator becomes the primary customer. Relationships should be developed and services should be targeted to relevant tour operators if we want Los Alamos to be more than a "drive-by". Tour operators are looking for additions to tour itineraries that "fit" and that will offer interesting experience for their clients. To the extent that adjunct services are available at reasonable rates for servicing the tour (e.g. food, interesting shopping, "local color"), the tour operator has additional options to work with. The tour operator segment is dependent on demand for tours and can be best accessed by building relationships with tour operators and reputation and supporting services for servicing them.

Local market customers will remain a key segment. The existence of our creative culture is a direct result of strong local constituencies and patronage. For some, if not most of the cultural organizations that will collaborate in development of the ACD, their primary constituency of focus will remain local. The museums in particular will have a broader agenda of promoting cultural tourism and a non-local customer base.

Although the specifics of the marketing approach to reach the targeted customers are yet to be characterized, a marketing effort that integrates with the community's overall visitor and tourism marketing approach, internal community marketing, and some level of effort specific to the ACD is anticipated.

Cultural and Heritage Tourism

The heritage of the Manhattan Project and the Los Alamos role remain a compelling and controversial part of world history. A reason for visiting Los Alamos that is frequently cited by respondents to our visitor surveys is "history." From this starting place, the visitor to downtown Los Alamos is often surprised to discover the broad range of creative work that has been and continues to be performed in Los Alamos, in both scientific and artistic endeavors. The cultural assets of the proposed ACD provide the basis for engaging the visitor to tell this story.

Cultural and heritage tourism plays a strong role in visits to nearby attractions such as Bandelier National Monument (Native American), Valles Caldera (ranch and native), and Santa Fe (fine arts, history). We have the opportunity to tap into visitors to these attractions who are interested in cultural stories by giving them a view into a different kind of story.

Signature Event

A requirement of every NM Arts & Culture District is the development of a "signature event" for the district. Los Alamos MainStreet initiated a new event in 2008 that we believe offers significant potential as the signature event for the proposed ACD. The event, called "The Next Big Idea: Festival of Discovery,

Invention, and Innovation,” celebrates Los Alamos’ unique history (and future) as a place of discovery and innovation. This theme matches well with the Los Alamos Creative District concept. The vision for this event is to develop it as a festival focused on our special interest in discovery, creativity, and innovation that will draw participants and attendees from throughout New Mexico and surrounding states.

The inaugural event in July 2008 featured hands-on creative activities for youth facilitated by the Bradbury Science Museum, the National Atomic Museum, the Santa Fe Children's Museum, Explora, and others as well as an inventor/innovator showcase that drew exhibitors from around the state, musical performances, and more. A popular component of the festival was a performance by Mass Ensemble, an innovative performance group featuring dance, light, one-of-a-kind musical instruments, and original musical compositions.

The second year of the event drew about twice as many exhibitors and twice as many attendees. A Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Student Day was an added feature on the day prior to the festival day. STEM Student Day invited junior and senior high schools students (and families) from around New Mexico to a day of structured educational activities and mini-field trips. About sixty students from throughout New Mexico participated. Local student participation was light and only about 25% of the students stayed overnight for the festival day.

The Arts Council, the County, the Bradbury Museum, and LANL participated along with MainStreet in the organizing committee for Next Big Idea in its first two years.

Initiating the Los Alamos Creative District

At its inception, the Los Alamos Creative District ACD is a project of Los Alamos MainStreet. LACDC is staffing the start-up of the district. A start-up steering committee has been formed composed of representatives from Los Alamos Commerce & Development Corporation (LACDC), the Los Alamos Arts Council, Los Alamos Historical Society, the Art Center at Fuller Lodge, Los Alamos County (library, Art in Public Places, Historical District Advisory Board), Bradbury Science Museum, and interested local businesses. LACDC encompasses the operations of the Los Alamos Chamber of Commerce, the UNM-LA Small Business Development Center, Los Alamos MainStreet, and the Los Alamos Meeting & Visitor Bureau so the interests of those organizations will be included in the start-up steering committee through LACDC participation.

The charter of the steering committee is to develop, during 2010, a plan for the district and to champion adoption of the plan as a supporting plan to the downtown plan. The anticipated outline for the plan:

- Introduction

- Overview
- Vision
- Mission
- Objectives
- Strategies
- Action Plans
- Appendices
 - Cultural Assets Map
 - Resource Team Report
 - UNM-BBER Assets Inventory
 - Other

Once adopted, the continuing work of the steering committee will be to champion implementation of action plans.

The Steering Committee will be asked to fully consider and establish the approach that will be used to monitor the success of the Los Alamos Creative District. Benchmarks and performance measures to be considered include (but are not limited to):

- growth in receipts for performance spaces and cultural institutions,
- increased number of arts related businesses,
- progress on achieving “10/10/10” goal (increase in arts, retail, dining & treat, and hospitality businesses in the district and in evening/weekend availability)
- financial investment in the district (public and private)
- attendance trends at museums
- level of partner participation in ACD events (numbers, resources)
- trends in estimated attendance at events within the ACD

Prospective Benefits of the New Mexico Arts & Cultural District Designation

A key reason for forming the District is to seek to utilize the provisions of the NM Arts & Cultural District Act to provide assistance and incentives to development of businesses and activities that will increase the economic potential and success of the district.

Based on review of the Act and discussions with NM MainStreet representatives about the intent of the Act, we believe that the following potential benefits may be the most important in our environment:

- Funding to support planning efforts. Los Alamos MainStreet was awarded a planning grant in 2009 to support 2010 planning efforts. It is unclear whether the State will be in a position to follow through with funding the grant given current State financial difficulties.
- Use of Local Economic Development Act (LEDA) provisions within the Arts & Cultural district to implement district goals. We want to explore how these provisions could enable support for businesses and arts & cultural

organizations that would assist in implementing the district. We will evaluate establishing goals for the number of retail/hospitality establishments that exist in the ACD and their hours of operation. An idea we will explore is establishing a 10/10/10 goal to address needed critical concentrations of activities – this goal would call for having 10 retail businesses (arts, consumer goods/services), 10 dining or treat (i.e. coffee, tea, etc.) businesses, and 10 of these 20 that are consistently open evenings and weekends. We will propose that businesses and arts & cultural organizations that will help to implement the district goals would be eligible for LEDA assistance.

- Another idea we have is to consider providing support by way of grants, lease guarantees, and or loans to supplement conventional sources of financing. The source of such supplemental financing could be LEDA funding from the local government, private funding from organizations interested in supporting the goals of the district, or a combination.
- Potential investment tax credits (doubling of New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (HPD) Federal Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credits and New Mexico Historic Property Tax Credit)
- Evaluation of access to NM Finance Authority and other state funding sources that may be applicable to projects within the district.
- Continuing pursuit of MainStreet capital outlay funds for implementing projects within the district.
- Use of technical and marketing resources and assistance that are available to State designated ACD's from State agencies and other partners including NM MainStreet, NM Department of Cultural Affairs, NM Department of Tourism, and the Museum of NM Foundation. As part of the ACD process, a resource team visit and report is anticipated during 2010.
- Collaboration with NM Department of Tourism and NM Arts Commission marketing efforts and programs.
- Potential marketing collaborations with other NM Arts & Cultural Districts