



**CULTURAL ACTION PLAN
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Mary Berryman Agard & Associates
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Background

Salisbury has long recognized the economic and social potential of a strong arts and cultural community. In 2007, the City of Salisbury formally adopted the goal of creating a cultural action plan to strengthen and unify Salisbury's cultural resources. The objective was to identify the key components of Salisbury's cultural landscape and build support for continued growth and sustainability for arts and cultural activities. In order to advance this goal, the city contracted with Mary Berryman Agard & Associates to conduct a cultural action planning process. This document is the culmination of that effort. The consultant expresses her gratitude to the citizens, artists and cultural workers, elected officials, and city staff members who made this study possible.

The General Status of Arts and Culture in Salisbury

Overall, the community presents as being rich in resources and citizen support while having outgrown its historic, informal approach to management of those resources. It is a time for reorganizing the community's stewardship systems for arts and cultural development, for putting mechanisms in place to stabilize and protect existing resources, and for linking arts and cultural resources to key economic, neighborhood development, educational, and social goals of the broader community. Certainly, tremendous opportunity exists.

Community Strengths

Salisbury is a city that is proud of its tradition of valuing arts and cultural resources, and it has every right to be so. The community is characterized by

- *High levels of arts and cultural activity;*
- *A strong commitment to historic preservation;*
- *Citizens that place high value on arts education;*
- *A strong local tradition of civic volunteerism;*
- *A growing, strong population of professional and amateur artists drawn from many disciplines and including many individuals with a high degree of commitment to local cultural development and the emergence of natural artist-leaders;*
- *A group of very supportive local patrons and foundations;*
- *A history of municipal participation in supporting arts organizations;*
- *An exemplary municipal comprehensive plan that demonstrates sensitivity to aesthetic and cultural issues, and establishes an informed context for arts and cultural development;*
- *An emerging downtown public art program with a sound procedural approach;*

- *Public and private development strategies and a local tourism development authority that see the value of artists, galleries, clubs, and studios in reclaiming the Railwalk and downtown areas and in promoting retail trade downtown among both residents and day-trippers;*
- *The presence of exciting and emerging local models for arts-based commerce and experience through adaptive reuse, including the EastSquare ArtWorks, the Rowan Arts Council space, Piedmont Players' Family Theatre, and the Looking Glass Artist Collective;*
- *Higher educational institutions with a commitment to arts programming including a growing attention to the visual arts at Rowan-Cabarrus Community College, a growing contemporary music program at Catawba College, and a long tradition of music, music education, and theatre arts instruction at Livingstone College;*
- *A wide variety of faith-based arts and cultural programs including music ministries, summer camps with arts components, and inter-congregational music programs;*
- *Stable, mature, professionally managed arts and cultural organizations and a complimentary community of established volunteer-led arts organizations;*
- *A local newspaper, the Salisbury Post, with a strong commitment to coverage of local and regional arts and cultural activities and cultural workers;*
- *A downtown development entity, Downtown Salisbury Inc., with an enlightened view of the role of the arts and culture in downtown success and concomitant good relations with many artists and arts and cultural organizations; and*
- *A public library with an active engagement with the performing arts, offering programs in many disciplines and for all ages.*

Community Weaknesses

Those areas in which Salisbury's arts and cultural development shows weakness generally relate to the community's having reached a point in its growth and development in which traditional approaches have been outgrown. Areas of weakness are triggered by changing demographics, shifting roles among community entities, the emergence of new community social and economic development goals, growing constraints on public school funding, and the advent of new approaches to communication and marketing. Weakness that could constrain the sustainability and enhancement of arts and cultural resources include the **absence of**

- *An entity charged with comprehensive cultural planning, coordination, and promotion of arts and cultural development;*
- *A sufficient pool of public and private dollars supporting the ongoing, everyday operational expenses of arts and cultural organizations;*
- *A regular way for arts and cultural organizations' leaders to engage in dialog, plan cooperative programs, identify shared resources and solutions, and receive training and technical assistance;*

- *Sufficient diversity (by age, ethnicity, economic status, etc.) in the leadership and programming of local arts and cultural organizations in general;*
- *A mechanism to advance arts education practice and programming at the community level including services in schools and at the neighborhood level;*
- *A forward-looking approach to anticipated generational and structural changes in the local philanthropic system that has supported such progress in Salisbury's cultural community to date;*
- *An aggressive approach to making certain physical infrastructure needs of importance to the local cultural economy and experience;*
- *Programming around certain art forms and genres of interest to the public;*
- *A sufficient number of special, community-wide events such as regional festivals;*
- *Clear and easily accessible methods of engaging municipal support in indemnifying and hosting special outdoor events such as festivals;*
- *A mechanism to engage the artist community in reclaiming blighted neighborhoods outside the downtown;*
- *Effective, regional arts and cultural marketing opportunities across all genres;*
- *Live commercial and non-commercial performing arts venues, especially clubs in the downtown area; and*
- *Artists' professional development and technical assistance resources.*

These strengths and weaknesses form the basis for the Cultural Action Plan, which is designed to protect what is working well, to provide for continuing advances in the quality and variety of arts and cultural activities in the community, and to engage arts and cultural resources in accomplishing key community agendas including educational attainment, neighborhood reclamation, downtown development, local branding, positive youth development, and social connectivity.

Goals and Strategies at a Glance

The Salisbury Cultural Action Plan establishes four goals and a series of supporting strategies for attaining those goals. Generally speaking, the goals call on the City of Salisbury to assume a new and formalized role in the stewardship of arts and cultural planning and development, to manage a portfolio of public investments in arts and cultural organizations and services, to support emerging and volunteer arts and cultural organizations, to expand the public art program, and to build related infrastructure as an on-going part of its overall physical development strategy.

The plan relies on local artists, cultural workers, arts and cultural organizations, and volunteers to participate as active players in advancing downtown and economic development, the provision of arts education, the growth and development of new arts and

cultural organizations and activities, and the creation of mutually beneficial systems of art making and marketing.

It calls upon the Rowan Convention and Visitors Bureau to assume a leadership role in enhancing arts and cultural marketing, especially as it pertains to tourism development.

The plan envisions local foundations continuing their generous role in sustaining arts and culture, and suggests they consider programs of operating support, increased communication with arts and cultural organizations, and participation in arts education and local leadership development.

It challenges Downtown Salisbury, Inc. to expand into the role of major festival producer and smaller festival support service, and to explore the value of street artists in defining downtown Salisbury.

The plan asks the Rowan Chamber of Commerce to enhance its Leadership Rowan program by including content on arts and cultural stewardship in particular, and to assist arts and cultural organizations in finding trained, energized trustees.

It suggests several methods for securing resources to implement its strategies including a municipal “penny for the arts” dedicated revenue stream; increasing the local occupancy tax from 3-6%; seeking state, federal, and foundation grants; and adopting a formal percent for art ordinance dedicating a fix percentage of municipal capital expenditures to public art installations and programs.

The full plan provides a detailed discussion of methodology and findings and provides rationales and detailed implementation approaches for each recommendation. Below, the plan’s goals and strategies are presented in summary form.

Goal I Create a meaningful system of community-wide, ongoing cultural stewardship.

- A. Create a municipal arts and cultural function.**
- B. Increase municipal support for arts and culture.**
- C. Advance philanthropic stewardship for arts and culture.**
- D. Clarify the roles of allied entities in supporting arts and cultural development.**

Goal II Make Salisbury a regional center for arts and cultural commerce and experience by complementing its exceptional commitment to historic preservation with a parallel commitment to contemporary expression.

- A. Address the need for general operating support.
- B. Support the growth and development of new and emerging arts and cultural activities in both the commercial and the nonprofit sectors.
- C. Enliven the arts market.
- D. Invest in cultural infrastructure.
- E. Create an ongoing capacity for effective arts and cultural marketing.

Goal III Utilize arts and cultural activities to strengthen neighborhoods both physically and socially.

- A. Utilize artists' housing incentives to reverse neighborhood decline.
- B. Expand the public art program.
- C. Provide neighborhood-based arts experiences.

Goal IV Make high-quality, diverse, and accessible arts education a community calling card.

- A. Establish a mechanism for broad-based multi-stakeholder communication and planning for community-wide approaches to arts in education.
- B. Create an accurate directory of available local arts in education programs and resources.
- C. Implement a community-wide system of arts and cultural education.
- D. Utilize strength in school/arts and culture community partnerships to improve the community's competitive position in the regional real estate market.

Conclusion

This plan has been developed based on the ideas of many Salisbury residents, ranging from young children to professional artists and cultural administrators. It has taken into consideration the views of elected officials, foundation trustees, local business leaders, arts and cultural consumers, parents, educators, community volunteers, neighborhood leaders, faith community leaders, civil servants, amateur and professional artists and historians, developers, and members of the press. Guided by a broadly constituted Cultural Action Plan Steering Committee and supported by many volunteers via the Salisbury's Got Talent effort, this plan is truly Salisbury's child.

Implementation of this plan can help Salisbury achieve a more socially cohesive community, improve its students academic attainment and elevate the reputation and accomplishment of its schools, power the revitalization of the downtown and the tourism industry, and forge a future in which arts and cultural experiences and opportunities become hallmarks of community identity and engines of civic endeavor.

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This plan has been undertaken by

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