

EAST END DISTRICT

CULTURAL ARTS STRATEGIC PLAN



The East End Cultural Arts Strategic Plan is the culmination of numerous bright, dedicated and passionate community and stakeholder voices. These individuals gathered with us over many hours to share their observations, visions and aspirations for the East End's cultural future. We are enormously grateful to all who participated in the planning for this project.

We appreciate greatly the multiple focus group participants who gave significant time to this project:

- Melissa Richardson Banks, Photographer
- Sylvia Blanco, Artist
- Adam Castañeda, Dancer, Executive and Artistic Director, Pilot Dance Project
- Marissa Castillo, Marketing and Communications, TEATRX
- Laura Lopez Cano, Artist
- Ronnie Cabrera-Moreno, Artist
- Michael Healey, Art Teacher, YES Prep Public Schools
- Melinda Hernandez, Songwriter and Lead Vocalist, Sister Sister
- Daniel Hinojosa, General Manager, Harris County General Store and Harris County Exposition and Fair
- Jessica Hulsey, Community Advocate and Historian
- Angel Quesada, Artist, artkungfu
- Elia Quiles, Public Art Facilitator, Entrepreneur, UP Art Studio
- Maria de Lourdes Remond, Community Engagement Manager, MFAH
- Alejandro "Alex" Roman (aka Donkeeboy), Artist and Hip-Hop Instructor
- Marissa Saenz, Owner, Rukaz Cultura
- Y.E. Torres (aka ms. YET), Performance Artist and Instructor
- Benito Vasquez, Artistic and Managing Director, TEATRX
- Roland von Kurnatowski, President, TX/RX Labs

Our gratitude is extended to those who participated in our Artist Advisory Groups:

- Adam Castañeda, Dancer, Executive and Artistic Director, Pilot Dance Project
- Marissa Castillo – Marketing and Communications, TEATRX
- Claire Drennan, Fiber Artist and Designer
- Daniel Garcia-Prats, Co-Founder, Director of Operations, Finca Tres Robles
- Michael Healey, Art Teacher, YES Prep Public Schools

- Melinda Hernandez, Songwriter and Lead Vocalist, Sister Sister
- Jessica Kreutter, Artist, Box 13 ArtSpace
- Mollie Miller, Executive Director, Dance Source Houston
- Lizbeth Ortiz, Art Director and Artist, East End Studio Gallery
- Angel Quesada, Artist, artkungfu
- Marissa Saenz, Owner, Rukaz Cultura
- Henry Sanchez, Founder and Director, L.O.C.C.A.
- Y.E. Torres (aka ms. YET), Performance Artist and Instructor
- Benito Vasquez, Artistic and Managing Director, TEATRX

Our sincere thanks to our stakeholder interviewees:

- Bobby Bacon, Artist, Capitol Street Gallery
- Diane Barber, former Director, East End Foundation
- Jonathan Brinsden, CEO, Midway Companies
- Frances Castaneda Dyess, President, East End Chamber of Commerce
- Theresa Escobedo, Civic Art Administrator, Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs, Multidisciplinary Artist
- Karen Farber, VP of External Affairs, Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- Carolyn Casey Figueroa, Aerosol Warfare, HUE Festival
- Bolivar Fraga, Community Engagement Developer, BakerRipley
- GONZO247, Multidisciplinary Artist, Aerosol Warfare
- Yeiry Guevara, Grants Manager, Houston Arts Alliance
- Domenic Laurenzo, President, El Tiempo Cantina and Board Member, East End District
- Emily Link, Member Artists and President, Box 13 ArtSpace
- Alex Luster, Co-Founder and Owner, The Storyhive
- Joe Meppelink, Principal, Metalab; Board Chair, East End District
- Christina Morales, State Representative, District 145; President, CEO, Funeral Director, Morales Funeral Home
- Marjorie Peña, Community Developer, BakerRipley and Board Member, East End District
- Jesse Rodriguez, Artist and Community Advocate, Magnolia Grown Art Gallery

- Rich Rodriguez, Founder and President, El Solo Consulting; Community Advocate, Magnolia Grown Art Gallery
- José Solis, Project Manager, Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- Andrew Vrana, Principal, Metalab
- Christine West, Cultural Programs Manager, Houston First Corporation
- Karen Wolfe, Grants & Nonprofits Division, Harris County Precinct 2; Executive Director, Precinct2gether

Our appreciation extends to Michael Healey for organizing and facilitating our Youth Advisory Group:

- Chrissy Figueroa, East End Parent; High School College Counselor
- Hermilo Garcia, Jr., Middle School Student, YES Prep East End and East End Resident
- Xitlali Sandoval, High School Graduate, YES Prep East End
- Eduardo Sandoval, High School Graduate, East End Resident
- Mayerli Madrigal, High School Graduate, YES Prep

Photography and Rendered Image Contributors:

- Trish Badger Photography
- Buffalo Bayou Partnership and Michael Van Vaulkenberg Associates
- East End District Archives
- GONZO247, Multidisciplinary Artist, Aerosol Warfare
- Michael Healey, Art Teacher, YES Prep Public Schools
- Dan Joyce, Photographer and Director of Public Affairs, East End District
- Midway Companies
- Ripley House Archives
- Houston Public Libraries Archives
- Anthony Rathbun, courtesy of Buffalo Bayou Partnership
- Jesse Rodriguez, Artist and Community Advocate, Magnolia Grown Art Gallery

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- East End District Administration
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- Pooja Salhotra, Freelance Writer, "About the East End District"
- Jose Monterrosa, Plan Translation
- Weingarten Art Group, Plan Administrator

COVER: East End Mural, Weingarten Art Group

PREVIOUS PAGES: East End Mural, Trish Badger



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THROUGH
HOUSTON ARTS ALLIANCE



Dear Friends,

We are elated to present a community-based strategic plan for the East End Houston Cultural District. Our Cultural District is fortunate to have many expressions of art throughout neighborhoods across the East End including Second Ward, Magnolia Park, and Lawndale.

Since the designation in 2014, the presence of art has expanded throughout neighborhoods in the Greater East End community. What started as passion for representation and expression has grown into one of the largest collections of outdoor murals in the city. We also boast original music and dance that is as much a part of Houston's history as the story of the Allen Brothers.

We initiated the Plan after input from friends, neighbors, and artists who encouraged us to present an honest assessment of our position today and our strategy going forward. The data, research, analysis and initiatives herein include how we should think about, and invest in, art in the East End. During a seven-month period, there were numerous focus groups and interviews with visual artists, performing artists, individuals, company directors, and venues. We are grateful for the generosity of their time and candor regarding the challenges they face in contributing to the community and in creating their art, especially during a pandemic.

While this Plan provides the critical framework and path for expanding our rich cultural landscape, there is one critical piece missing – a clear path for funding. Over the last four years we have had little financial support from Houston's foundation community. Our hope is that this Plan will inspire increased dialogue and investment in cultural arts of the East End because discussion of equity, access and acknowledgement of representation cannot occur without the arts in mind.

Special thanks to Mayor Sylvester Turner for investing in us (and playing a washboard at the East End Street Fest on short notice!). I am grateful to Debbie McNulty from the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs and to John Abodeely, Executive Director of the Houston Arts Alliance – we could not have done this without your collective vision toward equity in the arts. Necole Irvin, always generous with her time, offered expertise and encouragement that we could do more (and better).

Eastwood Park, Trish Badger

We are also grateful to Council Member Karla Cisneros, Council Member Robert Gallegos and Commissioner Adrian Garcia. Cultural arts live and thrive in the East End because of your leadership and investment in our infrastructure.

There are numerous East End business owners, corporations, community leaders, educators, and youth who give their time, talent, and treasure to arts in the East End every day. Your commitment and personal investment in the arts has been invaluable to the growth of cultural events in the East End—thank you!

Finally, a special thanks to Lea Weingarten and her colleagues at Weingarten Art Group. As you shared your memories of the J. Weingarten Inc. headquarters at 600 Lockwood Dr. and of lifetime visits with your family to the grocery store on Harrisburg, I saw the appreciation, fondness and respect you have for the history of the neighborhood. Your passion for and sensitivity to representation was instrumental and we are grateful for you.

Plans are important, but never final. They are open to discussion, review, revision, and amendment. With the leadership of the East End District and East End Improvement Corporation, we will continue to implement the East End Houston Cultural District Plan and collaborate on opportunities for the present and future.

With appreciation and gratitude for your continued support,

Veronica Chapa Gorczynski

President, East End District &

Executive Director, East End Houston Cultural District

A Special Note Regarding the Discussion of Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

We asked our research team to demonstrate cultural sensitivity toward the discussion of race, ethnicity and identity in the writing of this report. After each interview, we agonized over the selection of a term that could encompass all of the identities expressed by artists and interviewees, including Mexican American, Latin American, Chicano/a, Latino/a/x/e, Tejano/a, Raza, immigrant/non-immigrant, indigenous and Hispanic. Our histories are complicated and our struggle for representation nuanced. The East End Houston Cultural District is committed to representation and all forms of expression regarding identity. However, for the purposes of ease in reading this report, we are using the term “Hispanic” as the all-encompassing term. We thank you for your understanding.

Executive Summary

This Cultural Arts Strategic Plan is the result of a seven month process of community outreach, assessment, research and analysis to chart a holistic course for the East End District's cultural development over the next 10 years.

The goals of the Plan were to:

- Identify the East End's creative assets and opportunities
- Discuss the threats to the cultural vitality of the District, its residents and cultural assets
- Establish initiatives to sustain the East End's rich cultural landscape and to amplify it as a destination for arts and cultural tourism

VISION

Reflect and reinforce the East End's established community, their shared cultural treasures and distinctive identity as vital elements to the District's character, quality of life and economy.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

We were guided by the community's own voices: East End residents, makers, business owners, developers, artists, arts enthusiasts, cultural activists, educators, youth, seniors, administrators and history keepers.

The robust outreach effort included a Public Survey, multiple Focus Groups, two Artist Advisory Groups, one Youth Advisory Group and nearly two dozen one-on-one Stakeholder Interviews - all during the COVID-19 crisis. The ongoing pandemic eliminated our ability to hold Public Forums, which had been planned, therefore we moved the vast majority of our dialogues to the virtual sphere. This seemed awkward initially, but resulted ultimately in surprisingly unified themes both in terms of feedback and forward-looking inspirations.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Faced with the pressure of increasing development and major TxDOT changes, the District has recognized for some time the community-driven need for a firm plan that sets a strong, reliable foundation for cultural advocacy. The following issues were consistently raised in our outreach as the key threats to cultural arts in the East End:

- Culturally-insensitive development and the resulting gentrification threats.
- The stark discrepancy that exists in funding to Hispanic artists/arts organizations, not only locally, but also regionally.
- The absence of dedicated and regularly-available venues to support art and artists in the East End.

Reinforcing the East End's cultural arts anchors, working with the support of engaged community partners, local arts leaders, elected officials and cultural activists will be the District's most effective weapon against these threats.

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are a total of 23 recommendations in the body of this Plan, the following are ten of the most significant initiatives proposed:

– ONE –

Revitalize Talento Bilingue de Houston (TBH) and Guadalupe Plaza in the near term to provide the East End District with an arts epicenter. As of this writing, there is no cultural venue in the East End that the performing or visual arts can rely upon consistently to schedule arts rehearsals, performances and programming. It is imperative that the solution involve secure, financially stable and sustainable organizations upon which the community can depend.

– TWO –

Commission a feasibility study for the creation of an East End “Centro de Artes” (note: this is a working title only). The District deserves an indoor central gathering site for all of the arts - gallery spaces, rehearsal studios, performance spaces, and offices to support arts administrators. Ideally, it would dedicate space to a new museum for Hispanic art, for sharing East End artifacts/archives and for exhibitions from regional and national arts institutions.

– THREE –

Create essential placemaking infrastructure in key, prioritized sites throughout the District - initially Navigation Esplanade, Guadalupe Plaza Park, Eastwood Park, Mason Park. Specifically, bare-bones shade structures, risers/stages, and access to power in those locations will be “quick wins” and allow for diverse cultural gatherings.

– FOUR –

Launch “Calle de Colores”, a mile-long stretch of warehouse buildings (i.e. “empty canvases” for street art) on Navigation Boulevard stretching from just east of Lockwood Drive at the 5500 block of Navigation to the 6600 block of Navigation, ending at the bridge.

– FIVE –

Establish vibrant public gateways as markers to the District. For consideration: prominent intersections at Harrisburg Boulevard and Emancipation Drive, proposed roundabout at Navigation Boulevard and Jensen Drive, planned Canal Street tunnel, Wayside Drive at I-45 freeway, Wayside Drive at Lawndale Street, Harrisburg Boulevard at 75th street, and Telephone Road at I-45 freeway, and pedestrian and mixed-use bridges across Buffalo and Brays Bayous.

– SIX –

Focus on new, dedicated cultural programming for youth and seniors (historically under-served) including establishment of an “East End Teen Arts Council” and a senior oral history/storytelling program to preserve cultural memories to share with all.

– SEVEN –

Create a robust strategy to pursue foundation grants for the District and micro-grants for artists, makers and arts organizations to forge key partnerships for public/private funding and for programming support.

– EIGHT –

Hire a Cultural Arts Administrator to serve as the central initiator for this Plan and point-of-contact for the artists, makers and partners for projects in the District. Appoint a Cultural Arts Task Force to support these efforts.

– NINE –

Advocate for and support cultural development across all sectors of the District, especially in historically under-programmed, easternmost neighborhoods.

– TEN –

Develop a robust public awareness campaign for the District’s cultural activities.



◀ (previous page, left column from top)
KBR Kids Day 2018, Anthony Rathbun,
 courtesy of Buffalo Bayou Partnership
Kids Playing, Trish Badger

(right column from top)
Car, Jesse Rodriguez, Magnolia Grown
East End Home, Trish Badger
Leo Tanguma, Gonzo247

PRIOR PLANS

Prior to this East End District Cultural Arts Strategic Plan, eight plans and studies had been conducted on various overlapping areas of the East End District, the most recent of which was the Second Ward Complete Communities Plan (July 2018). The latter united many of the earlier plans and studies to strategically move the neighborhood toward a “healthier, more prosperous, resilient, and equitable future.” The geographic scope of the Complete Communities Plan was the Second Ward, which is a subset of the greater East End District footprint. The scope of this Plan is the full District footprint, but with a much more directed focus on the cultural arts exclusively. While urban and social planning concepts have obvious overlap with the cultural arts sphere, this Plan’s expertise is directed almost exclusively toward the cultural arts. Importantly, it is relevant to note that there is statistically significant overlap in this Plan with related findings and conclusions of the former plans.

TERMINOLOGY USED IN THE PLAN

During the course of our outreach, we have heard multiple self-identifying terms - Hispanic, Latino/a/x, Mexican American, Chicano/a, Xicano/a, Tejano/a - used interchangeably. The East End Houston Cultural District is committed to representation and all forms of expression regarding identity. However, for the purposes of ease in reading this report, we use primarily the term “Hispanic” as the all-encompassing term. We thank you for your understanding.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The East End’s strong, undiluted cultural and arts traditions are its primary appeal and the foundation of its collective spirit. However, it is not without its fragility: Culturally-insensitive development, obsolescence of its cultural infrastructure and declining support for its artists/makers will jeopardize its ecosystem and the unique qualities that make it so special. At stake is nothing less than the East End’s unique identity and way of life.

This Plan brings together the collective cultural arts voice of the East End. With the support of community leaders and other civic partners, its initiatives will help invigorate and sustain the East End to ensure a more solid cultural future.

This Cultural Arts Strategic Plan is designed to engage, inspire and motivate leadership to address its vision and recommendations for implementation. There remains significant work to be done. Among other items, to evaluate fully how these initiatives are best funded, related timelines and formation of an informed fundraising strategy. Following are suggested next steps:

- Pursue adoption of the Plan (in concept) by the East End District Board of Directors.
- Create a communications strategy to present the Plan to the community, civic associations, key stakeholder groups and others, as appropriate, highlighting the highest priority recommendations. This will lay the foundation for a collaborative development/advocacy effort to come.
- Hire a Cultural Arts Administrator to be the primary initiator of Plan actions.
- Organize tactical planning efforts (including the Cultural Arts Task Force) to pursue the highest priority, near term initiatives and to set the stage for the medium and long term initiatives.
- Develop a detailed implementation plan with arts advisory professionals - identifying concrete art projects, assigning activities, sequencing and assessing resources required.
- Identify, recruit and educate leaders for highest priority initiatives.
- Move forward on recommendations as feasible.



**“Cultural arts
programming helps
fight gentrification and
roots the community in
the Latinx experience.**

It keeps it alive.”

**ADAM CASTANEDA,
TEACHER/PERFORMANCE ARTIST,
HCC FELIX FRAGA & PILOT DANCE COMPANY**



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