Boise, ID Cultural District Profile: Cultural Production Focus District

DATE ESTABLISHED: 1998

MANAGEMENT: City of Boise

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BACKGROUND: Boise’s Cultural District is located in the historic South 8th Street corridor. As Boise prospered as a commercial center in the late 19th century, rail spurs were provided off the main frontage tracks and the South Eighth Street Historic District’s settlement patterns were shaped by these railroad sidings which passed through its 40 foot wide alleys. (Photo: 8th and Idaho in Downtown Boise).

The resulting commercial/industrial subdivision was the first such development in the city. The warehouses were largely built between 1902 and 1915 to serve wholesalers who supplied goods to southwest Idaho and the surrounding region. The neighborhood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978 and was designated as a local historic district by 1982. The neighborhood thrived for a decade as retail establishments populated the historic warehouses; much of the surrounding city was vacant due to disinvestment as a result of massive demolition in the 1960s and 70s. This neighborhood showcased the possibility for urban revitalization.

In the mid-1990s, following the planning process for the area, the Boise City Arts Commission (BCAC) and the Capital City Development Corporation (CCDC, the city’s redevelopment agency) joined with residents to identify cultural assets in the neighborhood. The result: three dozen cultural facilities, galleries, arts-related businesses, and public artworks. Two years later the group presented a plan to establish the city’s first Cultural District. Once adopted, the BCAC and CCDC designed and implement graphic elements, signage, an early way-finding system, information kiosks, and maps.

(Photo: Boise cultural district signage)
By the early 2000s, new cultural organizations joined those in the cultural district, including theater and dance companies, schools, creative businesses, and galleries. The City of Boise, CCDC, and private partners continued to invest upwards of $1 million in a variety of public art.

The successful implementation of the Cultural District demonstrated the value of cultural planning for facilities and neighborhoods and encouraged renovation of other unique neighborhoods adjacent to the Cultural District – such as the Basque Block. It also laid the groundwork for the establishment of the City’s Department of Arts & History (A&H) in 2008. Under the leadership of the Department of Arts & History, the City of Boise and its partners have continued a strategic approach to assess and envision cultural facilities and capture neighborhood identities, have prepared local arts plans for several areas, and included language about culture assets and possibilities in the City’s comprehensive plan.

In 2015 A&H began working on the first-ever citywide cultural plan, which links directly to the value of the Cultural District. An additional outcome is the implementation of a systematic way-finding system citywide, which was born from the Cultural District and its effort to identify an area through signage. Installation on the new system will begin in 2015 and CCDC has redesigned the streetscape to be more pedestrian-friendly.

UNIQUENESS/DISTINCTIONS:
Boise is a small city in the intermountain west, with a population nearing 210,000. To have as many cultural facilities concentrated in one geographical in a city this small is quite remarkable. And, the proximity of the Cultural District to the city’s natural surroundings – ranging from the Boise River, the Greenbelt hiking/biking path to foothills trails – makes it a unique place to be.
NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE

The Cultural District is in the heart of the city, with close access to the city’s premier cultural park and Boise State University. It is emblematic of the city’s vision to be the most livable city in the country, with a commitment to be lasting, innovative, and vibrant...all qualities which the Cultural District embodies without exception.

BOISE CULTURAL FACILITIES (http://www.boiseartsandhistory.org/resource-guide/):

- Esther Simplot Center for the Performing Arts:
  - Opera Idaho
  - Ballet Idaho
  - Boise Philharmonic

- Fulton Street Theater for the Arts
  - Boise Contemporary Theater (stage and offices)
  - Idaho Shakespeare Festival (offices)
  - Balance Dance Company (studios)
  - BCT Theater Lab and Shakespeare in the Schools

- Boise Public Main Library
- Log Cabin Literary Center
- Julia Davis Cultural Park (aligned with the Cultural District)
  - Boise Art Museum
  - Idaho Historical Museum
  - Black History Museum
  - Rose Garden
  - Historic Band shell for performing arts
  - Zoo Boise

- Flicks Theater (art house movie theater and restaurant)
- Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial and the Human Rights Education Center
- Public Art

OTHER BOISE FACILITIES:

- Boise Centre -- Convention Center
- Arena (hockey, concerts)
- The Grove Plaza – public gathering space
- Capital City Public Market – outdoor market
- Owyhee Candy Company (100 year old legacy Boise business)
- Schools
  - Foothills School for Arts & Sciences
  - Sage International School

www.AmericansfortheArts.org/CulturalDistricts
NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE

- Renewal – consignment home furnishings
- Salons
- Edwards Theaters
- Diversified local and national retailers and restaurants
- R. Grey Jewelry and Gallery and other small specialty galleries
- Trailhead high-tech tech incubator
- 8th Street Marketplace and its Artists-in-Residence program
- Public market (indoor winter market)
- Many creative businesses such as advertising agencies, architecture firms, media/public relations firms, tech developers
- Existing (Aspen and RGrey Lofts) plus forthcoming mixed use residential/condos development

For more information: http://www.boiseartsandhistory.org/