

# Converse County, WY

## Fostering a Collaborative Arts & Culture Community



### *Summary Report*

January 6, 2024  
Douglas, WY

Facilitated by  
Andrew Schneider  
Wyoming Arts Alliance



**MORE ARTS PROGRAM – CONVERSE  
WYOMING ARTS ALLIANCE  
Douglas City Hall  
January 6, 2024**

**WYAA More Arts Program:** MAP is a professional development program created to address the community and cultural leadership training needs of Wyoming communities. This training program is seen by WyAA as critical to building a stronger consortium of voices in support of the arts as key components in community development and in enhancing a statewide creative economy.

**Workshop Objective:** Celebrate and enhance the Douglas-area’s collaborative arts community by building and growing the partnerships and momentum of the Douglas Arts & Culture Board of Trustees. Explore ways to support and grow artists as community leaders.

Andrew Schneider, Wyoming Arts Alliance  
Amara Fehring, Wyoming Arts Council  
Amanda Smylie, Board Member  
Betsy Varland, Board Member, Vice Chair  
(Absent) Chevy Meyer, Board Member, Secretary  
Shea Burke, Board Member  
(Absent) Karma McKelvey, Board Member  
Richard Burke, Board Member, Treasurer  
Michele Carter, Board Member, Chairperson

JD Cox, City Manager  
Clara Chaffin, Community Development Director  
Heidi McCullough, Planning Technician (Historic Preservation)  
Jen Goodwin, Enterprise  
(Absent) Jen Rassmussen, Railroad Museum (Enterprise)  
Josh Butts, Culture Officer, Converse County Bank  
Matt Carlson, CCSD Middle School Shop Teacher

- 8:00 AM GATHER Light Breakfast and Coffee
- 8:30 AM Introductions/Setting Mindset and Expectations for the Day
- 8:45 AM Brainstorming: State of the Arts in Douglas
- 9:45 AM The Collaborative Community
- 10:30 AM BREAK
- 10:45 AM Building a Shared Direction
- 12:00 PM LUNCH
- 1:00 PM Community Support – Amara Fehring
- 2:00 PM Brainstorming: 5-Year Vision & Mission
- 3:00 PM BREAK
- 3:15 PM Priorities: Your Role
- 4:15 PM Building the Framework
- 5:30 PM ADJOURN

## *Draft Vision*

Douglas is a vibrant gateway to Wyoming's backcountry beauty. The arts attract entrepreneurs and audiences.

## *Draft Mission*

The board will cultivate a community of collaboration in which the arts serve as a boon to the local economy, help define Douglas's identity as a vibrant destination, and act as a catalyst for the city's vision: To be a community with the highest quality of life, growing towards tomorrow.

Some communities also include values to further define their purpose. This is optional, but might help you prioritize the numerous concepts that came up repeatedly throughout the workshop. Outlining your community's values can signal the importance of color (not brown!), fostering creativity in everyone (accessibility), etc.

## *Draft Strategic Initiatives*

Further work to organize objectives into key initiatives will help clarify how you are going to pursue your mission and reach your vision.

- Participate in brainstorm for Murphy's building downtown in Feb/Mar. Share examples of what communities have done. Collect community input on uses.
- Adopt 5 year plan by March.
- Establishing \*visual\* public art policies by end of June - either internally to board or to recommend to council for broader adoption. Due in 2-3 months.
- Gift policy already exists. Review it.
- Identify and develop downtown district brand that will be promoted. Branding workshop with mainstreet and city, involve community.
- Downtown streetscape vision details. (e.g. signage) Redo downtown sketchbook.

## *Draft Strategic Initiatives Continued*

- Encouraging existing agencies/groups to engage with board.
- Create space and time for collaboration. Empower thru visioning. Friendraiser.
- Gather leadership to getting to know each other: Local biz, churches, nonprofits. BGC. 4H. Master gardeners & extension coordinator. Individual artists. Tourism board. Other muni boards? To reach a point where resources can be shared.

- Help city understand the board serves at pleasure of community.
- Participate in existing community collaboration group meeting. Don't duplicate.
- Establish a gallery/exhibit space. Establish culinary/creative/doing space.
- Inventory existing spaces: pros/cons. Inventory blighted properties. Inventory 'brown town' buildings.
- Encourage children. Champion creativity in our youth. Youth advisory group? Youth wall in J Square.

Participate in Jackalope days, summer events.

- Urgent/Important: Board should show the community what we can do with 6 months of existence, in year 1: First event by June (participating in existing event).
- Public awareness activities: Have booth at vendor fair for visibility. Online survey. Hands-on arts activities at community events. Coloring book/sheets. Presentation to Council?
- Complete city-budgeted projects for 2024: Determine what budget is available and due dates for this as first step.
- Jack statue at Walnut St. Parking, Murals (festival this summer?), Progress on design of Jackalope Square feature and additional lighting, Graffiti alley or train museum, worth initiative destination development, kids wall.
- Implement visual arts program, including murals/facades.
- Giant wood billboard pieces at RR Museum needs a life. Collab opportunity with mainstreet and arts board. Instagramable moment.
- Artists offer classes: writing, drawing, etc.
- Jackalope Square Bandshell, incorporating gazebo, developing splash pad, integrating other artistic elements

## ***DEFINING YOUR COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY***

Create a space for creativity to serve the community. The space will serve gallery/exhibition needs. The space will serve culinary needs. The space will serve visual creative making/doing space. The space will serve performing arts needs. The space will serve creative entrepreneur needs.

Priorities	Action Steps	Person(s) Responsible	Tentative Due Dates (revise as needed)
Organize, Structure Douglas Collaborative Community	Address the questions on P.4 to organize the collaborative structure.		
Prioritize Strategic Initiatives	Add new/remove initiatives. Flesh out the priorities as needed to better define. Prioritize based on importance or time sensitivity.		
	Adopt 5-year Strategic Plan		March
Identify Community Space Needs	Participate in brainstorm for Murphy's building downtown in Feb/Mar.		Feb/March
	Share examples of what communities have done to inspire ideas.		
	Collect community input on uses.		
Identify a space that will serve the strategic initiatives and community needs	Inventory vacant/available spaces.		

Complete the chart to include due dates and person(s) responsible to lead and organize each effort.

# *THE DOUGLAS COLLABORATIVE ARTS & CULTURE COMMUNITY*

## BEST PRACTICES IN CREATING A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Review your shared vision, mission and values.
2. Organize your structure.
  - Is your collaboration formal or informal? What does it look like?
  - Example: Are you creating a new 501C3 or is this an informal collaboration network? What, if any, are the legal requirements?
  - Is it a formal board structure with a chair or president and an executive committee or is it an informal board?
  - What are the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for each member?
  - How do you make decisions? Is it a negotiating and voting process or something else?
  - Do you have or need guidelines for funding and fundraising?
  - How often do you meet? When and where?
3. Flesh out your collaborative membership.
  - Who (and how) will you recruit new collaborative members and partners?
  - Is your collaboration reflective of the community you are serving? Whose voices are missing? How do you ensure those voices are at the table?
4. How will you communicate with one another?
  - Do you have a clear, accessible structure for trading information and communicating?
  - Does everyone understand, and agree upon, timelines and expectations?
  - What are your agreed-upon guidelines - email, text, apps, and/or online services?
5. How will you communicate with your stakeholders, your community, and the outside world?
  - Is your branding and messaging consistent?
  - Do you have a crafted media strategy?
6. How do you foster the Team, or Collaborative, culture?
  - Are all team members focused on the long-term mission and goals? Do all members understand and agree on the mission and goals?
  - Do all members have what they need to be successful? Do they have clear expectations and guidelines? Do they feel like a valued member of the team? Can they use their skills to add value to the collaborative?
  - Do you incorporate Relationship Building into every opportunity?
7. How will you involve your community?

## *GROUP BRAINSTORMS: Your Collaborative Community*

### STRENGTHS

1. Arts & Culture Board of Trustees.
2. Diverse backgrounds on the Board.
3. City Council Support. Financially support.
4. Community Partners who have been attending Board meetings.
5. Diverse leadership – on the Board and partners.
6. Douglas' lack of A&C enables the Board to start from the beginning.
7. Clean slate.
8. Board has a common goal (unity) to get A&C in Douglas.
9. Hunger for A&C at the community level.
10. Resources: WYAA, WAC, WY Humanities, WY Community Foundation, individuals.
11. Stakeholder (local) support.
12. Unity within the Board.
13. Lots of existing groups and efforts within the community.
14. Community is becoming more diverse and accepting.
15. Advocacy from CCB encouraging others to step up.
16. Natural beauty. Hidden gem.
17. North Platte River.
18. Location and linkage (I-25).
19. Wyoming State Fair.

## *GROUP BRAINSTORMS: Your Collaborative Community*

### WEAKNESSES

1. Fear of boom/bust economy. Fear to invest in the community long-term.
2. Social Media (very active, sometimes angry, social media platforms).
3. Negative Public Opinion.
4. Might not always have financial support.
5. Lack of follow-through.
6. Ability to get new membership on the board when terms expire.
7. Board not working together.
8. Board taking ideas into action.
9. Board has a lot of idea people, but unsure of action people.
10. Board turnover.
11. Ability for the Board to prioritize.
12. Clean slate.
13. Proximity to Casper.
14. Migratory worker population not invested in Douglas.
15. Douglas is not attractive (built environment).
16. Locals take beauty of natural environment for granted (visitors see the beauty).
17. Public opinion: art is unnecessary – art is not essential, it's an option.
18. Opinion on how tax dollars are spent.
19. Online preference for experiencing art (digital divide).
20. Lack of participation. Interest does not translate to action/commitment.
21. Cultural outreach and coordination between groups.
22. Winter.
23. We don't know what we don't know.
24. Apathy.
25. Lack of professional services.
26. No culture of community service in Douglas.
27. Lack of labor pool in Douglas.
28. Housing shortage (missing middle).
29. Dug-in on opinions.
30. Traditions.
31. Water constraints.
32. Energy capital but highest cost of fuel in the state.
33. Communication challenges.

## *GROUP BRAINSTORMS: Your Collaborative Community*

### OPPORTUNITIES

1. Clean slate. Create identity.
2. Review City ordinances and guidelines.
3. "Look where we live."
4. Cultural Tourism as an Economic Driver.
5. City Council supporting economic investments to diversify economy.
6. Increase community excitement.
7. A&C education (schools, clubs, activities, partnerships).
8. Increase community interaction.
9. Increase community events.
10. Attract Casper residents.
11. Conferences are drawn to culturally rich communities.
12. Diversify income: Development of new A&C related businesses.
13. Use Placemaking SWOT analysis from May 2017.
14. Youth involvement. Develop mechanism for youth engagement. Mentorships.
15. Pride in the community.
16. Development of leadership succession.
17. Diversity of the community.
18. Diversity of the Board.
19. Build partnerships with the State.
20. Coalesce groups under umbrella of collaborative community.
21. Create a culture of engagement.
22. Integrate out historical narrative into our modern identity.
23. Leverage natural beauty for cultural events.
24. Walled garden: COG companies want to do business in WY.
25. Improve beautification of community.
26. Make community desirable to encourage new residents to stay through the winter and for years.
27. Engage new residents.
28. Find ways to help existing residents be welcoming to new residents.
29. Brownfield Remediation (EPA Brownfield Grant).
30. Develop an overlay: Creative Arts District.
31. Collaborative Opportunities (County, Glenrock, Glendo).
32. Demonstrate professional creative pathways to youth. A&C does not have to be a vocation to be an artist.
33. Redefine what art is.
34. Wyoming is attractive currently.

## *GROUP BRAINSTORMS: Your Collaborative Community*

### THREATS

1. Negative Public Opinion.
2. Change political leadership.
3. Vandalism.
4. City regulations and ordinances.
5. Community mind-set “we can’t.”
6. Not open to “outsiders.”
7. Youth moving away.
8. Funding.
9. Never being satisfied.
10. Lack of communication.
11. Community says they want it, we do it and they don’t show up.
12. Inability to collaborate between stakeholders.
13. Educating new or returning residents about activities and services in Douglas. Develop information center as a centralize point of information.
14. Narrow view of what art is and can be (focus on visual only).
15. Economy (boom/bust).
16. Lack of civility and information bias.
17. Sustainability (e.g. water constraints).
18. Political threats (e.g. losing State Fair, 1-cent sales tax).
19. Boad not being able to follow-through.
20. Longevity of communities.
21. Harsh weather.
22. Uninformed political leadership.
23. Stuck in ways “this is the way we’ve always done it.”
24. Failure to plan for longevity.
25. Social media.
26. Lack of engagement.
27. Public mistrust of government and/or others intentions.

# *Imagine Douglas, Wyoming in 2034*

*"From a brown town that does the arts  
to the quintessential colorful arts community."*

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Douglas built a community that shares. Identity and culture. Creativity and culture.
- Douglas Wyoming is now the destination for all things arts, from our gallery to events.
- There's a healthy nightlife surrounding Jackalope Square. Music and lively events fill the night air, where once the silence was only broken by highway noise.
- Is now a regional destination for travelers looking for entertainment. Or a quiet place to regroup.
- The charming town of Douglas is barely recognizable. Baker's cafes and art galleries, where there were vacant buildings.
- Douglas Wyoming is now the destination for all things, from our gallery to horticulture shows to live music and theater, Douglas has it all.
- The city is a beautiful place to visit., live and work and has an atmosphere focused on community and opportunities.
- Transform the agricultural and energy-based community to one that appreciated aesthetics as much as profits.
- This is also result in economic diversification as well as putting the city on the map as a destination and all that it has offered.
- The community wasn't transformed into something it was not. Rather enhanced. In its reflective understanding of its own culture.
- A long road from a plane facade of a town to a vibrant colorful community.
- In a world where it is far too easy to take take take and use use use, Douglas stands as a bastion for those willing to create and contribute to their community. In the world around them.
- The city is known for its mythical jackalope: Symbol of the mysterious landscapes of the West. Douglas has grown to embody that magical mystery.
- a well-established, by written filing, uniquely identifiable, cohesive, and that created a place that can You get there first and making a form that under the community who are driven to see Dev as a T in a variety of arts and cultural activities.
- .There's always something to do no matter the time of the year.
- So we have murals, and active businesses downtown.
- Douglas has become a cultural tourism destination.
- We fixed the housing problem and we have new community members.
- There's a culture of saying hello to each other and being friendly.
- There's more than just energy and oil here.
- That kind of Douglas Wyoming has become a bustling arts community in a corridor for outdoor adventure.
- The population grew, which allows for thriving nightlife.

- People stopping off from I-25 are pleasantly surprised to find bustling local shops, restaurants, bookstores, fly fishing shops. Just outside of town, people can rent UTVs or hire a fly fishing guide on their way. To Medicine Bow National Forest
- This weekend, masses from as far away as Santa Fe, descend on Douglas for the goat head gravel Bike race. expecting over 5,000 participants.
- Ancillary programs have joined alongside the long-standing jackalope mural and music festivals: The 4 Horsemen Pony Express Race and the you died of dysentery ultra-marathon, which finishes in front of Jackalope square with a high school band cheering participants on. Over a hundred-thousand people are expected to be attendance over this week long festival alone.
- Studio space is limited for artists and makers. It's not due to a lack of options but abundance of demand.
- Surrounding communities have also benefited.
- Douglas is a regional and national draw,
- became a mecca for arts and achieved widespread community participation.
- The view of downtown Douglas has evolved over the last 10 years. Once a brown town, devoid of beauty and art, it is now a vibrant energetic community.
- New business folks have moved in to help support and be a part of our newly diversified economy.
- The atmosphere of the downtown has transformed into a warm and welcoming gathering place with visions of its identity on display everywhere.

## ***ACTIONS TAKEN***

- The Arts and Culture Board of Trustees was established in 2023.
- In 2023 the city of Douglas compiled the board of trustees Challenged with steering the arts and culture scene of the small energy town.
- Started with a small but attainable idea and events that were created by the community: "What it's like to live and work here, what could it be."
- The community began buying vacant. And rundown spaces refurbishing them. And then turning them over to creative entrepreneurs.
- The community of Douglas, Wyoming is managed through a very intentional process to integrate our aesthetics in the usable community spaces.
- While looking for the future, they never lost sight of the past.
- Grew opportunities for everyone to gather and share.
- For the arts community, the city offers a place to collaborate and grow.
- Through strong vision and collaborative efforts
- Vision was supported socially and financially by a diverse group.
- Built through collaborative and inclusive efforts of all the residents of.
- Encouraging community members and inviting them to be community collaborators.
- City created a framework and culture of engagement that's serving the springboard for economic and social health of this place by actively engaging our community members and encouraging them to acknowledge their very valuable skills and other things they can contribute to help make this a place that they want to live in.
- Meet people where they're at, and actively seek influence them to understand the importance of the arts.

- The forming of this board, the funding, the planning, the budgeting, the execution, the maintenance of all of these.
- Utilize resources (Marketing.) to invite key people to come here and help.
- Through vision, intentional planning and action.
- Capitalizing on available resources.
- Formerly an abandoned warehouse, the Mac Carlson Center for the Arts houses over 50 to 30 studio spaces for artists for fledgling entrepreneurs. This venue is an anchor for the booming. And anchor for the booming economy.
- The city of Glenn Rock and Douglas have collaborated.
- Workshops are made available and no charge for Douglas residents.
- Overcame adversity and resistance
- Enshrined and ingrained arts and cultural activities
- Engage schools and youth
- Build an ongoing support system to encourage ongoing arts and to be developed and displayed.
- Developed an arts competition and shows for youth adults and professionals.
- Worked with Wyoming Arts Alliance and other partners to be one of several cities to host a circuit of statewide events where everyone attends eachothers events.
- Enhanced local ordinance and laws allowing for year round entertainment districts.
- Establish a local community foundation that's promoted the advancement in arts as well as provided a mechanism for local donations and a state requests.
- Developed a land bank.
- Build a strong, supportive atmosphere for arts through education and programming and working with the foundation on this.
- Developed also an arts and culture scholarship.
- The Arts and Culture Board of Trustees and its committed members transform the small town through community engagement and youth advocate. They worked with the citizens to enhance the Douglas experience.
- With support from the city.

## *COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE*

- Fifth generation rancher:
  - I could not have ever imagined my hometown would have turned into a thriving oasis. We love hosting artists up at the Pine Ridge for plain air painting and we love giving them a taste of what it's like to be a real cowboy.
- Kids:
  - Living in Douglas is fire.
- Residents:
  - Love seeing all the cool art stuff around town and we have kids from elementary and high school present. So many things we can do together, something for everyone.
  - How the community has changed. More accepting of change. And more vibrant, more community interaction where identity and culture is celebrated.
  - This community identifies with its culture and all the different personalities are accepted because Douglas has opened the door for creativity and identity for all ages.

- I no longer leave to get my culture fix. I can stay right here.
- The community went from stagnant for flourishing.
- From an energy extraction town, to one that is welcoming and inclusive,
- Community members find the change to be an energizing and welcome energy that has connected its citizens.
- Douglas is different. You can't, you simply can't enjoy the wealth, both an outdoor experience, the family atmosphere, the blooming arts economy, and the art and support from long-standing ranching families anywhere else.
- Long time ranching families are still here, but we also have a new artistic community that is present and very visible.
- Local artists and creative community members find public outlets for their and enjoy sharing it and celebrating it with the community.

## *OUTSIDER PERSPECTIVE*

- Casper talking about Douglas:
  - They admire Douglas's effort in creating a community that is thriving, but they sure do miss our dollar.
  - I don't know how Douglas did it, but the traffic on Saturdays, it flows in the other direction.
- Visitors admire the unit unique identity.
- Visitors are amazed that they've never heard of the Medicine Bow Rock formation, natural bridge or the giant trout lurking in hidden springs.
- Surrounding communities join in the events and festivals to experience the feeling of community.
- With the help of Wag and Hound, the Tiller family and other reaching families, You can take the Oregon Trail that sinks through their properties visiting. Visitors can experience what it must have been like during Westward expansion.
- If you can make it to Douglas, you want to stay.

## *ARTISTS PERSPECTIVE*

- The sense of belonging and the support of this community and community in general and of the creative community in particular made my decision to move to Douglas easy.
- I want to live here because it feels different than any other place I've ever been. Different in a way that is vibrant, flowing, that is thriving and exciting.
- Douglas Wyoming is not trying to be anywhere else, right with local charm. Douglas Wyoming is the setting for wholesome Americana.