

# Alva Cultural District Development Plan

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Alva, Oklahoma

July, 2013



*Alva Art Camp, Graceful Arts Center*

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## **ALVA'S CULTURAL DISTRICT PLANNING PARTICIPANTS**

The Graceful Arts Center and Alva's Cultural District Steering Committee recognizes the many individuals and organizations who contributed to Alva's Cultural District Plan.

The 74 citizens who attended the June, 2013 focus group sessions  
The City of Alva's resolution to support the development of Alva's Cultural District

### **Alva's Cultural District Steering Committee**

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### Photo Credits

Act I Community Theater  
Alva Mural Society  
The Alva-Review Courier  
Graceful Arts Center  
Nescatunga Arts Council  
Northwestern Oklahoma State University  
Woods County

*The Alva Cultural District Plan is sponsored by  
Graceful Arts Center  
a project of Freedom West Community Development Corporation  
with funding provided by the Oklahoma Arts Council*

Graceful Arts  
Gallery and Studios



## THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ARTS IN OKLAHOMA

Arts active communities have a strong advantage for economic growth over communities that do not support cultural development. The most recent economic impact study conducted by the Oklahoma Arts Council and Americans for the Arts provides compelling evidence that nonprofit arts and cultural institutions are a significant industry in the State of Oklahoma; one that generates \$314.8 million in economic activity statewide. The investment of \$176.5 million by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations and an additional \$138.3 million in event related spending by their audiences supports 10,156 full-time equivalent jobs, generates \$211 million in household income to local residents, and delivers \$29.4 million in local and state government revenue. Arts related spending pumps vital revenue into local restaurants, hotels and retail establishments. The study also referred to the impact of cultural tourism, stating that non-resident audiences spend more than twice as much as resident audiences, demonstrating that when a community attracts cultural tourists, it gains significant economic rewards.

## ABOUT CULTURAL DISTRICTS

A Cultural District is a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly area of a community in which a high concentration of arts and cultural facilities and events serve as the anchor of attraction. Ideally, the District reflects the community's unique built environment and history, showcases the region's artists and cultural traditions, increases social engagement and attracts visitors. Cultural Districts can be found in all types of communities from small and rural, to large and urban. They increase tax revenues, profitability of surrounding businesses, and in some cases property values.



Cultural Districts are a catalyst for downtown revitalization and serve as an incentive for new or relocating businesses. The role Cultural Districts play in providing a vibrant and appealing environment is a major factor in retaining young citizens and their families, attracting a well-educated and creative workforce, and positioning the community as a cultural tourist destination. Cultural Districts bring citizens out from their homes and into a vibrant social space to interact and bond with their families and neighbors; and

the community's young talent is showcased and recognized as part of the cultural landscape. Cultural Districts offer opportunities for children, youth and adults to experience lifelong learning through the arts. Music, dance and theater events, artists' studios and galleries, street fairs and festivals all contribute to a high standard of living for community residents and an appealing attraction for visitors.

## THE PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING ALVA'S CULTURAL DISTRICT PLAN

The Cultural District Development Program is an initiative of the Oklahoma Arts Council. It is designed to inspire communities to develop and build upon their arts and cultural assets that will serve as an anchor for downtown revitalization and economic growth.

In 2011, the Oklahoma Arts Council's Commissioners approved to initiate the Cultural District Development Program. In January of 2013, Freedom West Community Development Corporation submitted a letter of intent to pilot the first Cultural District Development Project in rural Northwestern Oklahoma. Following in March, Freedom West CDC was granted funds to oversee the plan for the development of Alva's Cultural District. Graceful Arts Center, a cultural development program of Freedom West CDC serves as the coordinating entity to guide the community through the process of developing the Cultural District in downtown Alva.

In June of 2013, the Graceful Arts Center coordinated a Cultural District Resource Team to assess Alva's built environment and collect valuable information from community citizens regarding the potential benefits and impact of the proposed Cultural District. Topics of discussion included: arts programs and events, downtown revitalization, economic development, small businesses expansion, and leadership. The sessions were well attended by citizens represented by artists and arts organizations, downtown businesses and property owners, elders and the faith community, the education and medical communities, civic leaders, young citizens, economic development and regional community groups, and the general public.

This plan is a synthesis of information gathered from the community focus groups, insight from members of the Cultural District Steering Committee, and recommendations by the Cultural District Resource Team. It is the intent of the Cultural District Steering Committee to ensure that this plan will integrate with the City of Alva's ongoing strategic efforts to improve infrastructure and capacity.



*Graceful Arts Center will serve as the lead organization to facilitate development of Alva's Cultural District.*

## COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Alva, the county seat for Woods County, is located at the intersection of U.S. Highways 64 and 281. It is situated sixty-five miles northeast of Woodward, seventy-two miles northwest of Enid, and 110 miles southwest of Wichita, Kansas.

Alva was the first railroad stop southwest of Kiowa, Kansas to serve settlers moving into the Texas Panhandle. Since the arrival of the first homesteaders, Alva's primary economic base has been agriculture. Early day settlers produced a variety of crops and livestock on their 160 acre homesteads. By 1950 the homesteads were being consolidated into larger farm units, and the farmers concentrated on beef and wheat production.

In 1897, the Northwestern Territorial Normal School was established in Alva to prepare teachers to serve the numerous one-room schoolhouses that covered the prairie, and in 1919 the school officially became a teachers college. In 1939 the college expanded to include degrees in liberal arts and education. Currently Northwestern Oklahoma State University, stands as a four year liberal arts public institution with branch campuses in Enid and Woodward. NWOSU serves as a major historic and cultural anchor on the extreme southern edge of the proposed Cultural District.

Within the city limits, Alva features two city parks, a recreational complex and a public swimming pool. Nearby within the region, there are recreational and natural resources that offer hiking and camping, mountain biking, bird watching, fishing, hunting and exploring. Great Salt Plains State Park and the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge provide numerous recreational activities and serve as a quality habitat for migratory waterfowl and fall foliage viewing. The 200 acre Alabaster Caverns State Park includes a 3/4-mile cavern formed of alabaster, making it the largest natural gypsum cave in the world. Little Sahara State Park boasts over 1,600 acres of sand dunes, and Boiling Springs State Park is one of seven original state parks built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps. These outstanding natural assets offer a variety of experiences to tourists and contribute to the overall vitality of this remote region of Northwestern Oklahoma.



*Northwest Oklahoma's natural resources offer a variety of experiences to tourists, contributing to the overall vitality of this remote region.*

Currently, Alva is at the geographic center of a significant oil and gas boom which has brought economic and population growth to the community within the past three years.

In year 2000, Alva's population was 5,288. Currently, it is close to 8,000 due to the growth of the oil and gas industry.



*Theater Camp*

*Act I Community Theater*

## Alva's Cultural Assets

Artists and arts organizations within the region will play a major role as resources and partners of the Cultural District, and their involvement in expanding and implementing arts and cultural programming will be vital to the success of the District.

Alva's assets include arts and cultural amenities, an impressive inventory of architecture including eleven buildings on the National Historic Register, a ranching and

agricultural heritage, natural and recreational opportunities and a gateway location. All of these assets provide fertile ground for expanded cultural and economic development. Arts and cultural assets include:

- Graceful Arts Center's programs and events
- Act I Community Theater
- Nescatunga Arts Council and Festival
- Concerts and events on the Courthouse Square
- Alva's Downtown Public Library
- NWOSU's art, music and theater departments
- Herod Hall Auditorium
- Alva High School Music and Art programs
- Cherokee Strip Historical Museum
- The Natural History Museum
- NWOSU Martin Library
- Alva Mural Society
- The Rialto Cinema
- Public Art Works
- Regional artists and teaching artists of multiple disciplines
- The Saltfork Artist-Blacksmith Association

## THE CULTURAL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES

Northwestern Oklahoma State University serves as the major cultural anchor on the far southern edge, with College Avenue serving as the primary gateway into the cultural district. The district is approximately 3 blocks wide by 3 blocks long and encompasses the downtown Courthouse Square, Alva's Municipal Offices and the core of Alva's arts and cultural assets. Act I Community Theater and the Rialto Cinema serve as cultural anchors on Flynn Street to the north, Graceful Arts Center anchors Barnes Street on the south, the Runnymede Center anchors 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the east, and the Ava Public Library serves as the west anchor on 7<sup>th</sup> Street.

## INFORMING THE CULTURAL DISTRICT PLAN: CITIZENS FOCUS GROUPS

The focus groups hosted by Alva's Cultural District Steering Committee addressed challenges and opportunities associated with developing the Cultural District. Participants were forthright in their appraisal of the current condition of downtown Alva, yet enthusiastic about the potential for its future.

### Challenges and Needs

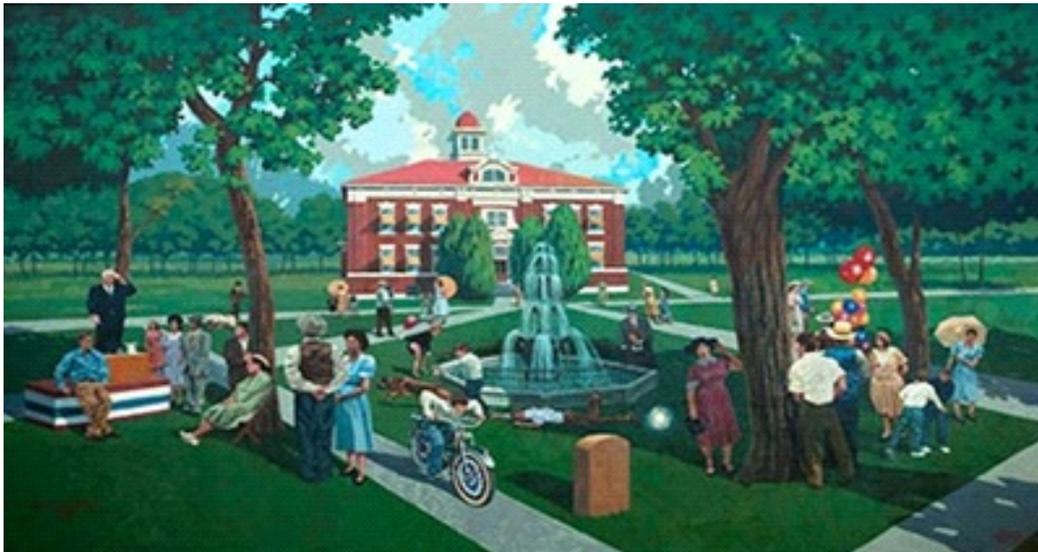
Citizens generally believe that Alva's Cultural District development must be accompanied by a county and municipal plan.



The vitality factor downtown is low; and there is expressed desire for more dining options and evening entertainment venues, consistent and longer business hours, and a dynamic variety of retail establishments. There are few open venues for downtown activities such as a small performance space, music venues, artists live/work spaces or spaces for social gathering. Consensus among younger citizens indicates a lack of events and activities to attract young adults and university students downtown.

While widely perceived as a safe place, downtown Alva is not uniformly inviting or welcoming to pedestrians, families or bicyclists. There is adequate parking but little street life provided by the variety of events and destinations that would encourage exploring, walking, or bicycling to the downtown core.

Although the Courthouse Square is considered a treasured public space, it is not user friendly and deserves special attention to detail. Proper amenities such as park benches, trash receptacles, a water fountain, and appropriate lighting and landscaping would transform the Courthouse Square into a vital and well utilized downtown attraction.



*Alva Mural Society*

*Mural Artists: Robbie Pierce and Don Prechtel 2009*

*The current Courthouse Square lacks amenities that were enjoyed in the past. The original Woods County Courthouse built in 1904 and was a beehive of activity including circus parades, political speeches and 4th of July celebrations.*

In More than one focus group, citizens discussed the challenge of purchasing or renting downtown space. Building owners have set unrealistically high prices on undeveloped or underdeveloped space. This limits opportunities for small business development, purchase options, building improvements, and affordable rental space. Vacant buildings impose a negative image on downtown Alva and cause a major loss in tax revenue. Currently there are few living spaces downtown and no studio or live/work spaces developed to attract artists and other creatives. There is concern that many property owners are not maintaining their buildings, with some people suggesting that stronger code enforcement should be initiated.

There is overall consensus that Alva does not have a strong image. Marketing and promotion is inconsistent, and there is no central marketing source for events. Some events are listed on Facebook, other events are listed on out-of-date websites or not marketed at all. There was considerable discussion centered on the hotel/motel tourism tax grant process with concern that the process is not user friendly.

Better communication is needed, and it is believed that the tourism tax board should focus on funding tourism promotion and development to attract visitors to Alva in a user friendly manner.

There is interest in restoring the neon on two iconic buildings, the Rialto and the Farmers Coop; and there is also interest in building restoration. These types of projects are worthy endeavors and will depend primarily on private sector investment and financing.

There is significant support for more music performances in downtown Alva, with residents interested in indoor venues and on-going music concerts on the Courthouse Square. Downtown activities such as picnics and concerts, social gatherings and family friendly programs are a priority, especially among young adults with children.

Even though NWOSU is a cultural institution and major employer, Alva does not feel like a college town. There is little reason for students to go downtown and many leave over the weekend. The university has a significant international student population that offers the potential to add a more global character to the community. The university's art, music and theater departments have a strong presence at the school that could be extended to downtown Alva. Efforts to bridge the university to the downtown district would create a stronger sense of vitality to the area; and an increase in events and creative spaces envisioned by the Cultural District would provide opportunities for students to be more engaged in the community.



*NWOSU Band*

## Assets and Opportunities



*Small businesses such as coffee houses, bakeries or small cafes attract citizens and visitors to the downtown core and contribute to the overall vitality of the community.*

Encourage the development of small businesses that generate social interaction such as a pub or restaurant with outdoor seating, a coffee house, and multi-use spaces that will also serve as music venues. Downtown lodging such as a small inn or bed and breakfast would provide an inviting atmosphere that would attract overnight visitors. Artists' work spaces and galleries, informal performance venues, and retail establishments that stay

open evenings and weekends will increase the quality of life for local residents, provide social spaces

for youth and young adults, and generate employment and increased tax revenue. These amenities would transform downtown Alva into an attractive night time destination; and improved signage, lighting, and a way finding system would encourage travelers and visitors to spend more time to shop and visit downtown Alva.

Expand First Friday Art Walk by planning events and projects that do not require a heavy capital outlay. Arts events and programs can take place in empty storefronts. Temporary pubs and bistros can be set up as part of larger events, and pop-up shops and galleries can demonstrate how a lot can be done with existing community resources and little funding. Invite music ensembles from the university or members of the high school choir. The point is to animate the proposed Cultural District in a variety of ways by a variety of people.

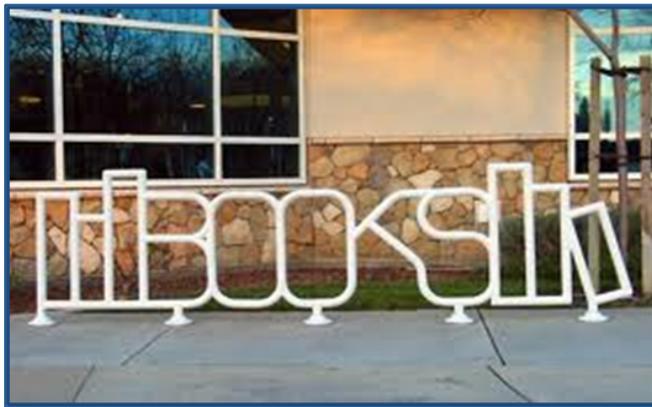


Historic architecture in the Cultural District is a significant asset, but many buildings are vacant and in need of attention. Two significant spaces located on Flynn Street; the Ranger Theater and the Holtzclaw breezeway space are not currently utilized, however Flynn Street presents the opportunity for creative development. Two community treasures, Alva's Act 1 Community Theater and the Rialto Cinema are both operating and in good condition; and there are currently a few spaces being occupied as residences. This cluster of spaces offers the potential for expanding Flynn Street into an area for downtown entertainment venues, living spaces and complementary businesses.



*Rialto Cinema on Flynn Street*

The City of Alva owns the Etc. Shoppe building on College Avenue which has several empty second floor spaces that could be converted into living spaces or accommodate a visiting artist. The conversion of the historic Bell Hotel into apartments will make a significant contribution to the vitality of downtown Alva. When completed, the Bell will provide retail space on the ground floor with one and two bedroom rental units on the remaining five floors. This development project will generate more interest in downtown living, provide affordable space for small businesses to locate, and create an even greater demand for improved amenities within the Cultural District.



*Consider installing a bike rack near the library and pocket park.*

Downtown Alva's new sidewalks are wide and accessible. Since the sidewalk project has been completed, the downtown area has become popular with the community's walking group, and the wide sidewalks present the opportunity for social gatherings. There is only one bike rack in the area, but additional bike racks in various locations throughout the district would extend downtown to a whole new group of citizens and would stand as a positive statement for the support of Oklahoma's healthy lifestyle initiatives.

NWOSU is a major cultural anchor, however there is not enough activity or amenities to attract students to the downtown core. The Cultural District and NWOSU will be natural partners for developing programs and projects to showcase the university's art, music and theater students, thereby providing additional opportunities to foster their artistic growth.

The community and economic development focus group recommends hospitality training for frontline staff of businesses and organizations to gain the skills to become more articulate ambassadors for their community. Effective hospitality training will advance the development of cultural tourism and Alva's Cultural District.

### **Community Engagement and Leadership: An Investment in Alva's Future**



*Leadership Arts Class Members*

Fostering development of the next generation of leaders is vital to Alva's future. There should be a focused effort by community organizations to provide a variety of opportunities for leadership and volunteer development; especially for youth, young adults and newcomers living and working in the community. Alva's population and economy is growing, and there are numerous opportunities

for community engagement. Topics of discussion among Alva's younger citizens focused on the need for leadership opportunities, fresh ideas for arts programming, enhanced amenities in downtown Alva, and the need to support small business development. The more invested youth and young adults are in the cultural and economic development of their community, the more likely they will remain or return to the community to live and raise their families.

Issues such as grounds maintenance, litter, the need for landscaping, and the community's overall appearance presents the opportunity to harness enthusiasm for downtown revitalization and aesthetic improvements. Now is the perfect time to foster the creation of an organized volunteer group that will concentrate on amenities and improved aesthetics.



*Nescatunga Arts Festival on Square*

# The Cultural District Development Plan

## Alva, Oklahoma

July, 2013

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Alva's Downtown Cultural District Development Plan provides the foundation for developing and sustaining a vibrant Cultural District that will increase Alva's economic growth, enhance the quality of life for all residents, and promote Alva as a vital and creative community in Northwest Oklahoma.

### GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Alva's proposed Downtown Cultural District has generated enthusiasm among arts organizations and artists, civic leaders, the business sector, public institutions, and citizens of all ages. This plan specifically addresses goals and strategies for developing Alva's Downtown Cultural District; the designated area for improvements, development and enhanced arts and cultural programming. The Cultural District will pave a positive new direction for economic growth and engage the community in creating a better quality of life.



#### **Goal 1: Increase Capacity for Arts and Cultural Development**

*Increase the community's capacity to develop and expand arts and cultural programs, events and creative spaces that will sustain the cultural district; and foster positive partnerships that will expand and support Alva's cultural growth.*

#### **Community Partners**

Alva Cultural District, arts organizations and artists, NWOSU and public education institutions, downtown businesses, community organizations, volunteers, property owners, City of Alva, Woods County Economic Development Committee, Freedom West CDC, Oklahoma Small Business Development Center, Northwest Technology Center, youth groups and the faith community.

#### **Strategies**

##### **1.1 Capacity Building**

Identify and support opportunities for arts organizations, artists, and community partners to gain expertise in various aspects of cultural development, and training that improves the earning capacity of artists, enables arts organizations to remain stable and expand programming, and builds the next generation of cultural leaders.

### **1.1 a. Encourage Professional Development for Arts Organizations**

As primary partners of Alva's Cultural District, arts organizations should keep current with best practices in organization management, event planning and implementation; and gain capacity for fundraising and effective marketing. Excellent professional development resources include the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits and the Oklahoma Arts Council's annual conference.

### **1.1 b. Identify Resources and Training Opportunities for Artists**

Gaining knowledge of the business of art is essential to artists and arts related businesses. Basic accounting and tax management, pricing, design and display aesthetics, self-marketing and effective use of technology are among the skills that are crucial to increasing artists' earning power.

Teaching artists should tap into the Oklahoma Teaching Artist Network, an excellent information source for networking opportunities, professional development and advocacy for teaching artists of all media. Refer to their Facebook page.

### **1.1 c. Develop Alva's Next Generation of Cultural Leaders**

Development of the Cultural District will provide numerous opportunities to recruit and engage emerging cultural leaders, especially among youth and young adults. Provide opportunities for potential arts leaders to gain experience and skills in arts programming through volunteer activities, leadership training and board service.

Arrange a field trip with the young adults' focus group to visit Oklahoma City's Plaza District and the Paseo Arts District to experience two small unique Cultural District models. Spaces at the Plaza are now filled with creative small businesses, live/work/studio spaces for artists, live theater, a dance and photography studio, pubs, a solon, etc. A similar profile describes the Paseo Arts District. Both have excellent websites, and the Plaza District website stands out as a model for marketing and promotion.

The Oklahoma Arts Council provides an excellent opportunity for emerging leaders to become part of a statewide network: Oklahoma's New and Emerging Arts Leaders (ONEAL), and Leadership Arts.



### 1.1 d. Host an Annual Arts Awareness Workshop for Volunteer Stakeholders

There are several Leadership Arts graduates in Alva who could create a one day workshop based on Leadership Arts principals: how the arts make a significant contribution to the local economy and cultural tourism development, how arts programs and vibrant arts spaces enhance the community's quality of life, and how the arts revitalize downtown areas and improve the overall image of cities and neighborhoods. This workshop would be especially beneficial to the community's emerging cultural leaders. Ideally, Cultural District stakeholders would send representatives to the workshop. As a follow up, encourage interested participants to apply for the extensive Leadership Arts training sponsored by the Oklahoma Arts Council.



*Leadership Arts Class 2013  
The Historic Coleman Theater, Miami OK*

### 1.1 e. Develop a Public-Private Partnership Between the Alva Cultural District and NWOSU to Hire a Coordinator

Development of Alva's Downtown Cultural District will require the coordinated efforts of the Cultural District Steering Committee and community partners to implement the goals of the cultural plan. The committee will be responsible for developing the initial foundation for the Cultural District; however growing the Cultural District will require considerable administrative oversight. At that point, a coordinator would be responsible for overseeing the overall activities of the District.



*International Student Show, NWOSU*

## 1.2 Enhance and Expand Arts and Cultural Programming

Administrative capacity will be a primary consideration. Take a cautious and strategic approach to program expansion. Partner with arts and community organizations to create a critical mass of cultural activities that will generate vitality in downtown Alva.



### 1.2 a. Expand Upon the Success of the First Friday Art Walk

Monthly evening art walks have become a tradition in Cultural Districts throughout the country. These events are an excellent way to foster collaboration among local businesses, artists, cultural organizations and the City. Encourage numerous activities to occur throughout the district during Art Walk: school performing groups, music groups, poetry readings, and activities for youth. If there are no dining options in the evening, encourage a pop-up café, food booths or a food truck.

### 1.2 b. Open Space: Year Long Events

Generate interest in downtown revitalization by demonstrating the creative use of empty or underutilized spaces. Encourage temporary pop-up galleries and performance spaces, participatory art projects, children’s activities, and poetry readings to animate a particular area in the Cultural District. *Open Space* is an excellent way to involve youth and young adults, and provide additional exhibition and performance opportunities for NWOSU students and regional artists.



*Student Volunteers, Act I Community Theater*

## 1.2 c. Build on the Community's Interest in Music



*NWOSU Chorus*

There is enthusiasm among people of all ages for music events and music venues to become a part of Alva's cultural landscape. In addition, there are excellent music resources in the region and touring artists in the state that can help turn Alva into a music town.

- **A Bridge to the Community: The NWOSU Downtown Jazz Lab**

Research the potential to transform downtown Alva into a night time destination by establishing a jazz lab modeled after the highly successful UCO Jazz Lab in Edmond and NSU Jazz Lab in Tahlequah. Both downtown labs have the full support of their communities and play to full houses. UCO has partnered with Hideaway Pizza to sell food and refreshments.



*UCO Jazz Lab, Edmond*



*Ranger Theater, Flynn Street*

- **Live on the Square**

Develop Courthouse Square into Alva's premier fair-weather performance space by encouraging picnic concerts featuring a variety of music. Explore the feasibility of hosting live holiday music on the square featuring local school and church choirs.

- **American Roots Music**



Expand on the community's experience with the Smithsonian *New Harmonies* exhibition and activities this coming November by hosting future Roots Music events. Oklahoma is blessed with an abundance of outstanding roots musicians and singer-songwriters. In addition, there are excellent resources for booking and

presenting Roots Music. In time, assess the capacity of the Cultural District to sponsor a Roots Music Festival.



#### **1.2 d. Chautauqua on the Square**

Research the potential for sponsoring a Chautauqua in the Courthouse Square as a collaborative project of the Alva Cultural District, NWOSU and the Oklahoma Humanities Council.

#### **1.2 e. Host a Scan Party at the Grateful Arts Center**

Invite Alva citizens to bring historic photographs of the Courthouse Square, downtown buildings, community events, and historic homes to be digitally scanned, archived and exhibited. Chances are, older residents will bring in many of the photographs, and younger crowd could organize the scanning. This process allows people to keep their originals while providing access for others to use the scanned photos for research and reference. With permission, the photos could be placed at the Grateful Arts Center, or on a blog or website. Refer to the website Retro Metro as an example for creating galleries of photo collections.

### **1.3 Support the Economy of Local and Regional Artists**

Ensure that local and regional artists participate in the growth of Alva's Cultural District.

- Facilitate exhibition, performing and teaching opportunities.
- Encourage networking among artists in the region to ensure that they are not isolated from statewide resources and opportunities.
- Encourage Cultural District events that feature the region's traditional and folk artists.

### **1.4 Identify a Location for Artist Live/Work Space**

NWOSU and Graceful Arts has identified the need for space to house visiting artists and will partner to develop a suitable space in Alva's Cultural District.

### **1.5 Facilitate Additional Opportunities for Arts Education**

Consider forming an arts education partnership between The GoldBug Education Foundation and Graceful Arts Center to sponsor artists-in-residence programs in Alva Public Schools. There are matching funds available through Oklahoma Arts Council's grants for arts education.



*Art Camp, Graceful Arts Center*



### **1.6 Outside the Box: Research the Expanding World of Public Art**

The world of public art has expanded beyond statues and monuments and into a variety of appealing works of art that serve the needs of the public, support the work of local and regional artists, and engage the community in the actual art-making process. Exciting examples can be found ranging from whirligig sculpture gardens, artist designed bicycle racks, and interactive music sculpture in public parks. The possibilities are endless.



### **1.7 Develop Dynamic Community Partnerships and Alliances**

No single entity can develop and sustain a successful Cultural District. This ambitious endeavor requires the active cooperation and collaboration among economic and community development organizations, arts and cultural institutions, artists, educators, and city/county government.



### **1.8 Facilitate the Formation of an Arts and Cultural Networking Alliance**

Arts organizations will be the Cultural District's primary partners in planning and programming arts events. Hold quarterly networking meetings to discuss events and programs, form collaborations, plan marketing and promotions, and share information and other timely issues relating to Alva's cultural development.





## **Goal 2: Enhance Alva's Quality of Life**

*Create a more vital and animated downtown by supporting cultural events, increasing the number of artists living and working in downtown spaces, and encouraging revitalization efforts.*

An increase in events and creative spaces envisioned by the Cultural District will provide opportunities for residents to become more engaged in their community and increase the vitality factor in downtown Alva. Events and projects could be held in empty storefronts: a temporary café or coffee house can be set up as part of larger events, pop-up shops, artists' demonstrations, and a children's art zone can demonstrate how a lot can be accomplished with existing community resources and little funding. The point is to animate the Cultural District in a variety of ways by a variety of people.

### **Community Partners**

Alva Cultural District, Alva Chamber of Commerce, City of Alva, NWOSU, youth and community organizations, artists and craftsmen, volunteers, downtown property owners

### **Strategies**

#### **2.1 Create a Welcoming and Attractive Downtown Environment**

Work with community partners to transform downtown Alva into a welcoming environment for pedestrians, families, young people and elders; and that encourages walking and bicycling to the downtown core.

##### **2.1 a. Host a DesignWorks Team Visit**

DesignWorks, a project of Oklahoma University's Institute for Quality Communities, is a 2 ½ day design program involving 4-6 design professionals. The team presents a design charrette by assessing specific locations within the community and providing recommendations for improvement. For Alva's Downtown Cultural District, two issues could be addressed:

- **Present an overall design of the Woods County Courthouse Square** with special attention to the existing 1968 concrete stage, landscaping, and outdoor spaces and uses. Possible design could incorporate a water feature, improved permanent seating, improved landscaping and more shade options.
- **Bridge NWOSU to Downtown Alva** with gateway signage of banners from light-posts. Consider installing heritage lights that are historically accurate and an improved biking/walking trail down College Avenue from Oklahoma Boulevard to Barnes Street, and the north side of Courthouse Square on Flynn Street. This gateway strategy will create an inviting connection to attract visitors and improve and promote walking and bicycling from the NWOSU Campus to the Cultural District.

## 2.2 Create Spaces that Encourage Social Interaction



*Opening event at Graceful Arts Center*

Certain spaces and businesses attract citizens because they appeal to the need for people to gather and interact with their friends, families and neighbors. Entertainment venues, outdoor dining spaces, parks, pubs and galleries help fulfill this need. Downtown activities such as picnics and concerts, social gatherings and family friendly programs are a priority, especially among young adults with children, and also with university students.

### 2.2 a. Develop the Pocket Park at Alva Public Library

Collaborate with the Friends of the Library and local artists to turn this little park into a treasured space by naming it and creating a more welcoming environment. Since the park is adjacent to the Alva Library, consider a reader's theme such as *Alva Book Nook* or *Reader's Park*. Create an environment where residents can linger, read and socialize, much like an outdoor living room. The park could take the name of a local benefactor that supports literacy projects, and decorative elements could include quotes on the wall about learning and reading from Oklahoma writers like Will Rogers, Woody Guthrie, Ralph Ellison, and N. Scott Momaday.



Create an inviting entryway into to the park with color. This can be designed in, metal, on banners, or a sign with the park's new name mounted above the existing entrance. Add additional seating and drought-resistant landscaping to soften the space. A simple fountain could be installed. For the metal wall of the space, consider artwork or decorative metal sculpture created by the Saltfork Craftsmen.

## 2.2 b. Encourage Pop-Up Art Venues and Businesses

There are few venues open that attract people downtown such as a small performance space, music venues, or dining options for social gathering. Empty storefronts present opportunities to animate the downtown area with temporary events and pop-up businesses. Encourage pop-ups as a demonstration tool, or as incubators for small business development.



- **The Holtzclaw Breezeway: Alva's Outdoor Pop-Up Venue**

The Holtzclaw space on Flynn Street can be transformed into another pocket park. In the meantime, be creative about using the space for a variety of temporary pop-up events and businesses. Outfit the space so that string lights and metal patio chairs and tables from the home improvement store can be used to make the space appealing for nighttime activities. Encourage a pop up café or coffee house to open up on the weekends or during First Friday Art Walk.



- **Create a Better Block**

The Better Block concept has become an international phenomenon that has set a new standard for citizen engagement in community development, especially among young adults. Using low cost and donated materials, Better Block brings together community resources to temporarily convert a one block area into a walkable, bikeable neighborhood destination for people of all ages complete with bike lanes, cafe seating, trees, plants, pop-up galleries and businesses, and lighting. This is a highly engaging project that shows civic leaders how the block can be revived when restrictive ordinances are removed and support is given to creative revitalization. In most cases where Better Block projects have occurred, there has been permanent results ranging from small business start-ups to permanent aesthetic improvements.



### **2.3 Identify and Promote Opportunities for Artists Live/Work Spaces**

Conversion of the historic Bell Hotel into apartments will make a significant contribution to the vitality of downtown Alva by generating more interest in downtown living. Expand on that momentum to develop a space for visiting artists, and by offering incentives for artist live/work spaces on the third floor of the Runnymede or the second floor units above the Etc. Shoppe.

### **2.4 Encourage Community Organizations to Hold Healthy Lifestyle Events in the Cultural District**

Make it appealing for residents to gather in the downtown district. Color runs, races, bike rallies, parades, and interactive events will all add to the vitality of downtown Alva. Encourage youth groups to advocate and raise funds for additional bike racks.

### **2.5 Convene a Citizen's Volunteer Corps to Adopt Downtown Alva**

Residents are concerned about the need for improved aesthetics and amenities. A considerable improvement in the overall appearance of downtown can be accomplished by volunteers. Encourage residents of all ages to volunteer during events, to help with landscaping, and form clean-up crews. Celebrate accomplishments of the Citizens Volunteer Corps with a picnic on Courthouse Square.

*Alva's Courthouse Square is a treasured public space and deserves special attention to detail. The Citizens Volunteer Corps could target the Square as an on-going improvement project.*

*Built in 1968, the concrete stage is a minimal structure that faces west. Consider a cantilevered structure to cover the stage that would capture the 1960's feel of the stage area.*







### **Goal 3: Impact Economic Growth in Downtown Alva**

*Increase economic activity by supporting arts and cultural venues and events that will attract residents and visitors to Alva's Cultural District; and encourage development of small businesses that will contribute to the overall vitality of downtown Alva.*

#### **Community Partners**

Alva Cultural District, Alva Chamber of Commerce, City of Alva, Woods County Economic Development Committee, Northwest Technology Center, property and business owners

Arts active communities generate income, employment and tax revenues; and are widely recognized for attracting and supporting small businesses and retaining a creative workforce. Developing Alva's Cultural District will require a critical mass of small arts spaces and businesses that will generate economic growth and attract visitors to the downtown core. As more arts events and programs occur within the District, pedestrian activity will increase and provide the opportunity for businesses to

increase sales and revenues.



Graceful Arts Center Poetry Event

#### **Strategies**

##### **3.1 Advocate for a Comprehensive Economic Development Plan**

Alva's economic development is limited by the lack of a comprehensive plan. Take advantage of Alva's potential for economic growth by planning for its future. If implemented, an effective economic development plan will have a positive impact on Alva's quality of life and support the vision of Alva's Cultural District.

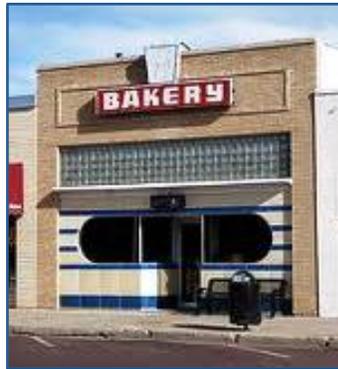
##### **3.2 Encourage the Development of a Dynamic Variety of Creative Spaces and Small Businesses**

Residents expressed the need for more dynamic downtown shopping and entertainment experiences, including:

- A small performance space and music venues
- Handcrafted and Oklahoma made products
- Artists' studios, galleries, living spaces
- Restaurant that is open in the evening and includes outdoor dining
- Pub or wine bar that would also serves as a music venue
- Breakfast café/coffee house
- Bakery

- Day spa
- A bicycle shop
- Downtown lodging such as a small inn or bed and breakfast that would provide an inviting atmosphere to attract overnight visitors
- Graphics design/ print shop/UPS facility
- Interior design and other design businesses
- Architects and contractors

### 3.3 Encourage Public/Private Sector Investment in Downtown Alva

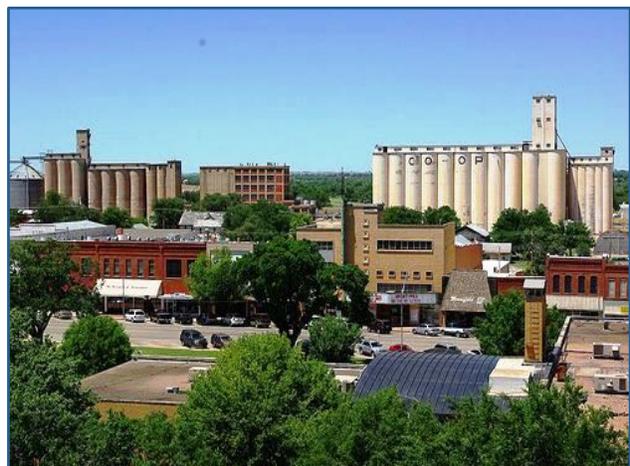


Empty buildings impose a negative image on downtown Alva and cause a major loss in tax revenue. Prices are unrealistically high for undeveloped or underdeveloped space which limits opportunities for small business development, purchase options and affordable rental space.

- Explore strategies and incentives that will encourage building owners to sell or maintain their properties.
- Identify municipal incentives such as tax abatement or deferment, permit and fee waivers, and debris removal at no cost to new businesses.
- Research funding resources for artists' live/work spaces.

### 3.4 Help Facilitate the Development of Flynn Street as an Entertainment Zone

Flynn Street presents the opportunity for creative development. Two community treasures, Alva's Act I Community Theater and the Rialto Cinema are both operating and in good condition; and there are currently a few spaces being occupied as residences. In addition, rehabilitation of the Ranger Theater would present another opportunity for a performance and/or exhibition venue to be developed. This cluster of spaces offers the potential for expanding Flynn Street into an area for downtown entertainment venues, living spaces and complementary businesses.



*Overview of Flynn Street*

**3.5 Integrate Alva’s Cultural District Development Plan with the City of Alva’s ongoing strategic efforts to improve infrastructure and capacity.**





## **Goal 4: Promote and Market Alva's Cultural District**

*Develop and communicate an authentic and compelling identity of Alva's Cultural District centered on arts and cultural assets, unique heritage, and the built and natural environment.*

### **Community Partners**

Alva Cultural District, Freedom West CDC, Graceful Arts Center, Woods County Economic Development Committee, Alva Chamber of Commerce, Red Carpet Country, Tourism Tax Board, City of Alva

### **Strategies**

#### **4.1 Promote the Cultural District**

Marketing the Cultural District will focus primarily on arts and cultural events and will require close communication with all cultural institutions.

##### **4.1 a. Set up a Blog or Website**

Electronic media is the primary tool used by cultural tourists and residents who want to access immediate information about places and events. Until the Cultural District develops a website, start a blog to keep the public informed about events, activities and news. The blog should be visually appealing, provide current information and promote a positive image of the District. Include a cultural calendar that covers a full year of events so that residents and visitors can plan in advance. Exciting and colorful images say more than words. Include images of people and events that convey a sense of vitality: citizens enjoying a festival or concert, dining and socializing, young people engaged in arts learning, and images of performances, exhibits and arts spaces.

##### **4.1 b. Web-Based Social Media**

Use of social media networking reaches many people quickly, helps reduce the need for costly advertising and printed materials, and is the communication tool of choice among youth and young adults. If a website is developed, it can extend the Cultural District's capabilities by integrating with Facebook, Twitter, Vimeo, YouTube, and other social links.

#### **4.2 Develop a Basic Marketing Plan for the Cultural District**

Create an image or profile of the District and create an effective marketing plan to promote events and programs to residents and visitors. Include:

- Well designed printed materials
- Website and social media
- Directional signage and gateway signage to downtown Alva

- Promoting entrepreneurial opportunities within the District for artists and small businesses

#### **4.3 Partner with All Cultural Organizations for Promotional Activities**

By having a central source for an online cultural calendar, Alva’s cultural profile will be greatly enhanced. Keeping one calendar for cultural events will reduce the chance of conflicting programming and enable the District to better promote events.

#### **4.4 Explore Collaborative Marketing Strategies**

Explore marketing collaborations and cross promotion of events and places among businesses and cultural organizations in the District.

#### **4.5 Maintain a Presence at Tourism Development Meetings**

Ensure that arts and culture remain an important component of the region’s tourism development.

#### **4.6 Develop a Cultural Tourism Profile**

The Cultural District can assist arts organizations and tourism officials by supporting to development of cultural tourism. Most communities view tourism revenue as a vital ingredient in economic development. According to the Travel Industry Association of America, the cultural tourist typically stays longer and spends more money than other visitors. 65% of American tourists include arts destinations in their vacation plans.



*Alva Mural Society*

- Partner with tourism offices and Alva’s arts and cultural institutions to promote Northwestern Oklahoma as a wellspring for historic, recreational and cultural tourism, and develop cultural tourism products based on Alva’s cultural, historical and natural assets.
- Promote the work of traditional and folk artists.
- Explore the potential to develop and promote arts and cultural trails and cultural heritage corridors.
- Develop cultural tourism packages that compel visitors to stay overnight by including a variety of activities, places, and experiences. Consider integrating the Murals tour into a smart phone application.

#### **4.7 Help Facilitate Better Communications with the Tourism Tax Board**

Encourage the tourism tax board to ensure a more transparent and user friendly grant process and focus on funding tourism promotion and development to attract visitors to Alva.

#### 4.8 Create an Image: Honor Authentic Alva While Conveying a Compelling Sense of Forward Momentum

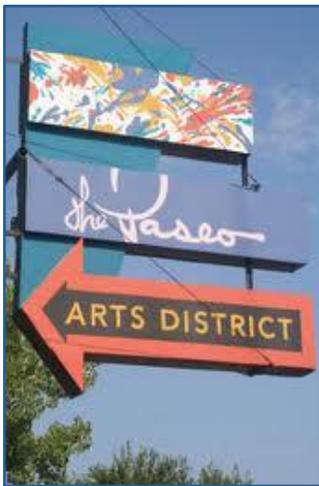


*Alva Mural Society*

Identify a community facilitator to convene a focus group to discuss Alva's assets and how to promote Alva as a great place to live, work, and visit. Create a profile of the community that promotes authentic Alva's people, places, and events.

Although it is important to maintain an authentic image of Alva based on its traditional assets, make the opportunity to look to a new future and communicate a sense of forward momentum. This strategy is especially timely for developing a vibrant Cultural District, addressing outmigration of young adults and families, and fostering entrepreneurial enterprises.

#### 4.9 Encourage Well Designed Printed and Promotional Materials



Printed materials, advertising, web communication, and signage should be updated, attractive and well placed to entice travelers to explore Alva's Cultural District. Work with the appropriate partners to create a plan for attractive signage and a wayfinding system.

#### 4.10 Promote Alva's Architectural Assets

Reprint the architectural drawings produced for Alva buildings by the Oklahoma Main Street Center from 1986 to 1989. There are 14 sheets of drawings in the Oklahoma Historical Society archives. These drawings can be reprinted and mounted on foam

core to be exhibited at Graceful Arts Center during the unveiling of Alva's Cultural District Plan.





## **Goal 5. Identify and Develop Funding Sources to Sustain Alva's Cultural District**

*Identify a dedicated funding stream that will provide stable, long-term resources to support collaborative arts venues and events, operations, and marketing for Alva's Cultural District.*

Renewable operating funds will be critical to the Cultural District's effectiveness and sustainability. Districts that receive start-up funding but do not have a long-term sustainability plan are handicapped in their ability to fulfill their missions, which are by nature long-term initiatives. Fundraising will focus on the activities directly related to developing the Cultural District: capacity training, expanding and coordinating arts and cultural programming and venues, marketing and promotion.

### **Community Partners**

Represented entities on the Cultural District Steering Committee

### **Strategies**

#### **5.1 Create a Cultural District Fund Development Task Force**

The Fund Development Task Force will research and identify funding sources, and create a finance sustainability plan.

- Develop a budget. Start by developing a budget for the first year of operation based upon projected costs of events, training, marketing, operations, etc.
- Conduct a mid-year assessment and create a fund development plan for year two and three.
- Identify seed funding for initiating the Cultural District from public and private funding sources and expand fundraising efforts that will include specific activities such as organizing and coalition building, grant writing and fundraising activities, marketing, scheduling, project management, expanding arts events, recruiting and guiding volunteers, and advocating for downtown revitalization.
- Request Lodger's Tax funding to be dedicated to website development and creation of the community cultural calendar.

#### **5.2 Assign a Funding Research and Grant Writing Assistant**

Research additional funding and technical assistance opportunities and initiatives dedicated to cultural and rural development. Explore all areas including local, state federal government; business sponsorships; local, state and national private foundations; national arts service foundations and organizations; planned giving programs; and earned income strategies. Examples include:

- Oklahoma Department of Commerce and Tourism
- The United States Department of Agriculture's Rural Development programs, Rural Business Opportunity Grants, and Rural Business Enterprise Grants are worth investigating
- The National Endowment for the Arts

- State and National Registers of Historic Places identifies and lists historic and cultural properties for protection and rehabilitation. Listing can facilitate eligibility for state and federal tax credit incentives for appropriate rehabilitation projects.
- ArtPlace is a consortium of federal funding, private foundations and corporate interests, to support “bricks and mortar” projects in progressive communities seeking to support arts and culture based development programs
- The Kresge Foundation supports arts and community building
- Research grants to create business incentive programs for artists, including start-up funds for rent or relocation, and small business incubators

### **5.3 Cultivate Creative Fundraising Partnerships**

Cultural District development is an economic development endeavor. The Cultural District will become an important catalyst for economic development and should be enabled to access local, state and federal funding. Serious consideration should be given for the District to be included in a comprehensive economic development plan.

It is imperative that public partners, such as the City of Alva, Woods County, and the State of Oklahoma be pro-active investors in the development of Alva’s Cultural District.

Steering Committee members from the private and public sectors should enable the development of Alva’s Cultural District by advocating for and facilitating economic and community development strategies that will ensure the success of the District, including:

- Advocate for an economic development plan that includes the Cultural District’s activities, and that supports public/private investment in downtown revitalization.
- Identify and facilitate local, state and federal funding resources dedicated to the development of the Cultural District.
- Identify and facilitate local business sponsorships for District events and programs.
- Identify and cultivate a relationship with foundations that support community and cultural development projects.

### **5.4 Consult with Oklahoma Arts Council Staff**

Ensure that Alva’s arts and cultural institutions are aware of their maximum potential for technical assistance and funding for arts and arts education programs.

# Graceful Arts

Gallery and Studios

Graceful Arts is the result of a collaboration between Freedom West Community Development Corporation and the Wisdom Family Foundation. Graceful Arts is the premier arts and humanities entity for northwest Oklahoma with monthly changing gallery exhibits and an ongoing roster of classes for all ages. Our mission is to support practicing artists and provide opportunities for arts education in a professional environment to area citizens of all ages

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