



City of Sebastopol Planning Department

Date: July 22, 2025
To: Public Arts Committee
From: Luke Lindenbusch, AICP – Interim Supervising Planner
Subject: California Cultural District Grant Application

Recommendation

Receive an update from staff on the application process, including adherence to the 2025 Cultural District Guidelines and the requisite development of a cultural asset inventory, branding, and geography of the proposed district. Provide further recommendations for inclusion in the final grant application slated for Council action at the August 5, 2025 meeting ahead of the August 7, 2025 application deadline.

Background

At the special meeting of June 10, 2025, Public Arts Committee (PAC) recommended that the City to pursue a California Cultural District grant offered by the California Arts Council, a state agency. This program has only been offered once before, approximately a decade ago, when only 12-14 cities throughout California were selected.

An additional public meeting held on July 9, 2025 narrowed down the list of prospective branding options, defined the geography as no greater than $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the Sebastopol Town Square, and directed staff to further refine the grant application.

The Public Arts Committee provided direction on branding for staff to incorporate into the grant application. Consensus generally centered around the Sebastopol Core Arts District as a preferred name for the district, with a name that can simultaneously evoke the centralized nature of Sebastopol's creative and cultural assets in the Downtown core, along with the City's historic heritage as an agricultural center (i.e., an apple core). Additional recommendations included avoiding signifiers associated with existing entities like school districts (e.g., Gravenstein, Apple Blossom).

Staff proceeded with the direction of the PAC in focusing on the recommendation of the use of the word "Core." Further input may provide additional phrasing to build out a compelling acronym, or further refine the branding direction for the Cultural District application. Staff further recommends including the use of Sebastopol to express the City's standing, and position the City for a successful application with a strong sense of geography and place.

Context

Benefits of the designation include official recognition as a State Cultural District, increased visibility and prestige for the City's arts and cultural assets, and enhanced eligibility and preference for state-level arts grants and programming.

Marketing and promotion services offered to designated jurisdictions include free graphic design services provided by the State Arts Council, distribution of promotional materials at state Welcome Centers, and inclusion in statewide cultural tourism campaigns.

Staff indicated that the City has a strong foundation of arts programming and community engagement that positions it well for the application. The designation could enhance existing efforts and serve as a catalyst for further cultural and economic development, while honoring Sebastopol's distinctive character as a creative community.

At prior meetings, the Public Arts Committee expressed support for pursuing the designation, emphasizing its alignment with the City's goals for cultural enrichment, community identity, and economic development.

Environmental Review

The proposed action to support an application for California Cultural District designation does not constitute a "project" under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as it involves administrative and organizational activities of government that will not result in a direct or reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment.

Fiscal Impact

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the action to support an application for California Cultural District designation. Preparation of the application will be conducted by City staff.

If the City is selected for designation, it may receive a baseline annual stipend historically ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000, with the potential for significantly higher grant awards depending on available state funding. However, all state funding is contingent on a one-to-one local match, meaning the City would need to allocate or secure matching funds equal to any state-provided grant amount in order to receive those funds.

The designation may also increase the City's competitiveness for future arts-related grants and could reduce marketing and promotional costs due to state-provided materials and support. Any future costs associated with implementing or expanding arts programming within the designated district would be subject to separate Council review and appropriation.

Attachments

- 2025 Cultural District Guidelines