



Art and Culture

Grand Connection Becomes a Cultural Corridor

The Grand Connection is one of the most ambitious, comprehensive efforts to date that aims to establish downtown Bellevue as a place to encounter cultural exchange, innovative immersive art experiences, music, and performance. It serves as a connector as well as destination: a creative spine in the core of the city that draws a public audience—both casual passersby and visitors seeking a community-driven experience. At the core of this vision is the belief that Bellevue’s public art should be an integral part of the city that excites and promotes dialogue across cultural and generational lines. The Grand Connection reflects the City of Bellevue’s diverse identity and an investment in contemporary public art and culture on par with the world’s most innovative cultural centers.

Why a Cultural Corridor?

A cultural corridor is a tool of economic development through the arts that connects nearby cultural attractions along a transportation route. It has its roots in heritage trails whereby tourists could “make a day” of visiting various historical sites by car. North Carolina has been particularly successful with using cultural corridors as a regional tourism strategy by promoting five different cultural trails that crisscross the state including an African American Music Trail and Discover North Carolina Craft.

As the demand for urban cultural tourism increases, the concept of the cultural corridor has been adapted for walkers and bicyclists to experience the city. Opened in 2013, the Indianapolis Cultural Trail features an 8-mile urban trail system with a network of bike-share stations that connect hundreds of

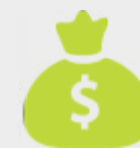
Did you know? Art:



Cultural tourists stay an average of **5.2** nights compared to **3.4** nights by business travelers



65% of travelers will attend arts and culture events when **50+** miles from home



For every **\$1** invested in the arts there is a **\$7** return.



32% will **extend** their trip

Source: Americans for the Arts - *Arts and Economic Prosperity*

cultural attractions in six different cultural districts in Downtown Indianapolis. This cultural trail was made possible after decades of infrastructure investments and the leadership of private philanthropists in the area.

While there is not a standard approach to how to develop a cultural corridor, national research suggests that successful cultural tourism projects focus on 1) a concentration of existing year-round cultural attractions; 2) easy round-trip access; 3) available and committed private investment in tourism development; and 4) sufficient public resources to sustain operations such as staff and marketing.

A String of cultural treasures

The Grand Connection winds through one of the most culture-rich and creative parts of Bellevue and has the potential to be a vibrant cultural corridor. The Bellevue Arts Museum and the Theatre at Meydenbauer Center offer year-round exhibitions and performances to tens of thousands of visitors a year. Bellevue City Hall, Compass Plaza, Downtown Park and Lincoln Square host annual cultural events, independent film screenings, and outdoor concerts. These venues attract hundreds of thousands of people to Downtown Bellevue and contributes to Bellevue's reputation as a "Top 10 Underrated City for Art Lovers" according to the US News and World Report. But while Bellevue is a cultural destination for people in the know, few people are aware of what's further down the road or around the corner. The opportunity is to put Bellevue on the cultural map as a first-rate city for art by connecting these discrete cultural treasures into something truly grand.



Clusters of cultural activity within a half-mile of the Grand Connection

The prospect of a cultural corridor rests not only the cultural attractions along the largely east-west route. Clusters of cultural activities exist around the Grand Connection and are easily accessible by pedestrians and bicyclists. For instance, if a visitor standing at the corner of the Grand Connection and 106th Avenue NE decides to walk five minutes (roughly a quarter mile) south along 106th they could catch a jazz concert at Bakes Place or a classical recital at Resonance at SOMA Towers. However, if visitors decide to walk five minutes north along the same street they would discover a handful of commercial art galleries including Gunnar Nordstrom Gallery and Hall Spassov Gallery. Another five minutes walking northeast and they'd come upon the Bellevue Library and the new Kidsquest Children's Museum.

In the future, visitors to the Grand Connection on the other side of the I-405 freeway to the east will face the same situation. At the point where the Grand Connection meets the Eastside Rail Corridor trail, visitors walking or biking south will have access to the Eastside Heritage Center and the Bellevue Botanical Garden. In total, over 25 cultural institutions, arts venues and public spaces are either on or easily accessible from the Grand Connection.

A hub for creative professionals

Downtown Bellevue is not only a cultural destination for visitors. A ring drawn around the Grand Connection that extends a quarter mile out in any direction would include within it 43,000 workers, about 6,400 of which are considered to be workers at creative firms or 15 percent. Creative firms contribute to the creative economy, or the segment of the economy that uses creative ideas and processes to produce aesthetic and economic value. Overall, 30 percent of US workers are part of the creative economy.

This includes individual artists and musicians as well as architects, museum workers and the range of skilled workers such as graphic designers who contribute to the production of video games.

The top industry with creative economy jobs inside the quarter mile ring around the Grand Connection is software publishers, which includes companies such as Microsoft and video game developers Valve and Bungie. While the total percentage of creative economy jobs in proximity to the Grand Connection is lower than the national average it is still significant.

Good bones: the making of a vibrant cultural district

There is an exciting opportunity to connect these cultural treasures and creative professionals. In fact, a growing body of literature suggests that linking culture and creatives into a larger whole is imperative to contemporary economic development. Research by the Brookings Institution has revealed the preference of creative technology firms to co-locate with each other and in areas with cultural amenities such as cultural districts.

International best practice research on cultural districts suggest that six common features are necessary for sustainable cultural district development:

1. Cluster: the industrial glue able to put together the economic and social actors of the local community;
2. Talent: the presence of a qualified and specialized workforce;
3. Networks: the free circulation of tacit knowledge;
4. Secondary services: the proximity of complementary companies;
5. Culture: the sharing of common values; and
6. Social capital: the mutual trust among local people.

Downtown Bellevue exhibits some of these features but not all. There is clearly a cluster of primary and secondary cultural assets and anchors as well as the presence of creative talent. But the social features of sustainable cultural districts are lacking: networks, shared culture and social capital. Investing in the social aspects of a potential Downtown cultural district could be the most impactful role for art and culture in the Grand Connection.



▲ Indianapolis Cultural Trail - Indianapolis, Indiana - Image source - Indianapolis Cultural Trail

Goals

Goal 1 - The Grand Connection is an easily identifiable, clearly defined, and culturally vibrant route.

The Grand Connection will act as a spine connecting an abundance of cultural offerings for residents and visitors. The route will include cultural elements that bring a sense of discovery and delight to everyday spaces using color, unexpected locations and lighting. The project creates a cohesive, unified aesthetic that emphasizes playfulness and surprise that allows people to imagine the world anew through the eyes of artists. The overlooked and under-looked corners, nooks and crannies of Downtown Bellevue are transformed, framed through text, images, and actions that encourage residents to slow down, take their time, and be filled with wonder.

Goal 2 - Bellevue has a proud and visible identity as an arts and cultural community that embraces regional artists as a unique and vital resource.

Provide economic incentives, varied cultural programming, and opportunities for all demographics. Encourage experimentation, innovation, and risk with an emphasis on diversity, technology and community building.

Implement an “Emerging Artist Program” that will allow underrepresented artists options to exhibit, perform, and to create their work. This will be a distinctive way to cultivate an interest in the arts and establish Bellevue as forward thinking in its artistic programming. Utilize specific Cultural Plinths to showcase and highlight these local artists.

Collaborate and engage with the area’s tech companies and provide a new and unique model for Microsoft and Google to engage with the community it serves. Engage with the gaming community and endorse projects such as PAX that could be held in venues such as Meydenbauer Center and DOXA Church.

Goal 3 - Downtown Bellevue is a culturally inclusive environment that encourages a diverse population to take part in Bellevue’s cultural offerings.

Cultivate a new generation of artists and arts participants. Bellevue’s new and increasing populace will shape its cultural vibrancy. The City’s cultural identity is expressed through community events, shared experiences and common memories. A lively arts environment begets a connected population with more people of all ages and ethnicities coming together to share experiences, ideas, and learn from one another.

Goal 4 - Downtown Bellevue is connected by seven major public artworks.

Culturally and aesthetically significant artworks strengthen Downtown Bellevue’s identity as a destination for creative people and professionals. These new major artworks are envisioned as place-makers, cross-town beacons, and gathering places. They should be commissioned with an emphasis on site specificity, community, and cultural and historical context. When possible and appropriate, these should be viewed as opportunities for public-private partnerships to make the most of limited city owned public space and funding. Working with private developers and neighborhood associations will serve to broaden the range of possibilities and strengthen community driven support for the arts.

Goal 5 - The City of Bellevue commits resources and staff to the development and ongoing operation of an Arts and Cultural Program specific to the Grand Connection and its vision as a flexible, curate-able corridor.

Support the programming and opportunities laid out in the Art and Culture Plan while applying Bellevue’s focus on technology, innovation, and education to arts and cultural programming.



▲ Big Top Grand Stand (2015), Nuit Blanche - Toronto, Ontario - SuttonBeresCuller



▲ **The High Line - New York, New York** - Image by Iwan Baan



▲ **Tiny Stages - San Francisco, California** - Image by Mission Community Market

Strategies

Strategy 1 - Whole Site Approach

In mapping out the placement of works, the corridor will be considered as a whole, with an intent to weave smaller intimate projects with signature, eye-catching works on a large scale. The scale and breadth of the Grand Connection afford a significant opportunity to create new ways to view, interact, and discover art. Projects will be designed to be accessible to a wide range of the public, offering a broad spectrum of cultural experiences.

The Grand Connection will be clearly defined by major points of interest every four to five minutes walking. Major points of interest may include, but not limited to, artist-designed canopies and paving, signature sculptures, amphitheaters, murals, and cultural venues.

Minor points of interest will occur every 15 to 20 seconds walking. These may include projects at cultural plinths, space for buskers and performances, and small discoverable artworks. Other points of interest may include informational kiosks and artist-designed features such as maps, manhole covers, utility boxes, benches, planters, railings, and bicycle racks.

Strategy 2 - Initiate a program that provides ongoing opportunities for the creation and presentation of new works.

Create ongoing opportunities to support local and regional artists in the development of new work. Opportunities include calls for artists to work with design teams on all new developments, Cultural Plinths Program, and venues for emerging artists' exhibitions and performances. The cultivation of new visual art installations, performance arts, and music should include investing and expanding existing programs.

Strategy 3 - Identify specific opportunities to address cultural, historical, and community-driven projects.

Highlight the significance of the natural environment and issues facing the community through sustainable planting and hardscape strategies while incorporating new technologies such as illuminated pathways and solar technologies. Art should also highlight historical elements of Bellevue such as cultural diversity, innovation, agricultural, and Asian-American heritage.

Strategy 4 - Build and reinforce distinct neighborhood identities along the route.

Help build and reinforce distinct neighborhood identities along the route including Wilburton, Eastside Rail Corridor and Old Bellevue. These strategies should enhance and celebrate the existing character and localized history through events and installations.

Strategy 5 - Use art and cultural programming to enhance the civic experience.

Programming should engage the community with a series of intimate, theme-based events. These can include tech-based arts festivals, seasonal events, temporary installations, and performance. The events will be short and flexible in nature to allow for experimentation by a diverse range of artists and curators. These events will increase the number of visitors that engage with Downtown Bellevue.

Strategy 6 - Forge partnerships between artists, government, the private sector, and cultural organizations for the creation and presentation of new works.

Programming will encourage communication and collaboration between existing organizations and community groups that make use of cultural offerings along the Grand Connection. Artists will be integrated into the design process for new public development



▲ **Pollinator Pathway- Seattle, Washington** Image by Minnie Bredouw



▲ **Nuit Blanche - Toronto, Ontario** - Image by Benn Roffelsen

projects. Prioritizing incentives for private developments to engage in similar project planning with local artists will be emphasized and curators working with the Grand Connection will continue to work with property owners and cultural organizations to identify art and programming opportunities.

Pursue, where appropriate, strategies where the City can be flexible in its development standards for the right of way and private development to support the arts and cultural enhancements. Prioritize the enhancement of the street and cultural experience over interior and lobby space installations. Apply the amenities incentive system to cultural value rather than the monetary value of improvements through the engagement of the Arts Commission.

Strategy 7 - Provide incentives and development opportunities for the support of local artists and cultural organizations.

The City takes a leadership role in fostering the arts as a community resource and leverages the arts as a key component in its overall economic development strategies. Long-term strategies include investing in existing and new venues, affordable artist housing, and artist workspace. To realize the scope of the Grand Connection's impact, it is necessary to consider means of attraction artist and cultural services as active members of the City.

Strategy 8 - Initiate a public relations program to communicate, educate, and engage the public.

Creating a network for all of the experiences along the Grand Connection route will help bring awareness to and build upon cultural events in Bellevue. This program should be initiated by the City and developed in partnership with the proposed Cultural Collective (see full Art and Culture plan). This can be achieved through a website, mobile apps, and other standard means of advertising. The program should present all of the arts and cultural offerings clearly and regularly to the greater community.

Strategy 9 - Implement a program that supports a wide range of art projects, which in turn fosters community interaction.

Create a curate-able, flexible program that continues to draw visitors to a continually evolving and changing art scene. Encourage experimentation, innovation, and risk with an emphasis on diversity, technology, and community building. Beginning in 2018, Bellwether should be re-imagined as an annual 10 day curated exhibition and festival. This is a unique opportunity for experimentation and early implementation of the programming vision for the arts and cultural component of the Grand Connection.

Program Opportunities

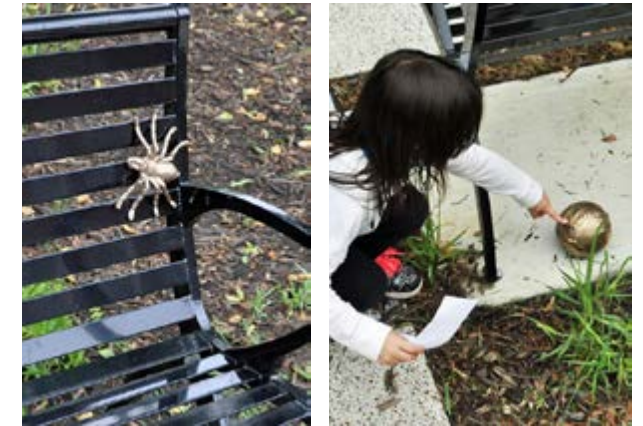
Many of the stakeholders and public surveys expressed a desire for more public art, especially in the area of performance and music. Another need is more venues available where artists can perform, exhibit, and share their work. One major component to supporting local artists is to provide a place to exhibit. The following program ideas create a flexible Grand Connection Arts Program that continues to draw visitors to a continually evolving and changing, vibrant and exciting art scene that encourages experimentation, innovation, and risk with an emphasis on diversity, technology, and community building.

Bellwether

Re-imagine Bellwether as an annual 10-day curated multi-disciplinary exhibition and festival. Public art as well as public preferences have evolved significantly in the twenty-five years since the beginning of the Bellevue Sculpture Exhibition. While sculpture is still an important discipline, it is becoming an increasingly smaller portion of art in public places as well as inadequate to achieve community goals for public art. Digital art, performance, and social practice are emerging art disciplines that are proving more effective in community engagement and in popularity. The switch from a four-month to a 10-day format will concentrate the action into a smaller time frame, allowing energy and attention to be fully paid to a more vibrant and exciting event. The shorter time-frame is also more conducive to temporary, time-based art works. The first three years of Bellwether can be a laboratory set up to gauge the success of the new format. This time should also be used to encourage deep and meaningful partnerships with Bellevue's cultural institutions, such as the Bellevue Arts Museum, KidsQuest Children's Museum, Bellevue Public Library, and the Theater at Meydenbauer Center. These partners present the opportunity for Bellwether to engage the whole downtown core and host more indoor locations for art works and installations.

Cultural Collective

Build a community of organizations and stakeholders along



▲ *Treasure Hunt - Washington, District of Columbia* - Pete Beeman



▲ *Light City Baltimore - Baltimore, Maryland* - OVO Collective



▲ *Red Ball Project- Taipei, Taiwan* - Kurt Perschke



▲ *Prada Marfa* - Marfa, Texas - Elmgreen and Dragset

the Grand Connection route to grow their audiences, share resources, promote tourism, and increase awareness of the Grand Connection. The Meydenbauer Center, BAM, The Westin, City Hall, Doxa Church, Downtown Park, and Bellevue Square all have adequate and distinctly different opportunities for an engagement with the arts. Many of these venues have available lobby, general facility, and wall space that go unused, even during regular programming. By creating a network for the sharing of physical space and artworks, a broader awareness and cohesiveness of the Grand Connection can be accomplished. Sharing of resources, artworks, information, and space can help further propel the Grand Connection and the cultural programming into a stronger, more vibrant arts destination.



▲ *Nelson's Ship in a Bottle* - Trafalgar Square, London, United Kingdom - Yinka Shonibare

Cultural Plinths Program

Create ongoing opportunities to support local and regional artists in the creation and presentation of new works displayed on designated platforms. These plinths, using the success of the Bellwether program and the art walk format, will allow for creation and display of art in all its forms including sculptures and 3D work, performance, music, and other creative expression. These plinths can be curated and be very flexible, used for one-night events, rotating monthly exhibitions, festivals, and temporal performance. A series of cultural plinths along the route of the Grand Connection will ensure downtown Bellevue a year-round cultural destination.



▲ *Spring Garden Street Bridge Mural* - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Betsy Casnas

Mural Program

Murals make a place welcoming and add to the walkability of a city. These public canvases can be highly interactive and have long been a way to explore a larger community story and enhance the built environment. A mural program can create a large impact and can quickly enhance civic spaces through affordable artworks. To utilize unused spaces, incentives could encourage property owners to create "art walls" that can function as cultural plinths for temporary murals as well as other art projects including digital projection, bas-relief sculpture, and wheat paste.

Art Walks

Build upon the Bellevue Arts Museum Free First Friday program and the Bellwether art walks. The art walk should be considered part of programming specific to the Grand Connection. The art walk can be expanded to take place year-round. Following the models of existing Seattle-area art walks, the Bellevue art walk would benefit from changing its hours to late afternoon or early evening, to coincide with the end of the work day, other evening-based cultural events taking place, and to further benefit neighborhood restaurants and cafes wanting to participate and take advantage of the art walk crowds.

Art Fairs

Grow and develop Bellevue's art fairs – Bellevue Arts Museum ARTSFair, Bellevue Festival of the Arts and the 6th Street Fair – into a regionally recognized arts destination by coordinating and pooling marketing resources, centralizing activities along Bellevue Way, integrating more contemporary art and performance into activities and offerings, and providing extended evening hours.

Downtown Concerts

Expand and publicize the Bellevue Downtown Association's Live at Lunch concert series of free live music performances at lunchtime to include evening concerts that connect Downtown residents and employees to a vibrant 18-hour a day neighborhood.

Emerging Artist Program

The opportunity for a unique and flexible program that allows underrepresented artists options to exhibit, perform, display, and to create their work, has the potential to cultivate an interest in the arts and establish Bellevue as forward thinking in its artistic programming. This can be achieved through a variety of genres including visual arts, performing arts, and musical acts that make downtown Bellevue a year-round cultural destination.



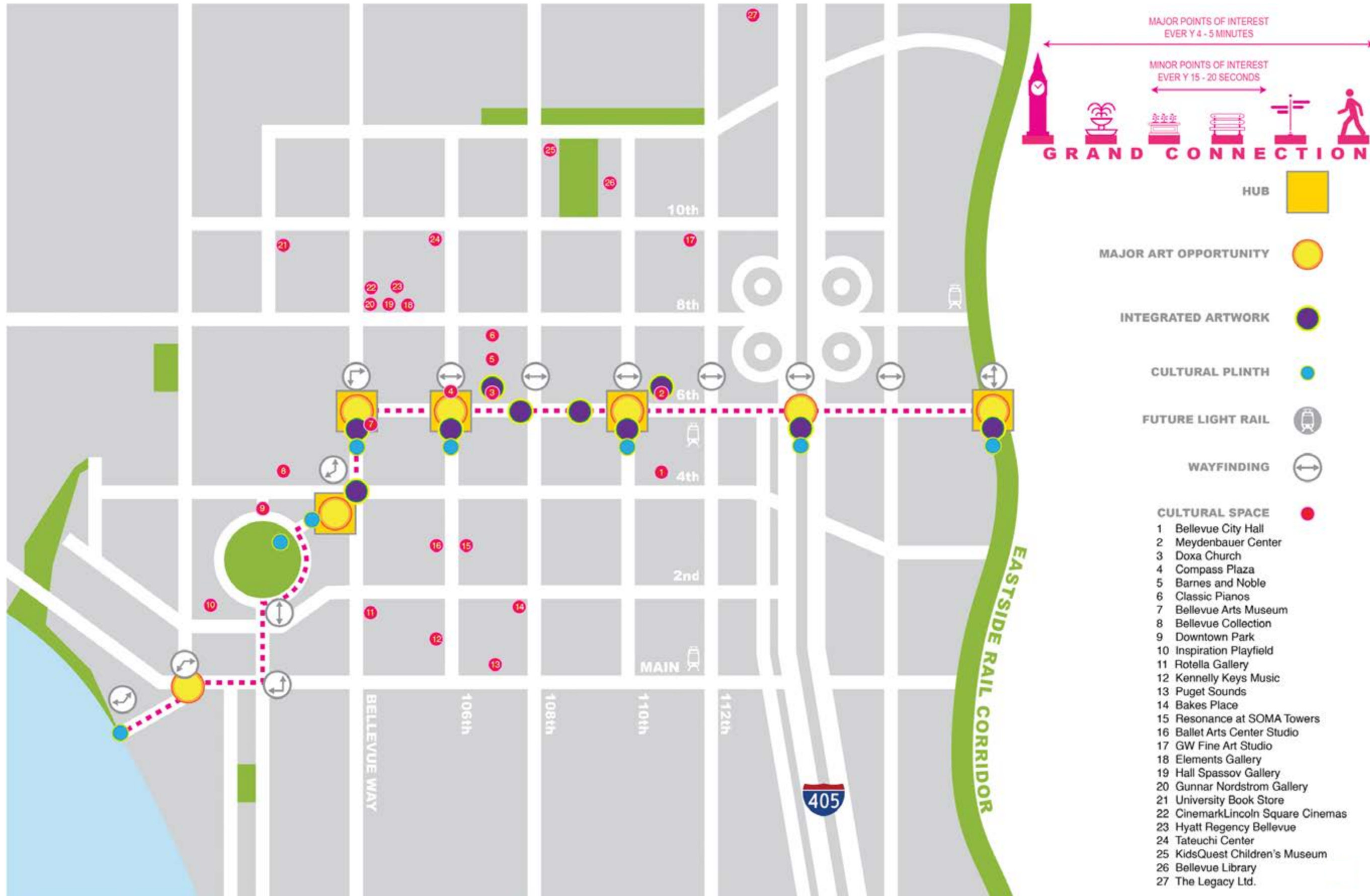
▲ *Cell Phone Disco* - Three Rivers Art Festival, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania - Information Lab



▲ *Old Town Art Fair* - Chicago, Illinois



▲ *Old Town Art Fair* - Chicago, Illinois



▲ Art and Culture Plan - Image by SuttonBeresCuller

Next Steps: Art and Culture Plan

- Adopt the *Grand Connection Art and Culture* plan.
- Identify improvements to existing art opportunities.
- Identify opportunities for partnerships to advance the goals and vision of the *Art and Culture* plan.

