

**Meeting Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2026

**Prepared By:** Eric Weiss, Director of Parks and Recreation

## Subject: Arts and Placemaking Strategy

### Request

Review background materials, proposed 2026 quick action strategy, and

### Background

#### Community Feedback

Through community conversations, engagement at events and festivals, feedback from local businesses, and even a statistically-valid phone survey, we have found a common thread – people love West St. Paul (WSP) but desire:

- More opportunities to connect with one another
- A greater number of events and programs
- Enhanced community design
- Greater access to local arts and culture

#### Branding+Placemaking Roadmap and Parks System Plan

Given the community feedback, the city hired the consulting firm AllTogether to guide the development of a strategy that would:

- improve and streamline the city's brand and marketing materials, while reviewing our logo, fonts, and colors
- improve the city's market position within the metro (attracting businesses, visitors, shoppers, new investments)
- identify ways to enhance community design, celebrate the city's history, improve community connections

Likewise, the city's new parks system plan highlights many of the same topics and incorporates similar strategies.

For more information about these documents:

- [Branding+Placemaking Roadmap](#)
- [Brand Positioning](#)
- [Parks System Plan](#)

#### Strategic Plan

In 2025, the City Council adopted a new five-year strategic plan highlighting several goals and strategies from the Branding+Placemaking Roadmap and Parks System Plan. Staff and PRAC are now tasked with implementation. In 2026, the focus of our efforts is exploring ways to "maximize use of public amenities and third spaces" and "elevating the visual appeal of WSP" with a particular emphasis on:

- **Public Space Audit + Activation Plan** (TOP PRIORITY): Conduct a citywide audit of underutilized or hidden spaces. Assess accessibility, visibility, and potential uses. Create GIS map. Create a phased activation plan using low-cost, high-impact design interventions.
- **Activate Public Sites:** Launch low-cost pilot programming (e.g., food truck nights, games, story time) at a few key public spaces that don't currently offer WSP programming/events. Build attendance and partnerships incrementally to evaluate long-term feasibility.
- **Art in Unexpected Places:** Decorate visible infrastructure with art by local artists, youth or community groups (utility boxes, etc.) Add small, low-cost wayfinding signs that point to hidden parks, seating areas, trails, and restrooms.
- **Community Seating/Gathering Spaces:** Install whimsical or distinctive seating, or 'pause spots' in areas not traditionally used for gathering—along trails, by sidewalks, or outside City buildings.
- **Winter-Friendly WSP Mini-Projects:** Test small design and programming upgrades that make parks and sidewalks more inviting in cold months. Ideas could include decorative winter lighting, painted snow-path trails, temporary warming stations, or creative pop-ups (hot cocoa, art displays).
- Plus, several other projects tied to other strategic goals

### Funding Allocations

In 2026, the City Council allocated several funding sources that support arts and placemaking efforts. Funds are in various stages of allocation, with the Arts + Placemaking Fund having the most flexibility.

These funds include:

- Arts + Placemaking Fund (\$75,000 available)
- Parks & Recreation Special Events Fund (approximately \$12,500 available)
- Explore West St. Paul Fund (approximately \$15,000 available)
- Parks Capital Improvement Fund
- Advertising Fund

*Note: Funding streams are generally listed in order of flexibility/availability of funds.*

### Draft Strategy

As was shared at the last Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) meeting, the City Council made the determination that, for now, in order to expeditiously get the city's arts and placemaking efforts off the ground, PRAC would take the lead guiding and making recommendations regarding programs, projects, community engagement strategies, and budgets.

### Quick Action Projects - 2026

Given that it's already March, and the busy summer season is right around the corner, we need to act quickly to be able to provide offerings yet this year. As such, staff have made several recommendations which we feel are realistic and impactful. These recommendations are outlined in the attached draft strategy.

Key to staff's recommendation is the connection between people, place, art, and economic development. We feel we can strategically align these efforts, which, given the current circumstances,

are especially important this year. WSP is a vibrant, working-class community, home to a large Latino population. A stroll down Robert St. reveals a delightful blend of restaurants and businesses that reflect the diversity of life here. However, our community has faced significant challenges due to Operation Metro Surge and its impact. We feel, more than ever, that the roadmap's implementation is a pathway to healing, resilience, and, most importantly, joy in the aftermath of the surge. Staff's recommendation is to use much of the 2026 Arts+Placemaking funding as mini-grants, which could be offered to businesses interested in creating new, interesting spaces where people can gather and connect.

In regard to aligning our Arts+Placemaking work with our Economic Development strategy, staff are making this recommendation for several reasons:

- Aligns several goals within the strategic plan
- Supports our efforts to recruit/support independent, unique small businesses
- Combats potential view that arts are “wasteful” use of public resources
- Attracts additional investment and resources
- Utilizes the arts and placemaking as a tax revenue strategy

This is an ambitious strategy that will require the support of all departments and will be more successful with additional funding (we've already applied for grants!). We think a strategic alignment between arts and placemaking and economic development, public safety, cultural expression, and the environment is our best bet to securing additional support.

The draft strategy outlines several opportunities, several which can be done with relatively little financial input (but a definite sweat equity investment).

Staff are seeking PRAC's feedback on the draft strategy for 2026:

- Does this generally feel like a good direction?
- Do budget allocations generally feel okay?
- Are there any projects individual PRAC members would like to support?
- Is anything missing? Should anything be removed?

### **Developing a Long-Term Strategy**

In addition to advancing near-term, quick-action projects, staff and PRAC are tasked with beginning to develop a longer-term strategy and budget recommendation for the city's arts and placemaking work.

This could include any and all of the projects mentioned under the Strategic Plan section above. It could also creatively incorporate events and programming.

For discussion at the PRAC meeting, members should explore:

- What opportunities exist to engage the community in conversations about arts, placemaking, and culture?
- What questions should be asked of the community?
- What should an arts plan or strategy look like?
- In developing the plan or strategy, what kind of process should be pursued?

- What activities, events, or projects are individual PRAC members available to support?

**Attachments:**

- Arts+Placemaking 2026 Draft Strategy