Philadelphia2050 Planning Together

CULTURE & TRADITION

Philadelphia's identity is shaped by its history and vibrant culture. This can be seen in its historic architecture, local businesses, public spaces, and thriving arts scene. Institutions including sports teams, museums, orchestras, dance companies and universities enrich the city's fabric and foster cultural exchange, cohesion, and civic pride. Through planning, Philadelphia can protect and elevate its identity by amplifying underrepresented histories, promoting adaptive reuse of buildings, driving equitable economic development, and strengthening community pride across neighborhoods.

CULTURE & TRADITION IN PHILADELPHIA

- **Cultural spaces nurture community connection.** Recreation centers, libraries, and community-based businesses are viewed as pillars of community that support connection. Over 80% of people surveyed by the Greater Philadelphia Culture Alliance agreed that the venue or facility where they were surveyed is an important pillar within their community.[1]
- **Neighborhood events like block parties and parades bring Philadelphians together.** These gatherings strengthen local identity and foster social cohesion by temporarily transforming car-oriented spaces into places for people. More than 6,000 block party permits are requested every year.[2]
- **Philadelphia's increasingly diverse population fuels a vibrant mix of cultural traditions and expressions across the city.**
    - Black Philadelphians, who make up nearly 40% of the population, shape the city through a rich legacy of arts, music, and cultural institutions derived from the city's roots in jazz, hip hop, and soul and reflected today across commercial corridors in West and North Philadelphia.[3]
    - The Hispanic/Latino population, now 16.1% of the city, influences neighborhood character through visible cultural expression, including Puerto Rican iron rejas that define the look and feel of areas like Norris Square, Kensington, and North Philadelphia.[4, 5]

Cinco de Mayo parade in South Philadelphia



Photo: Paula Brumbelow

- Immigrant communities, making up about 15% of residents, contribute to Philadelphia's cultural identity through businesses and public markets, seen in hubs like FDR Park's Southeast Asian Market and the cultural anchor of Chinatown.[6]

- **Philadelphia is home to the nation's largest public art program.** Mural Arts Philadelphia, the city-funded nonprofit, is responsible for creating over 3,600 murals across the city and continues to create 50-100 new pieces per year. The City is also home to the pioneering Percent for Art model, which requires new construction or major renovation projects to spend 1% of their budget on public art designed specifically for the site.[7, 8, 9]
- **Philadelphia is home to many culturally significant institutions.** Over 100 museums, including the Philadelphia Art Museum, venues like the Dell Music Center and Academy of Music, and sports stadiums like Citizens Bank Park and Lincoln Financial Field contribute to the city's daily life, pride, and identity.[10]
- **Philadelphia's affordability supports its creative communities.** Significantly more affordable than neighboring cities like New York and Washington, D.C., Philadelphia is able to foster a vibrant arts community, providing access to high quality, affordable studio and performance spaces.
- **Philadelphia has an extensive historic footprint.** Nearly 5% of the city's total land area is designated as a historic district or individually designated property located outside of historic districts. Within the city there are over 600 sites on the National Register of Historic Places and nearly 15,000 on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.[11, 12, 13]
- **The Avenue of the Arts is one of the nation's most dynamic cultural corridors.** Located on Broad Street between City Hall and Washington Avenue, it is home to the second highest concentration of arts and culture institutions in the country, second only to New York City. However, the closing of the University of the Arts and a 45% increase in property value from 2016 to 2024 have raised concerns about the corridor's future as a cultural center.[14]
- **Arts and culture are major economic engines in Philadelphia.** Philadelphia's arts and culture sector contributes about $3.3 billion to the local economy each year, including $1.9 billion in direct spending and $1.4 billion in indirect spending. The sector also supports over 30,000 jobs and generates $429 million in tax revenue at the local, state, and federal levels.[15, 16]

CULTURE & TRADITION CHALLENGES

- **There is unequal access to cultural resources and other desirable locations.** Most Philadelphia residents consider having safe places to live, work, and play to be very important, and slightly less say they have easy access to such spaces. Access differs significantly by race: only 57% of residents of color report easy access, compared to 81% of white residents.[17]
- **Safety concerns create a barrier to community connection.** Permits for block parties, beneficial for community connection, are regularly denied due to fear of violence. In 2022, at least 263 requests (about one in six) were rejected, mostly in Logan/Ogontz/Fern Rock, Kensington, Allegheny West, and other neighborhoods that struggle with violence. Similarly, safety concerns keep teens and young people from gathering at City recreation centers. In 2020, over 700 shootings occurred within 400 feet of rec centers.[18, 19]
- **Historic sites in Philadelphia often lack the support needed for preservation.** Without dedicated local financial, zoning, or procedural initiatives, many fall into disrepair, missing opportunities to serve as vibrant community spaces. One example is the historic Uptown Theater, where renovations have stalled due to funding challenges.[20, 21, 22]

In 2025, Creative Philadelphia began work on the city's first Arts & Culture Master Plan. This planning effort will dovetail with *Philadelphia2050* to support citywide art and cultural resources. In 2023 the Philadelphia Historical Commission developed the Treasure Philly! model to inventory, document, protect and publicize the grassroots cultural traditions and overlooked community histories that have shaped Philadelphia and its people.[23, 24]

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Thoughtful planning and collaboration will be necessary to address Philadelphia's cultural needs. *Philadelphia2050* will consider ways in which culture and tradition can remain central to community life, be celebrated across every neighborhood, and be accessible to all residents. Through continued analysis and public engagement, *Philadelphia2050* will consider questions including:

- How can planning support access to events, like block parties, and other forms of community-based cultural expression?
- What strategies can Philadelphia use to encourage equitable investment in cultural infrastructure across historically underserved neighborhoods?
- How can Philadelphia plan to better protect and uplift sites that are essential to the history of Philadelphia?
- What approaches to planning can help curb violence, so more Philadelphians are able to safely gather in public spaces?

Endnotes

1 Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. "Arts, Culture & Economic Prosperity: Greater Philadelphia." April 2024. Pg.7.

2 Terruso, Julia. "Philly has 922 streets banned from having block parties. Why?" The Philadelphia Inquirer. Aug. 14, 2018.

3 2023 ACS 5-Year Estimate. "Racial Composition in Philadelphia." U.S. Census Bureau.

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12 National Park Service. "Spreadsheet of NRHP Listed Properties" June 24, 2025.

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14 Econsult Solutions Inc. "Avenue of the Arts Economic Impact Study." September 9, 2024.

15 Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. "Arts, Culture & Economic Prosperity: Greater Philadelphia." April 2024. Pg.7.

16 Econsult Solutions Inc. "Avenue of the Arts Economic Impact Study." September 9, 2024.

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18 Hazelton, Lynette and Purcell, Dylan. "Philly's block parties can foster community connections, but they're being canceled because of gun violence." The Philadelphia Inquirer. Aug. 17, 2022.

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20 Crimmins, Peter. "Jazz legend, after house partially collapses, gets help from philanthropist, neighbors." WHYY. March 3, 2021.

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24 Philadelphia Historical Commission, City of Philadelphia. "About Us."

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