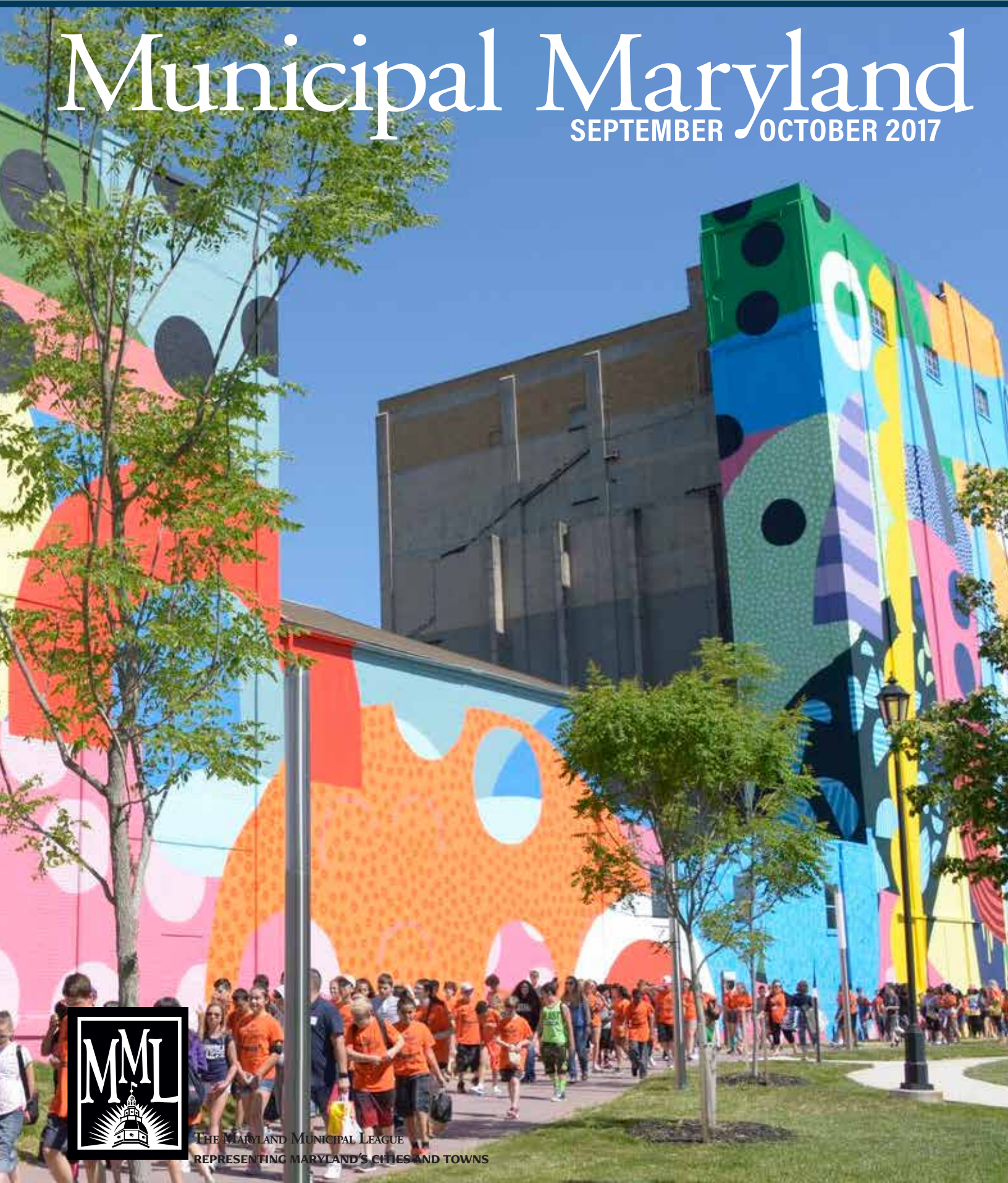


HAGERSTOWN CULTURAL TRAIL / ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF HEAL CITIES

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The Hagerstown Cultural Trail: A Path to Downtown Development

By Erin C. Anderson, Communications Manager, Hagerstown

The City of Hagerstown is - quite literally - blazing a trail for revitalization in its downtown. This summer the community celebrated the grand opening of the Hagerstown Cultural Trail, a half-mile path that connects two of the city's most popular destinations: the downtown Arts & Entertainment District with City Park, named the most beautiful city park in the country by a popular travel website. The crown jewel of Hagerstown's 21 parks, City Park also features the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, the restored home of Hagerstown's founder, and many walking trail and recreation areas.

While you may choose to begin your trip downtown or at the park, the trail is not just a means to either end. Rather, the journey is as inspiring as both destinations. There are six public art installations along the way, which feature local, regional, and internationally-recognized talent. Artists were tasked with creating projects that are not simply inviting to the eye, but that also function as an invitation for interaction and engagement. The trail and its art has helped the community rediscover itself with a fresh perspective of its culture and heritage, and it's transforming the way Hagerstown's neighbors view the city.

Why Public Art?

The Knight Foundation undertook a three-year study with Gallup to discover what "attaches" people to the place they live. Surveying 43,000 residents from 26 different states, the group found one of the most significant drivers of attachment is aesthetics of a place - its art, parks, and green spaces. This characteristic ranked higher than factors like perception of the local economy, leadership, quality of education, and safety. The study further determined that cities with the highest levels of attachment also experienced the highest rate of economic growth. The Knight Foundation believes if people are more attached to their community, they will help make it a better place.

The Bigger Picture

The Hagerstown Cultural Trail is one of eight catalyst projects included in the Community's City Center Plan, a roadmap designed to spur downtown development through public-private partnerships. The full realization of the plan projects the creation of 875 new permanent jobs, bringing \$125 million in new investment downtown. The plan is the result of broad community input, with the consultants, Urban Partners of Philadelphia, spending over 130 hours collecting feedback from the community. For more details visit www.hagerstownmd.org/citycenterplan.

Beyond a Walking Trail

Initially, the trail was intended to be a multi-use path, one that would create a more walkable route between two areas of the city with the

most visitors. However, the community wanted more than a trail - they wanted art.

City Engineer Rodney Tissue was tasked with overseeing the development of the trail. While he possesses a broad range of skills and talents, the solicitation, selection, and implementation of



People pass Alison Sigethy's "Fantastical Garden" featuring aluminum foliage with windmill and mirror components.



The Mayor and City Council are joined by Delegate Brett Wilson and trail partners to cut the ribbon at the grand opening.



The Art Selection Committee shows off their tokens of appreciation for their work.

public art was a bit outside of his wheelhouse. The City developed a Public Art Committee, an eight-person subcommittee of the Arts & Entertainment District Board. The group obtained invaluable guidance from leading national arts organizations, including Americans for the Arts and the Public Arts Network. Hagerstown took the advice to hire a public art consultant and selected Cochran Studios of Frederick, Maryland over other competitive proposals from across the country.

William Cochran, a public artist himself, and his wife and partner Teresa, led the steering committee in a process to develop a Public Art Master Plan. The Cochrans spent many hours meeting with adjacent land owners, interviewing stakeholders, and getting the pulse of the community. The Master Plan lays the ground work for how and what public art would be implemented along the trail. An additional group of community arts advocates and leaders in the art community

worked together to select the artists and fine-tune the concepts to make the art a reality.

Won't You Be My Neighbor?

The project received significant support from neighboring businesses and property owners in the form of land donations and easements, including the local newspaper, which donated an area of its property that now hosts a striking steel sculpture. One local business owner, Washington County Commissioner and a past president of the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo) John Barr, played an invaluable role in the project. Commissioner Barr not only provided parts of his property, but he paid for the paint used to create the trail's inaugural public art piece, the "Mural of Unusual Size," a bold, contemporary artwork that spans the façade of four industrial buildings, encompassing a canvas of about 16,000 square feet. Commissioner Barr is also supporting the removal of a chain link fence along the trail and his property to be replaced by a decorative, laser-cut Corten screen.

Commissioner Barr has also welcomed a new tenant to another one of his properties along the trail, the Chiropractic and Massage Center of Hagerstown. Owned by Dr. Marc Gamerman, the placement of the trail is what sealed the deal. The chiropractor recalled a time when his realtor was showing potential site locations. He questioned surveyors who were setting spikes, and the realtor told him they were plotting the Hagerstown Cultural Trail. Dr. Gamerman recalled thinking to himself, "We better sign the lease before John Barr finds out about this place," already anticipating the contribution the trail would make to the area. Dr. Gamerman is also financially supporting projects near his business.

Hagerstown was fortunate to receive numerous grants from the Maryland State Arts Council, the Maryland Heritage Area Authority, and Program Open Space. The majority of city funding came from bond financing. "The Mayor and City Council took a big chance on investing in the community this way, and I'm proud to work for a city that invests in itself," commented City Engineer Tissue.

A Case for Public Art

Beauty is certainly in the eye of the beholder when it comes to any art, so it's not unusual to have a variety of opinions on any one piece. However, critics grow more energized when it comes to public funding for public art.

"The job of the artist is to blow everyone's mind. When you get really top-notch artists, that's what they do," says William Cochran. "There's a maxim in the public art world that if it's not a little bit controversial, you're probably not doing it right." While the artwork along the trail has received its fair share of criticism, it has been embraced overall by the community. Thousands of people came to explore the trail, interact with the artwork, and celebrate the integration of the trail within the city's fabric.

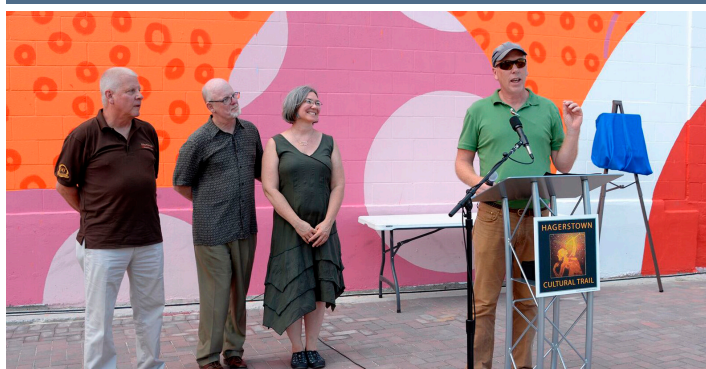
There are plans to develop the Hagerstown Cultural Trail further, creating a pedestrian walkway through an historic building, extending through a downtown green space, and eventually reaching the City Farmers' Market. Local artists are also engaged in attracting future art projects. For more information on the Hagerstown Cultural Trail, visit www.hagerstownculturaltrail.com. ■



Sculptor Adam Curtis (right of group with hat) speaks to a group about his steel sculpture, "Rise," featured at the Herald-Mail Plaza.



Families walk down a stretch of the Hagerstown Cultural Trail at the grand opening celebration.



Rodney Tissue recognizes John Barr and William and Teresa Cochran for their role in creating and supporting the trail.