



## City Council Agenda Report Agenda Item No. 10.a.

**DATE:** January 20, 2026

**TO:** Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

**APPROVED BY:** Rene Salas, City Manager

**SUBMITTED BY:** David De Vries, Director of Economic Development

**SUBJECT:** CONSIDERATION OF ARTS DISTRICT OVERLAY AND SELECTION OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

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**SUMMARY:** Arts District Overlay Consideration & Alternatives

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Staff recommends the City Council review the provided alternative locations for an Arts District Overlay and provide staff a preferred alternative, if any, and direct staff to establish an Arts District Overlay for future consideration with related allowable uses and activities to be included within the South El Monte Municipal Code and a capital improvement budget for art related infrastructure, activities, paintings and sculptures.

**FISCAL/FINANCIAL IMPACT:** Fiscal Impact will be determined at a future City Council meeting.

### **DISCUSSION:**

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

At the November 18, 2025 City Council Meeting, staff was directed to provide alternatives for a potential arts district. The City Council is considering options and alternatives to establish an "Arts District" to stimulate economic revitalization, create community hubs, support local businesses, celebrate community heritage and encourage active healthy living, inclusivity, and a sense of community pride and belonging through public art and creative placemaking.

Staff has identified three potential sub-areas for an Arts District:

- **Alternative 1: West Industrial (Attachment 1)**

Within the heart of the City's industrial business district with Chico Ave as the central street.

- **Alternative 2: Central Civic (Attachment 2)**

Within the heart of the City's civic area with Santa Anita Ave as the central street.

- **Alternative 3: East Commercial (Attachment 3)**

Within the heart of the City's commercial business district with Durfee Ave as the central street.

## II. ANALYSIS OF ALTERNATIVES

The three sites have been evaluated based on their "activation potential" as it relates to placemaking, creating a community hub, walkability, access to transit, things-to-do, etc.

- **West Industrial (Alternative 1):** Existing murals (e.g., Cali Dumpling, Progress Brewing); highest potential for maker spaces (industrial with retail sales such as breweries, bakery, dumpling and cheese wholesale-manufacturing); numerous private walls for murals, limited restaurants (e.g., Lolita's Fast Food, Lonchera La Hamburguesa Loca); Progress Brewing centrally located off Chico Ave.; limited street right-of-way and park opportunities; near Whittier Narrows and Rio Honda trail allowing for multi-modal (e.g., bike, walk) to transit; serviced by bus routes; away from retail, residences and hotels; interest from property owner for upzoning; interest from business owners/developers for art murals.
- **Central Civic (Alternative 2):** Existing sculptures/monuments at Central and Legg lakes, Thienes Ave. Gateway, and at City Hall; limited potential for maker spaces (industrial with retail sales such as breweries); several private walls for murals including within and adjacent to the City-owned Kruse property, limited restaurants (e.g., Starbucks, future In-N-Out site, future Cielito Lindo); impacts existing historic civic ambiance; numerous community events occur annually; robust park and street right-of-way opportunities for sculptures, infrastructure and events; near Whittier Narrows; near Merced Ave. bike route allowing for multi-modal (e.g., bike, walk) to transit; serviced by bus routes; away from retail; hotels exist; adjacent to residences; future Magellan development and Southern California Edison property provide opportunities for art sculptures and murals.
- **East Commercial (Alternative 3):** No known existing art; limited potential maker spaces (industrial with retail sales such as breweries, El Monte Wholesale Meats); several private walls for murals, however, shopping centers may be resistant to participation due to corporate branding requirements; robust retail and restaurants (e.g., Marshalls, Habit, Panda Express, WaBa Grill, Krudos); highest potential for increasing sales tax; moderate street right-of-way opportunities; near San Gabriel River trail allowing for multi-modal (e.g., bike, walk) to transit; serviced by bus routes; away from freeway and highways; adjacent to residences; no hotels.

## III. CASE STUDIES

The following art related areas were studied as it relates to art installations and tourism activation as summarized below:

### **Miami, Florida (Wynwood Arts District)**

- Theme: Urban Revitalization and Global Street Culture.
- Installations: "Wynwood Walls" (high-end graffiti) and large-scale industrial warehouse murals.
- Purpose: Transformed a blighted industrial zone into a luxury retail/arts hub. Focuses on high-impact color to drive commercial traffic and nightlife.

### **Valparaíso, Chile**

- Theme: Poetry, Color, and Verticality (moves upward and downward through the slopes within the town).
- Installations: Massive murals, "Piano Stairs" on public walkways, and many homes and businesses feature hand-painted poetry, verses or quotes on their doors and doorframes as a sign of cultural pride.
- Purpose: Celebrates bohemian history and the legacy of poet Pablo Neruda. Uses art to transform challenging topography into a pedestrian-heavy tourist destination.

### **Nashville, Tennessee (The Gulch)**

- Theme: Music City Identity and Social Media Interaction.
- Installations: "What Lifts You" (giant wings), the Taylor Swift Bench, and music-themed murals (giant microphones/ears) and sculptures (giant guitars).
- Purpose: Creates "Instagrammable moments" that serve as free global marketing, blending Nashville's music heritage with modern, trendy tourism.

### **Laguna Beach, California**

- Theme: "Art Colony" Heritage and Coastal Aesthetics.
- Installations: High-end bronze sculptures in Heisler Park, beach/ocean related park installations (e.g., walls, seating, walkways) and "living art" festivals.
- Purpose: Reinforces a sophisticated, nature-integrated brand. Focuses on fine art to attract high-spending tourists and maintain a "sanctuary" atmosphere.

## **IV. DISTRICT VISION & PROGRAM ELEMENTS**

The proposed Arts District will be designed as an overlay amending Chapter 17.10 Overlay Zones of the Municipal Code. The following elements are proposed for the Preferred Alternative:

### **1. Specialized "Maker-Space" and Entertainment Zoning**

To encourage a vibrant economy, the City Council will consider "Light-Industrial Craft" uses by-right, including:

- **Alcohol Production:** Small-scale breweries, wineries, and craft distilleries with on-site tasting rooms, off-site retail merchandising and alcohol sales and allowances for live-music, outdoor dining and food service including food trucks.

- **Artisanal Manufacturing:** Manufacturing wholesale and retail including furniture makers, ceramics studios (with electric/gas kilns), and custom textile fabrication with retail sales.
- **Shared Maker-Spaces:** Co-working business incubator facilities equipped with shared equipment such as 3D printers, wood fabricators, and metal-working tools.
- **Entertainment Uses:** Retail, Restaurants, and Bars will be allowed to provide a niche dining and beverage experience including street vendors and food trucks. Open container alcohol consumption may be a part of the future establishment of an Entertainment District. Allowances for entertainment including art galleries, nightclubs, comedy clubs, shows and theatres, live music and video displays including within the streets may be a part.

## 2. Upzoning for Office, Hotel, and Residential Integration

To encourage office, hotel, and housing, especially housing for veterans, seniors and affordable market-rate housing such as micro-units, the City Council will consider upzoning parcels within the district. This "Work-Live" tourist density ensures that artists and makers can reside within the district, providing a built-in customer base for new retail and restaurants.

## 3. Conversion for Adaptive Reuse

Following the 2025-2026 state legislative push for "Adaptive Reuse," the City Council will consider a ministerial path to convert existing industrial spaces or portions thereof to low-rise office, art galleries, artist workshops, "Artist Lofts," "Work-Centric Residential," boutique hotels and bed and breakfast establishments, coworking spaces, retail restaurants, etc.

## 4. Architectural Design & Public Art Standards

To encourage unique artistic architecture and art installations, the City Council will consider "Flex-Industrial" by-right (automatic "Administrative Approval") design regulations:

- **Façade Requirements:** Encouragement of murals, business signage, and facade improvements like murals representing the business name, website, and associated imagery, wild business signage (e.g. Universal City Walk), and unique architecture like historic-modern including projections within the street right-of-way and glass "roll-up" doors (transparency) for maker-spaces provide visual interest and connectivity between the street and production facilities.
- **Sculptures:** Encouragement of sculptures on private property representing their commercial advertising including dedicated "Sculpture Pads."
- **Materials:** Preference to "honest" artistic varying materials—exposed steel, brick, and reclaimed wood—reflecting South El Monte's industrial history.

## V. STREETScape & INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

To define the Arts District's physical identity, the City Council will consider a "Tactical Urbanism" approach to the public right-of-way:

- **Gateways & Wayfinding:** Iconic "District Entrance" monuments, arches, domes, towers, canopies and gazebos with painted ceilings, and color-coded wayfinding signs on every corner to guide visitors to key art installations, galleries and restaurants. Maps and mile markers will be provided to create loop art walks.
- **Artistic Surfaces:** Utilizing "thermoplastic art" and stained and stamped concrete for high-durability, as permissible, colorful art and patterns will be painted at sidewalks, crosswalks, streets and intersections. Painting and wraps on utility boxes will be a part.
- **Street Lighting:** Allowances for street lights, lights on utility poles, uplighting, cross-street lighting, light shows etc. will be a part.
- **Street Furniture:** Custom-designed "Art" benches and street furniture, bike racks, trash receptacles, shade structures, bollards for street closures and street lights.
- **Street Closures and Events:** Allow for and encourage markets, food trucks, street vendors, live music (e.g., open mic), plays, shows, etc. as a part of street closure events on nights, weekends, and holidays.
- **Website:** A City Arts District website will be created (e.g., [www.SEM.ART](http://www.SEM.ART)) with the url added to art installations that want to be featured on the website with biography of the artist, business name, location and website and the background of the art.

## VI. FUNDING AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

To reduce costs, encourage community involvement and participation, and support local artists and businesses, the City Council will consider the following:

- **Grant Opportunities:** Coordinate with consultant Townsend to apply for applicable grants.
- **Incentive Programs:** Create incentive programs and provide resources to encourage art installations (e.g., paint reimbursement program). To incentivize the creation of "Creative Class" structures, the city will offer a 1.0 Floor Area Ratio (FAR) bonus for industrial retail projects and a 2.0 FAR for housing, hotel, and office projects that dedicate at least 15% of floor area to art and entertainment related spaces along with murals and/or sculptures. For example, a four-story hotel covering 50% of the lot area would be permissible. Height will be restricted based on the maximum allowable by the Fire Department. To encourage development and micro-mobility (e.g., walking, biking), the City will review parking reductions to be up to date with trends and parking demand in consideration of youth not as eager to drive and a future with autonomous taxis and shared vehicles requiring more loading zones than parking.
- **Business Priority:** Businesses will have a unique way to market their businesses through murals, signage and sculptures with cross-marketing on the City website, newsletter, press releases and social media marketing in conjunction with our community partners. Art installations will also include a ceremonial on-site dedication upon installation and a subsequent City Council proclamation.
- **Business Partnerships:** In-city businesses and artists will be featured first as priority vendors for art installations (e.g., muralist, sculptor, powder coating and

sandblasting businesses, art sale and resale outlets, sign contractors) to encourage their businesses to remain or relocate to be in-city.

- **Utility Partners:** Partner with utility providers to artistically paint and wrap utility boxes and poles.
- **Potential Partnerships:** Coordinate with potential partners to maximize interest and exposure and potential for creation and support of art installations including newsletters and press releases (e.g., San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership, San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, CalArts, Cal Poly Pomona, Cal State LA, Cal State Fullerton, USC, UCLA, University of the West, Rio Honda College, South El Monte School Districts, Valencia Academy of the Arts, CA School of the Arts, Creative Planet School of the Arts, Pasadena Art School, Azusa Pacific, Arcadia Art Academy, Art Center College of Design, Center for the Arts, Wunderlust Food Truck Events, local artist and groups - South El Monte Arts Posse (SEMAP), The Arts Area, LA County Arts ED Collective senior center, local businesses)
- **TIF and Impact Fees:** Consider Tax Increment Financing (TIF)-funding and/or Development Impact Fees (DIF) for street CIP infrastructure funding (e.g., "Painted Paths" such as crosswalks and sidewalks, custom "Art-Benches," gateway monuments, and artistic utility box and pole wraps).
- **Celebrity Dedications.** Consider proclamations and dedications to celebrities (e.g., Taylor Swift Bench at Centennial Park, Nashville, TN) to reflect on the San Gabriel Valley's unique history and attract tourism. Appropriate examples would be Ritchie Valens, The Beatles, Ray Charles, Tina Turner, Stevie Wonder, Johnny Cash and the Beach Boys who all played at the nearby Legion Stadium before and during the era of the City's birth and through the 70's.

**VII. NEXT STEPS: LEGISLATIVE TIMELINE**

Phase	Action	Targeted Date
Phase 1: Ordinance Drafting	City Attorney and Staff will draft the text for the Arts District Overlay based on tonight's preferred alternative and recommended allowances. Transtech will review traffic and parking impacts and related traffic safety impacts as it relates to encroachments, lighting and street infrastructure with art. A noise consultant will provide recommendations. Funding opportunities and community partnerships will be explored.	March, 2026
Phase 2: AB 2904 Noticing	20-Day Notice mailed to all property owners within and within 500 feet of the Preferred Alternative (mandatory per 2025 state law) for a community meeting to discuss the Arts District. Advertisement in the City newsletter and social media and invitations to stakeholders and potential community partners will be included.	April, 2026
Phase 3: Planning	Assuming and Environmental Impact Report is not required, conduct Environmental CEQA review determination and PC	May, 2026

<b>Commission (PC)</b>	Public Hearing to recommend approval of the Municipal Code Amendment to City Council unless revisions are requested with additional review.	
<b>Phase 4: City Council Adoption</b>	First and Second Reading of the Ordinance to amend Municipal Code Chapter 17.10 unless revisions are requested with additional review. A CIP budget and funding strategy will be finalized for art related installations.	June and July, 2026
<b>Phase 5: Effective Date</b>	Ordinance becomes law 30 days after the second reading.	August 2026
<b>Phase 6: Funding and Installations</b>	Commence branding, marketing, installations, events, and funding applications with further coordination amongst community partners	September 2026 and beyond

**ATTACHMENT(S):**

- A. Alternative 1: West Industrial
- B. Alternative 2: Central Civic
- C. Alternative 3: East Commercial