



Pittsburgh Cultural Trust + Cultural District

Downtown Pittsburgh's Cultural District is the heart of the region's arts and cultural scene, and one of the clearest examples of the quality of life transformation that has taken place over the past several decades.

The Cultural District is a 14-square block area in Downtown Pittsburgh with 90 retailers, 50 restaurants, seven theaters, eight public parks, numerous art installations, and a dozen galleries. The area is anchored by a trio of historic theaters – The Benedum Center for the Performing Arts, home of the Pittsburgh Opera, Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, and Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera; Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, where the world-class Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra performs; and The Byham Theater, the oldest of the trio having been originally constructed in 1903.



The story of the Cultural District began in the early 1980s when several visionaries from the business, civic, and foundation communities set out to transform Downtown Pittsburgh and show that investments made in arts and cultural assets can catalyze broader economic development. This group of visionaries, led by H.J. "Jack" Heinz II, grandson of the founder of the iconic Heinz ketchup company, formed the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

The Cultural Trust is a 501(c)(3) non-profit whose initial goals were to restore downtown's historic theaters, revitalize other degraded buildings and spaces, and drive overall transformation and development. At the time, the area now called the Cultural District was defined by blight, having fallen into severe decline as a red-light district.

The Cultural Trust's first project was to embark on a \$43 million restoration of the Stanley Theater – a movie palace opened in 1928, into the 2,800-seat Benedum Center for the Performing Arts. Later, the trust restored The Fulton Theater, built in 1903 as a Vaudeville house. Now called the Byham Theater, it has 1,300 seats.



Today, the Cultural Trust promotes and manages arts and cultural programming in the Cultural District and owns and manages more than 1 million square feet of property, making it one of downtown's largest real estate developers. More than 2 million people visit the Cultural District annually, a number that has doubled over the past decade.

In many ways, the Trust's success is the result of a unique collaboration between the business, civic, arts, and foundation communities. Of particular note is the leadership and support of Pittsburgh's major legacy foundations, including the Heinz Endowments, R.K. Mellon Foundation, and the Benedum Foundation. The enormous success of the Pittsburgh Cultural District is a testament to the power of vision, leadership, partnership, and the arts to transform a place to benefit all.



Critical to the success of arts, cultural, and other regional assets in Allegheny County is the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD). The RAD is a special purpose area-wide unit of local government in the county that funds regional assets throughout the county with half the revenues from a 1% sales and use tax.

By the end of 2019, RAD will have invested more than \$3.9 billion over its 24-year history into hundreds of regional assets – from parks and greenspaces, to sports and civic facilities, to arts and cultural organizations, and more. Of this amount, arts and cultural organizations will have received \$205.5 million to support operations and capital improvement projects.

RAD was established in the early 1990s after the Allegheny Conference on Community Development proposed the idea as a way to reduce reliance on property taxes. Before RAD, the city was providing a disproportionate share of the funding for these assets across the region. Half of the additional 1% tax goes to fund regional assets. The other half is distributed to local governments across Allegheny County to reduce taxes and to support municipal cooperation projects and other local government functions. RAD is now a national model for how public support of regional arts, culture, and civic assets can be more equitably shared through city/county cooperation.



Arts and cultural institutions in metro Atlanta, including Lawrenceville’s Aurora Theater and Midtown’s Woodruff Arts Center, serve as anchors in their communities’ efforts to create vibrant, walkable, accessible places that encourage healthy lifestyles and drive economic development. What can metro Atlanta learn from Pittsburgh’s experience in leveraging arts and cultural assets to build a sense of place in terms of geography? What role can philanthropy, arts and cultural organizations and local government, working together, play in planning and developing dynamic communities in metro Atlanta? Could an arts and cultural funding mechanism like the Regional Asset District be implemented in metro Atlanta?

Further Reading

Pow! – From Pointe Shoes to Pierogies: Impact of the Arts in Allegheny County

Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council – 2017

RAD 2017 Annual Report

Pittsburgh Cultural Trust: 2017 Report to the Community

Greater Pittsburgh ranks No. 1 in arts and culture spending

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – September 26, 2017

Built on Steel, Pittsburgh Now Thrives on Culture

New York Times – April 12, 2017

How the Arts Drove Pittsburgh’s Revitalization

The Atlantic – December 11, 2014

How the Regional Asset District rode to the rescue of Allegheny County attractions

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette – September 23, 2014

