



SAINT PAUL
MINNESOTA

CULTURAL DESTINATION AREA STUDY

Enhancing Inclusivity and Economic Growth in Saint Paul, MN



Presented by:



June 24, 2026

BACKGROUND



- **Gateways for Growth Initiative (G4G)**

- Partnership with Minneapolis and local chambers of commerce
- Received technical assistance grants from the Gateways for Growth Challenge (G4G)
- Focused on enhancing immigrant inclusion and showcasing their contributions in the Twin Cities

- **Community Engagement and Challenges**

- Immigrant inclusion plans initiated in Spring 2021
- Challenges arose from COVID-19 and the aftermath of George Floyd's death, revealing community trauma and skepticism
- Formation of a Twin Cities Advisory Committee for unified recommendations

- **Strategic Planning and Outcomes**

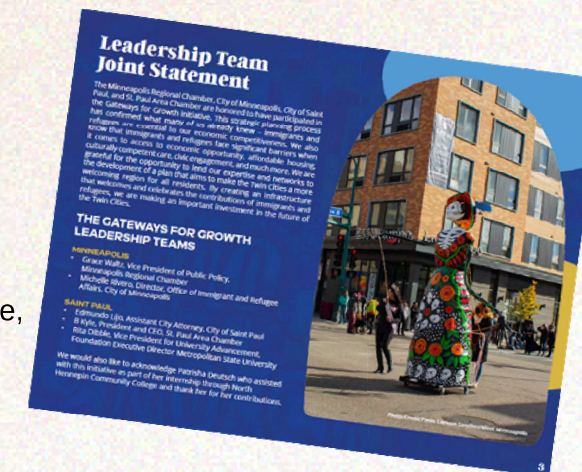
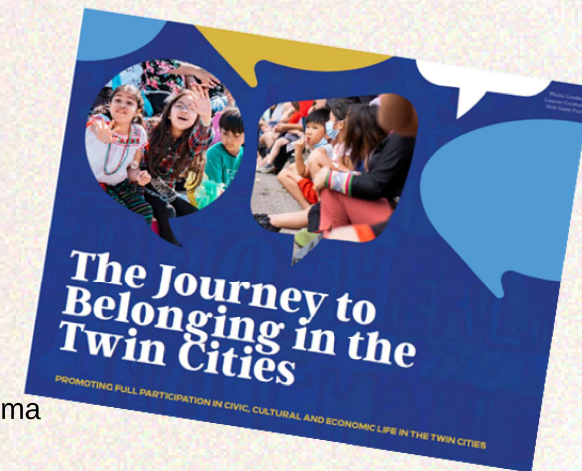
- Gateways for Growth process assessed immigrants' economic competitiveness
- Plan titled "The Journey to Belonging in the Twin Cities" identified challenges in economic opportunities, housing, healthcare, and civic participation
- Emphasized diversity with actionable strategies and collaboration among leaders and organizations

- **Thematic Areas in the Plan**

- Focused on Connected Communities, Safe Communities, Equitable Access to Education and Healthcare, and Economic Workforce Development
- Established specific goals and strategies for inclusion

- **Focus in Saint Paul**

- Adjusted focus due to COVID and civil unrest following the deaths of George Floyd and Daunte Wright
- Advisory Committee explored leveraging Cultural Destination Areas
- Fall 2023: Received a \$15,000 G4G Challenge grant, matched by the City Attorney's Office
- Engaged MaKee Company to develop a plan for Cultural Destination Areas



ABOUT MAKEE COMPANY



- **Founder: R. Lynn Pingol, DBA**

- Doctorate in Business Administration, Emphasis on Ethnic Consumer Behavior
- Executive Masters in Business, Emphasis in Global Business & International Finance
- Masters in Business, Emphasis in Real Estate Development and Marketing
- Majors in Construction Management & Human Relations
- Minors in Entertainment & Urban Planning
- 30 Years in Real Estate Development, under 2B in Commercial Construction Projects
- 20 Years in Transportation Projects, Highways, landbridges, and pedestrian pathways
- 20 Years in Shared ownership Cooperatives (Real Estate Investments, Agriculture, Cannabis, Clean Energy and Logistics)
- 10 Years Union Carpentry (Framing & Drywall)
- 5 Years Union Concrete & Asphalt

- **Core Services:**

- Economic Development & Tourism Strategies
- Real Estate Development & Construction
- Shared ownership and cooperative models
- Industry-specific programs
- Entrepreneurial ecosystems - Programming & Technical Assistance
- Policy Development & Implementation
- Government procurement, compliance, and contract management

- **Similar Studies & Projects:**

- Norway Tourism Bureau - Fjords Cultural Destination Area
- Swedish Tourism & Commerce - Stockholm
- Plaza Major & Paseo del Prado Destination Area, Madrid Spain
- European Commission: Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiative
- Reconnect Rondo: Entrepreneur Feasibility Study
- City of Rochester: Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Study





PROJECT GOALS



- Comprehend the current framework supporting Cultural Destination Areas (CDAs).
- Identify existing conditions and challenges within CDAs.
- Explore historical context, stakeholder involvement, and policy frameworks.
- Conduct in-depth analyses to reveal unique characteristics and contributing factors to the success or struggles of cultural destinations.
- Gather data through personal interviews, focus groups, and an online survey.
- Highlight economic and social impacts on immigrant and refugee communities.
- Develop strategies for enhancing sustainability and resilience of CDAs.



- **Cultural Destination Leaders**

- Asian Economic Development Center
- African Economic Development Solutions
- Downtown Alliance
- Indigenous Roots
- Latino Economic Development Center
- ReConnect Rondo
- Rondo Community Land Trust
- West Side Community Organization

- **Chambers & Associations**

- East Side Area Business Association
- Hmong American Partnership
- Hmong Chamber
- Midway Chamber
- Saint Paul Chamber

- **Tourism Agencies**

- Visit Saint Paul
- Explore Minnesota

- **City of Saint Paul Departments**

- Mayor's Office
- Planning & Economic Development
- Public Safety & Inspections
- Office of Neighborhood Safety

The Cultural Destination Areas



CORE TEAM & METHODOLOGY



CORE TEAM

- R.Lynn Pingol, DBA - Strategic Consultant
- Edmundo Lijo, City Attorney's Office
- Jimmy Loyd, CoSTP Economic Development Director, PED
- Tony Johnson, Sr. City Planner, PED

METHODOLOGY

- Study launched on September 18, 2023, to strategize and outline project outcomes.
- Categorize stakeholders into Cultural Destination Areas, Capacity Builders, and Chambers & Associations.
- Create a stakeholder invitation list with city officials.
- Use focus groups and an online survey for comprehensive data collection.
- Ensure stakeholder needs are understood and community alignment is achieved.
- Emphasize inclusivity and transparency throughout the project.
- Maintain continuous conversations during the project duration.
- ***Ensure effective development and implementation of programs in Cultural Destination Areas.***



ASSESSMENT

1

Review the City of Saint Paul's Global City Initiative and the Strategic Plan for Cultural Destination Areas.

INTERVIEWS

2

Conduct interviews with staff from the City of Saint Paul, including representatives from the City Attorney's Office, Planning, Economic Development, and Public Safety & Inspection.

Engage with leaders from cultural destination areas, chambers of commerce, associations, and capacity-building organizations.

Interview representatives from state and city tourism agencies

FOCUS GROUPS & SURVEYS

3

Organize focus groups to examine the support systems for cultural destination areas.

Implement an online survey targeting Cultural Destination Areas (CDAs).

4

ANALYZE

Compile and analyze the gathered results and information.

5

REPORT

Craft of recommendations and a strategic approach based on the findings.

RESEARCH



- **Open conversations**
- Revealed challenges and opportunities.
- Emphasized strengths and obstacles for sustainable growth and innovation.
- Highlighted unique cultural assets of each location.
- Identified potential tourism and community engagement.
- Stressed the importance of preserving local heritage.
- Encouraged modern developments to attract diverse visitors.



- **90 minute Focus group sessions, in-person and virtual.**
- Gathered insights from specific stakeholders about challenges in selected CDAs.
- Stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to share concerns and suggest improvements for the cultural and business landscape.



- **Surveys and interviews post-focus group sessions**
- Analyzed feedback to improve recommendations
- Online survey ran from October 7 to 28, 2024
- Included tailored questions for Cultural Destination Area Leaders:
 - Rating statements
 - Multiple-choice options
 - Open-ended inquiries
- Gained valuable insights into the target demographic's needs
- Interviews offered a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives



ABOUT CULTURAL DESTINATION AREAS

- **Role and Importance:**

- Central points for cultural exchange and education
- Facilitate appreciation of diverse traditions
- Platforms for local artists and entrepreneurs
- Enhance area vibrancy and economic health

- **Common Features:**

- Museums, theaters, galleries
- Historic landmarks
- Venues for festivals and events
- Accessible cultural experiences

- **Impact on Community and Tourism:**

- Bridge cultures, fostering understanding
- Showcase unique community traits
- Promote tourism and enhance multicultural appeal

Cultural



CDA's are vibrant hubs celebrating cultural heritage and artistic expression, vital for community involvement and economic growth. CDA's enrich communities, promote cultural appreciation, and boost economic vitality, fostering unity.

~R.Lynn Pingol, Norway and Swedish Tourism Bureau CDA Presentation October 2021

INFLUENCE OF DR. BRUCE CORRIE'S 2015 ARTICLE ON CULTURAL DISTRICTS



Emphasizes the blend of culture and commerce to foster a culturally enriched society.

CATALYSTS FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

With its commercial corridors, Cultural districts can generate jobs and wealth in struggling neighborhoods, with examples like District Del Sol and the American Indian Cultural Corridor. Projects like Little Mekong and Little Africa are in development.

KEY INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

Policymakers and funders must support these initiatives. Investment in cultural infrastructure and collaboration between public and private sectors is essential. Businesses need technical support to serve diverse customers effectively.

COMMUNITY AND RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Events like Little Mekong Night Market boost local business and hire community members. Ethnic restaurants provide affordable options and have untapped potential.

SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION

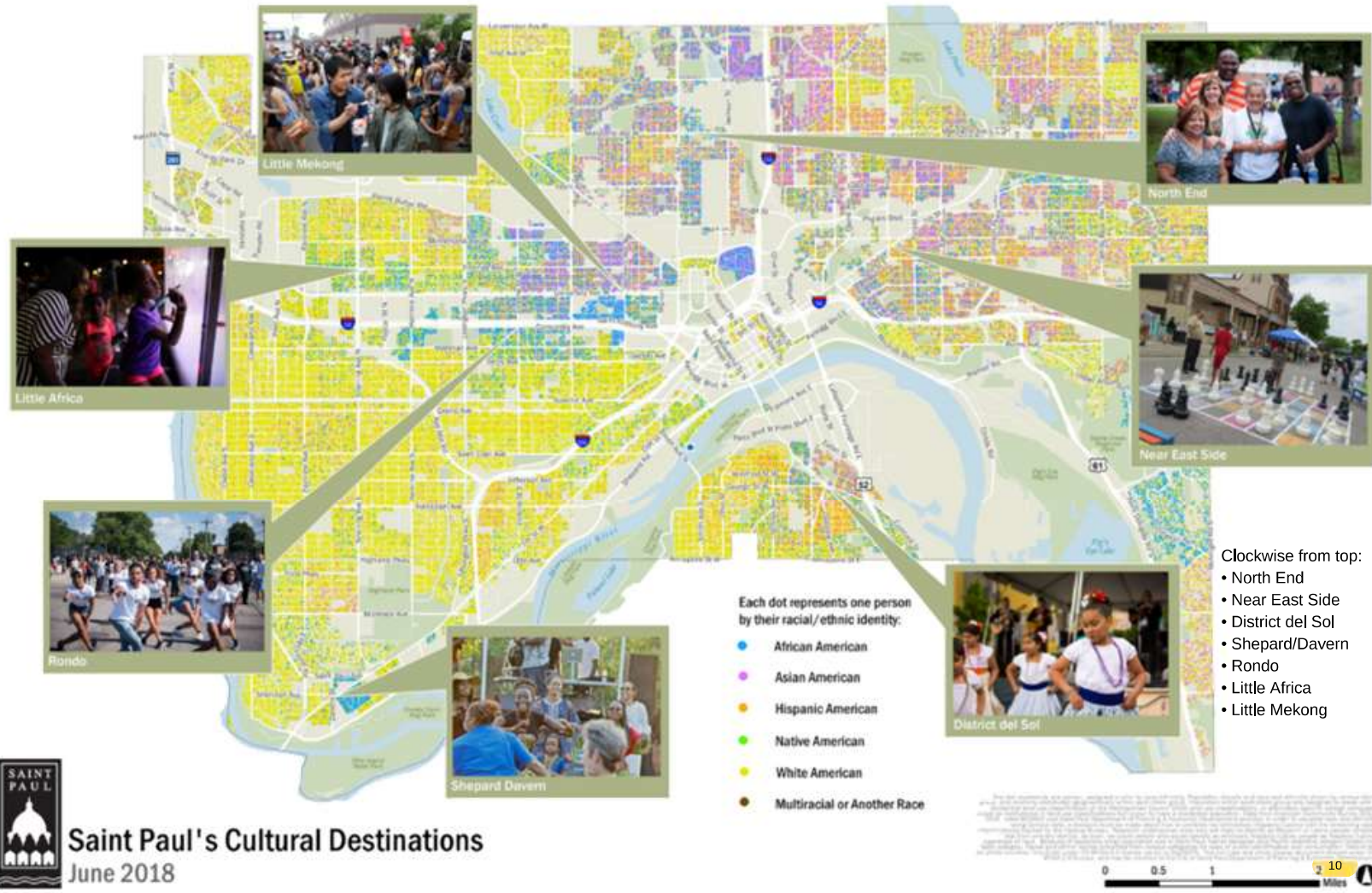
Concordia University-St. Paul supports these initiatives, emphasizing strong partnerships with community leaders.

ST. PAUL'S GLOBAL CITY INITIATIVE



The City of Saint Paul's **Global City Initiative** focuses on developing **Cultural Destination Areas** to enhance its heritage through art, music, and cuisine. Key points include:

- Supporting local artists and businesses
- Collaborating with community leaders on:
 - Infrastructure
 - Marketing
 - Cultural programming
- Enhancing unique neighborhood character
- Strengthening Saint Paul's identity as a global city
- Initiative aims to improve quality of life and promote community pride.



SUCCESS OF ST. PAUL'S CULTURAL AREAS



- **Saint Paul's cultural areas thrive through:**

- Festivals
- Murals
- Business support
- City funding
- Real estate cooperatives

- **Initiatives enhance the local economy and foster community pride**

- Festivals celebrate diversity
- Murals beautify urban spaces
- Business support assists entrepreneurs
- Cooperatives encourage collaboration and equity

Attracts both visitors and locals to engage with the city's unique cultural offerings

CULTURAL DESTINATION	FESTIVALS	MURALS	BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT	TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE	COOPERATIVES
District del Sol	●	●	●	●	
Downtown		●			
East Side Saint Paul	●	●			●
Little Africa	●		●	●	
Little Mekong	●		●	●	
Rondo	●	●			
West 7 th Street/Shephard			●	●	
West Side Saint Paul	●	●	●	●	



SWOT FINDINGS





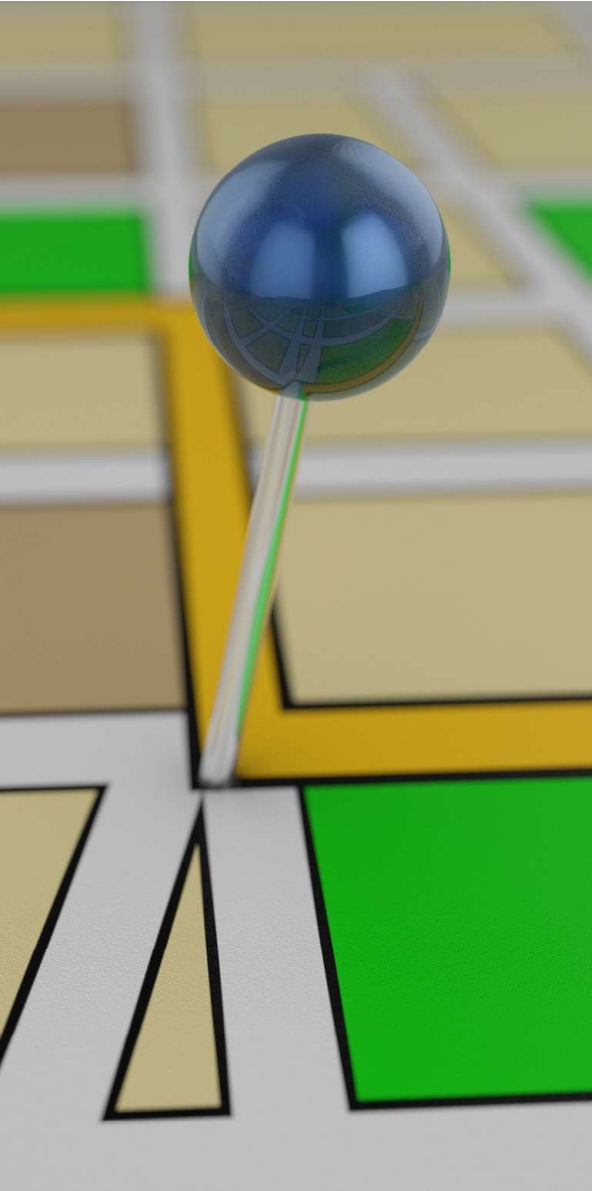
CDA LEADERS LEVEL-SET DEFINITIONS



- Cultural nodes, corridors, districts, and destination areas are vital for preserving traditions.
- Survey participants supported definitions from Saint Paul's Global City Initiative, highlighting the importance of cultural heritage in community identity.
- Corridors serve as hubs for artistic expression and cultural exchange.
- CDA leaders use these definitions to clarify their areas.

CULTURAL DESTINATION	NODE	CORRIDOR	DISTRICT	AREA
District del Sol		•		
Downtown			•	
East Side Saint Paul		•		
Little Africa	•			
Little Mekong		•		
Rondo			•	
West 7 th Street/Shephard	•			
West Side Saint Paul		•		

**There are additional emerging cultural areas in the city not included in this list.*

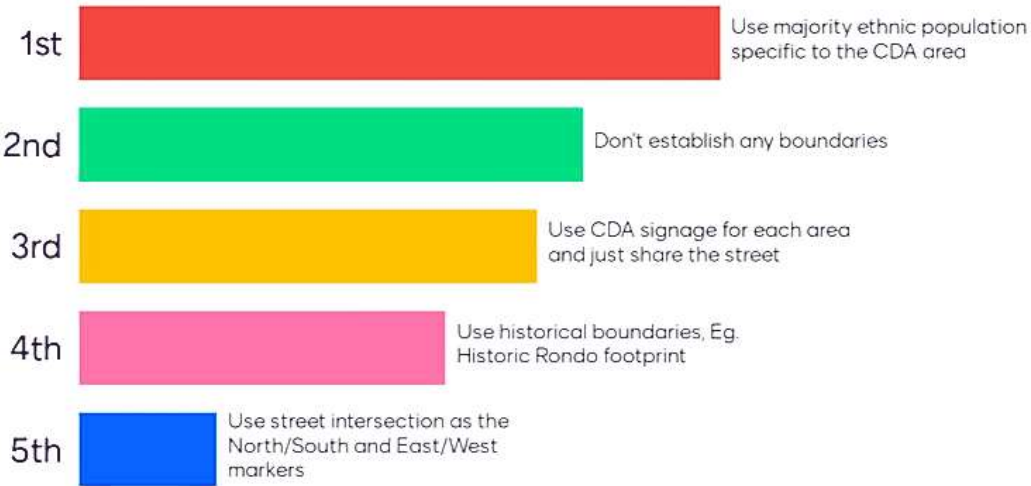


CULTURAL BOUNDARY PERSPECTIVE



MKC Conversations and Surveys emphasize the need to balance cultural identity preservation with shared experiences, reflecting participant complexities around boundaries.

- Cultural Boundaries and Integration: Focus on ethnic majorities and signage solutions affecting community cohesion.
- Ethnic Majorities: These can marginalize minorities, highlighting the need for inclusive dialogue and multicultural education.
- Historical Context: The Rondo Community's displacement due to I-94 construction underscores the importance of preserving cultural heritage.
- Signage Solutions: Multilingual signs and symbols enhance accessibility and celebrate cultural diversity.
- No Boundaries Approach: Promotes cultural blending for innovation but risks erasing distinct identities.



CDA LEADERS IDENTIFY KEY CHALLENGES



FUNDING GAPS

CDAs struggle with funding shortages, impacting their economic potential. Addressing these gaps is crucial.



BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

CDAs need tailored technical support for local businesses, recognizing cultural nuances to help them thrive.



SIGNAGE BARRIERS

Existing ordinances limit cultural markers, affecting visitor experiences. Revising these regulations is necessary.



WAYFINDING ISSUES

Inadequate wayfinding frustrates visitors and harms the economy. Enhancements can improve experiences and local economies.



TOURISM ECONOMICS

Collaborations between local businesses and tourism can boost economic benefits. Allocating tourism taxes to CDAs can support growth.



SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Stakeholders advocate for eco-friendly initiatives to protect cultural heritage and reduce environmental impact.

SUPPORT FOR IMMIGRANT OWNED BUSINESSES IS A MUST



- **Immigrant entrepreneurs significantly contribute to the city's economy and community.**
 - Drive economic growth, enhance cultural diversity, and promote social cohesion.
 - Bring unique skills, perspectives, and networks.
 - Contributions foster innovation, increase competition, and expand consumer choices.
- **MKG's research aligns with organizations like:**
 - African Economic Development Solutions
 - Asian Economic Development Center
 - Latino Economic Development Center
 - Hmong American Partnership
 - Hmong Chamber
- **Supportive local government policies are crucial for success:**
 - Improve access to funding
 - Streamline regulations
 - Offer tax incentives

Addressing the needs of immigrant-owned businesses is vital for St. Paul's economic vitality and social unity.



STUDY CONCLUSIONS



MKC has identified prioritizing commercial corridors in Cultural Destination Areas (CDAs) as the key finding of this study.

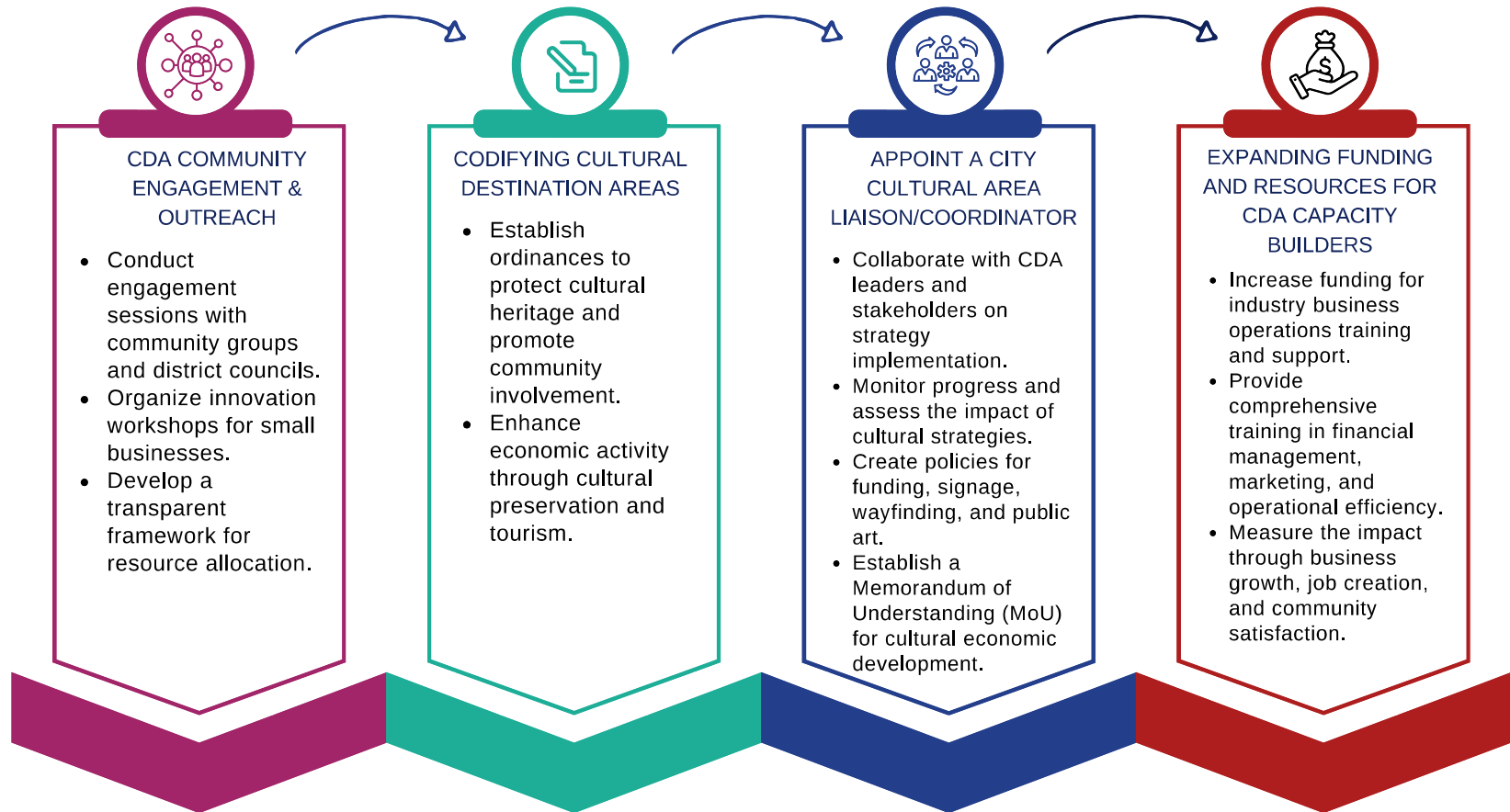
- **Recommendations for Enhancing Community and Economic Growth**
 - Foster community engagement and cultural heritage preservation
 - Promote economic growth in Saint Paul's commercial corridors
- **Essential Aspects to Focus On**
 - Community outreach and support
 - Strategic appointments and resource expansion
 - Creative wayfinding and local business support
 - Engaging community activities
- **Goals and Benefits**
 - Preserve cultural heritage and promote economic development
 - Enhance residents' quality of life
 - Ensure the long-term vitality and cultural richness of neighborhoods
 - Cultivate vibrant, sustainable, and culturally enriched communities
 - Yield substantial economic and societal benefits
 - Build a stronger, more unified community



RECOMMENDATIONS: CITY INITIATIVES



- **Objective**
 - Establish a strong framework for cultural and economic growth in Saint Paul.
- **Goals:**
 - Preserve cultural heritage.
 - Promote economic development.
 - Enhance quality of life for residents.
- **Outcome:**
 - Ensure long-term vitality and cultural richness of neighborhoods.



RECOMMENDATIONS: CULTURAL AREA INITIATIVES



- **Objective:** Cultivate dynamic cultural settings within Saint Paul's neighborhoods.
- **Goals:**
 - Strengthen community bonds
 - Enhance cultural appeal
 - Stimulate economic growth
 - Celebrate unique cultural identities
- **Outcomes:** Creation of a thriving, interconnected community



CREATIVE WAYFINDING

Develop creative signage to guide visitors and enhance their experience.



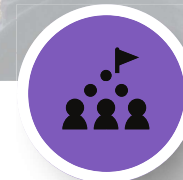
BUY LOCAL ST PAUL

Create a local business program to promote businesses.



VIRTUAL MARKETPLACE

Create an online platform for local businesses to reach a wider audience.



WALKING TOURS

Organize quarterly walking tours to showcase cultural areas and engage the community

PROPOSED BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION



Initiative Steps/Processes	Quarter-Year	Proposed Budget	Responsible Department				
			CDAs Leaders	Mayor & Council	City Atty	PED	DSI
Appointing a City Cultural Area Liaison/Coordinator							
Identify funding sources	Q2-2025			+	+	+	
Determine new hire or appointment & pay (If stipend (15K)		\$15,000		+	+	+	
Engage CDA Leaders & stakeholders			+		+	+	
CDA leaders engagement stipend (8 @ 12k/year)		\$96,000			+	+	
Establish responsibilities			+		+	+	
Draft charter or MoU & sign			+		+	+	
Market & promote partnership		\$2,500	+	+	+	+	
Sub-total Investment			\$113,500				

Expand Funding & Resources for CDA Capacity Builders							
Identify funding sources	Q3-2025			+	+	+	
Convene CDA leaders & stakeholders to define specific CDA needs			+		+	+	
Create mechanisms & programming			+		+	+	
Determine KPIs to measure success such as grant funding, workshop attendance & lessons implemented by businesses, revenue increase/generated			+		+	+	
Investment dollars for programming		\$150,000		+			
Follow up with CDA Leaders for review, edit plan as suggested						+	+
Market & promote uplifted program		\$8,000	+	+	+	+	
Quarterly reporting			+		+	+	
Sub-total Investment		\$158,000					

Streamlining business processes in Cultural Commercial Corridors							
Engagement with CDAs and stakeholders	Q2-2025			+		+	+
Create infographic for a business' journey (A-Z) licensing, permits, business resources, etc. Post on St.Paul website and distribute		\$1,500				+	+
Fund business workshops		\$100,000			+		
Survey businesses participating				+			
Quarterly reporting				+		+	+
Sub-total Investment		\$101,500.00					

Codifying CDA and modifying signage ordinances in Saint Paul							
Engagement with CDAs and stakeholders	Q3-2025			+		+	+
Engagement with City departments				+		+	+
Crafting Ordinances						+	+
Presentation of Ordinances						+	+
Approval of Ordinances					+	+	+
Sub-total Investment		\$0.00					

Creative Wayfinding							
Engagement with CDAs and stakeholders	Q4-2025			+		+	+
Ideation & Development				+		+	+
Design & Creation of designated signs for 8 CDAs		\$160,000		+			
Installation & Celebration				+			
Sub-total Investment		\$160,000					

Buy Local Saint Paul							
Engagement with CDAs and stakeholders	Q1-2026			+		+	+
Program development				+		+	
Engagement for business participation				+			
Fund brochure/Sticker design & printing for 8 CDAs @ \$2500		\$20,000		+	+		
Sub-total Investment		\$20,000					

PROPOSED BUDGET & IMPLEMENTATION



Virtual Marketplace							
Engagement with CDAs and stakeholders	Q1-2026		+		+	+	+
Develop virtual marketplace platform in partnership with Visit St Paul		\$25,000	+		+	+	
Develop digital kiosks/stands for 8 CDA locations @ (\$15k)		\$120,000	+		+	+	+
Ideate Quarterly Walking Tours with Visit St. Paul			+		+	+	
Sub-total Investment		\$145,000.00					

Appointing a City Cultural Area Liaison/Coordinator	\$113,500
Expand Funding & Resources for CDA Capacity Builders	\$158,000
Streamlining business processes in Cultural Commercial Corridors	\$160,000
Codifying CDA and modifying signage ordinances in Saint Paul	\$0
Creative Wayfinding	\$160,000
Buy Local Saint Paul	\$20,000
Virtual Marketplace	\$145,000
TOTAL Cultural Destination Investment	\$756,500



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS STUDY, CONTACT:

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