



Denver's Five Points Jazz Festival celebrates the neighborhood once known as the Harlem of the West.
PHOTO COURTESY VISIT DENVER



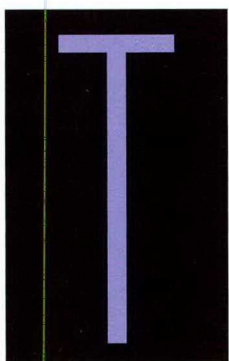
PLANNING FOR MUSIC CAN TRANSFORM AMERICAN CITIES

From live shows to recording studios,
music is an economic multiplier.

By CHRISTINE RO



Death Cab for Cutie's Ben Gibbard (top row, in blue shirt) waits in Seattle's city council chambers to comment on the fate of the Showbox.



THE LATEST ALBUM BY WISTFUL INDIE ROCK GROUP DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE, *Thank You for Today*, is largely about nostalgia and memory. It includes a track explicitly about gentrification in Seattle, in which singer Ben Gibbard laments watching buildings being torn down to make way for parking garages.

The song isn't just lip service. When beloved Seattle music venue Showbox was threatened by demolition last August, Gibbard spoke at a city council meeting in support of a new ordinance that would expand the boundary of an existing historic district to include the building and therefore preserve it. In his testimony, as on his album, Gibbard referenced the rapid pace of change in Seattle.

Cities, the built environment, and urban issues have become popular topics in the last several years, so it seems fitting that they have been absorbed into popular culture. Perhaps more surprising is how pop culture, particularly in the form of music and musicians, is impacting the development of cities.

Sam Davol, cellist for indie pop band The Magnetic Fields, runs The Uni Project, a literacy nonprofit focused on public spaces in New York City. In New York, political folkie Ani DiFranco has helped

stimulate the music environment of Buffalo through her Righteous Babe label and Babeville venue.

Underground Resistance, a Detroit techno collective that has long been active in urban activism, has forged links between Detroit and Berlin, proposing that a nightlife liaison be appointed to help the Motor City develop nightlife-friendly policies like the ones that have helped Berlin benefit from entertainment and tourism revenue.

And in 2017, as the first ambassador for the

Colorado Music Strategy, Shawn King helped businesses in Colorado cities license music from local acts for use in ads, films, and other projects. King, the drummer for Eastern European-tinged rock group DeVotchKa, was tapped to transform Colorado's cities into "music cities," or communities that deliberately incorporate music into planning.

Colorado is not alone. As competition for dollars and workforces intensifies, a growing number of cities are turning to music.

The lure of music

"This whole concept of music cities is only a few years old," says Shain Shapiro, founder of the music consultancy Sound Diplomacy. But it's taken off.

The Shapiro's business launched in 2013 and has arguably done more than any other organization to popularize the idea of music-led urban development. Today it runs the Music Cities conference series and works with cities to optimize the economic returns of their music scenes, including helping Indianapolis diversify its sports-city reputation to include status as a music destination.

Unlike the economic potential of sports entertainment or traditional industries such as manufacturing or even technology, which are somewhat limited, the creative industry is an economic multiplier. The average consumer only needs so many household appliances or digital services, but the number of concert tickets, digital songs or albums, and the like they can purchase are virtually endless.

In the UK, where Sound Diplomacy has done plenty of work, "music as a business is growing at twice the rate of the national economy," Shapiro says.

From a jobs standpoint, creative industries like music employ people at all levels of production—from conception to performance to sales and everything in between. Strong music scenes also tend to be affiliated with technology and entrepreneurialism. Music engineers need tech wizardry, for instance, while venue managers rely on business acumen to juggle a constantly changing slate of performers.

Musician and trained urban planner Michael Seman has seen this from multiple angles. While touring with his band out of a van several decades ago, he was also working on his dissertation in urban planning. It analyzed the music sector in Denton, Texas (a college town with a population of 136,000 where punk and other forms of rock and jazz have thrived), as an economic cluster akin to a tech sector. Seman is now the director of creative industries research and policy at the University of Colorado

Denver, which in 2016 became the first U.S. college to offer a course on music cities.

Seman says, "All of this is interconnected. You are helping your music scene. You are also probably helping your tech scene in some way. So many people that are involved in tech are involved in music."

Vibrant cultural sectors also aid in workforce development and retention by helping to keep young people in smaller cities, rather than migrating to magnetic major cities.

"Regional growth, and success in regional growth, is really based on the competition for talent," Seman explains. "You need the educated, highly skilled workforce in today's economy to push your region ahead. One way to [do this is] attracting and retaining talent through creative amenities."

This starts early, in Seman's view. Getting high school students invested in their cities, and eager to stick around, is important. Shapiro of Sound Diplomacy adds that music is often a reason why workers, particularly younger generations, move to a place.

Businesses are ever eager to attach themselves to cool, young-leaning brands, and consumers willing to spend money on concerts and band merchandise pump money into a city. Then there are music tourists who might choose to visit Des Moines to attend a music festival or Branson, Missouri, to check out the country scene. (For more on planning for music festivals, see "Planningpolooza," *Planning*, June 2018: planning.org/planning/2018/jun/planningpalooza.)

Established music cities are also courting music-based development to further build upon their reputations, from Austin seeking to attract big record labels to Nashville attempting to incorporate more technological prowess into its music businesses.

There are a few potential downsides of expanded music scenes that local planners should address head-on. For instance, alcohol and noise are associated with live music venues. But incorporating agent of change regulations—which put the onus on property developers to soundproof new buildings located near venues—into city legislation can help promote more harmonious relations between businesses and residential uses. San Francisco was the first U.S. city to incorporate these regulations into local law, as part of its Live Music Venue Preservation Act.

Another concern is that musicians and music lovers might contribute to gentrification, as opposed to being displaced by it themselves, which has been a problem in large cities like New York and Toronto. Fortunately, smart policies—like encouraging development on vacant land in neglected areas—can help.



APA Learn

LGBTQ Prides: Tool for urban revitalization?

Pride events have become widespread, even in smaller cities. Are they a reliable tool for economic development? Hear from planners linking these concerts, festivals, and parades to urban revitalization efforts.

CM | 1.25

NONMEMBER PRICE: \$50.00

MEMBER PRICE: \$25.00

Planning.org/APALearn

Partnerships for development

People tend to think music scenes materialize organically and entirely on their own in a serendipitous process of right place, right time. But plenty of planning goes on behind the scenes.

One way city officials and policy makers contribute to strong music scenes is by building on the work of existing influencers, whether those are musicians like rappers Three 6 Mafia in Memphis, record labels like Sub Pop in Seattle, or venues like Flint Local 432 in Michigan. All-ages venue Flint Local 432 was founded in 1992 in the wake of the auto industry's departure. The club quickly drove interest to the neglected downtown area, which city officials seized upon by improving infrastructure and starting festivals and other events in the area.

Local luminaries also attract attention. Justin Vernon, better known as moody musician Bon Iver, helped put Eau Claire, Wisconsin, on the musical map with his Eaux Claire Music & Arts Festival. But Eau Claire's popularity isn't just about the Bon Iver effect. The city had already laid the groundwork

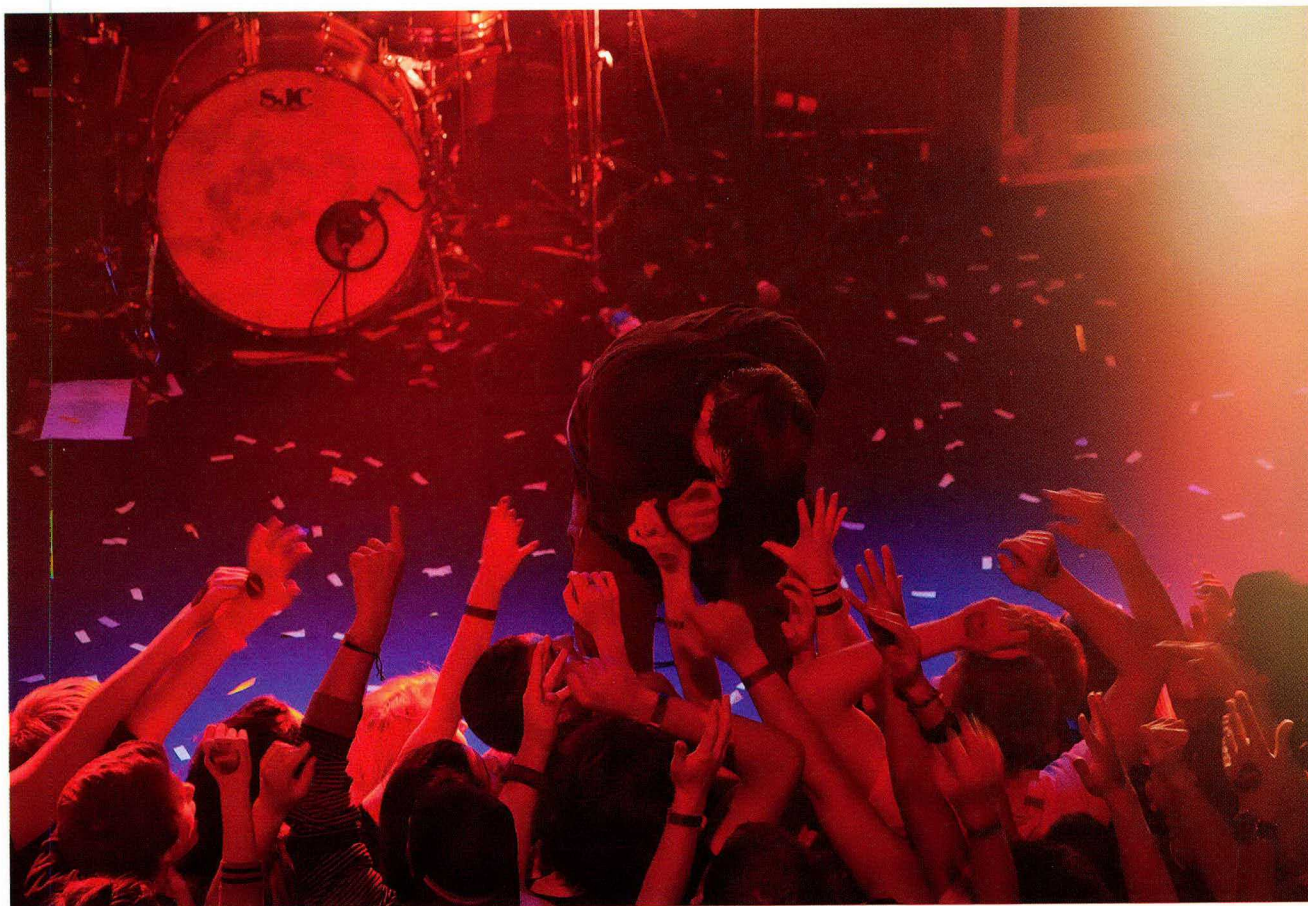
with art-friendly policies that helped build momentum around its music scene.

Like Flint, Eau Claire struggled in the 1980s and 1990s to transition to a postindustrial economy. One of the city's strategies was to develop its arts sector. City officials established a public concert series and collaborated with a university, arts advocates, and others to establish a downtown arts center that quickly drew other businesses to the area. Eau Claire's downtown public announcement system also played music created by local artists.

The most successful case of music in U.S. urban planning, according to Seman, is Omaha's Slowdown project, completed in 2007. It's a rare case that "connected the bottom-up ground organic activity with the top-down planning activity," he says.

A key bottom-up player for the project was beloved local music label Saddle Creek, home to artists like indie rock act Bright Eyes. The top-down entity was the city's planning department and chamber of commerce, which wanted to redevelop the sluggish north downtown area marked by closed

Circa Survive performs at the Slowdown in Omaha, Nebraska. The Slowdown is possibly the most successful arts investment experiment so far, and has put Omaha on the indie rock map.



7 STRATEGIES FOR A STRONG MUSIC SCENE

Government policies have a direct impact on music businesses and musicians. *The Mastering of a Music City* from IFPI and Music Canada (bit.ly/2GMqmo3) identifies seven key strategies that cities around the world have used to help grow and strengthen their music economies.

1 WRITE MUSIC-FRIENDLY POLICIES

Compliance requirements for business and liquor licensing, transportation planning, and parking should be appropriate without becoming a barrier to music businesses. Heritage designations, cultural zones, and policies based on the “agent of change” principle can help address gentrification and urban growth challenges. Training and education programs, mentoring, and affordable housing for artists support musicians so that they can focus on what they do best: making music.

2 DEDICATE A MUSIC OFFICE OR OFFICER

Cities that have a single point of contact to help the music community navigate the broad range of government policies that impact them are better positioned to build their music economies. Music offices or officers can also lead city music strategy development and mediate conflicts between music businesses and the larger community.

3 CREATE A MUSIC ADVISORY BOARD

Music advisory boards composed of a broad cross section of the music community and related industries like tourism and economic development provide an invaluable link between the music community and city hall. They are

also an ideal forum for the music community to develop internal consensus on issues and provide advice on the legislative and regulatory environment.

4 ENGAGE THE BROADER MUSIC COMMUNITY

The involvement of the people most affected by music strategies is critical to a music city’s success. Collaboration across the different segments of the music community can lead to significant improvements to the regulatory and business environments and is the most effective means of gaining political leaders’ support.

5 PROVIDE ACCESS TO SPACES AND PLACES

Music cities require a variety of quality spaces and places to succeed,

from education to rehearsal to recording to performance. For live performances, a range of venues is essential to support local artists as they advance through their careers—from basements to stadiums. Cities should take an inventory to identify gaps. Hubs and accelerators that allow venues and other music businesses to cluster are also effective.

6 CULTIVATE AUDIENCES OF ALL AGES

Demographics play an important role in audience development. Many music cities consider large student populations an advantage. All-ages events can help engage younger audiences, thereby encouraging youth to develop a lifelong relationship with music. Factors like a

community’s proximity to other music markets, transportation links, and promotion of live music events influence audience development.

7 DEVELOP MUSIC TOURISM

Music tourism brings in billions of dollars each year for local governments. Tourism assets include a city’s year-round live music scene, music festivals, and historical music landmarks. Many cities have developed comprehensive music tourism strategies that involve music-based branding, promotional campaigns, wayfinding apps and other social media strategies, investment in music infrastructure and signage, and programming.

factories and big plots of vacant land. Like other parts of Omaha, it had been a brownfield site and was struggling to transcend its legacy of lead poisoning from an industrial smelter and other companies.

Hoping that a Slowdown arts venue and neighboring local businesses constructed on unused land would catalyze other economic development, the city provided more than \$1 million in tax increment financing. It also provided key support with site selection and helped with remediation and negotiations with former landowners.

Seman describes this as a genuine partnership between city officials and people who had been building the local music scene for years. City officials say Slowdown has catalyzed around-the-clock activity in the area. All of Slowdown’s residential and retail spaces are now occupied; neighboring developments have sprung up as well. Further demonstrating the strength and success of the local music scene, more than 60 percent of the gigs at the venue,

which *Esquire* named its 2008 club of the year, include local bands.

Meeting in the middle was important, as “top-down planning initiatives for arts and culture are very difficult and often fail. Whereas organic bottom-up activity is often thriving but has a hard time getting to that next level,” says Seman.

It helped that Omaha’s mayor, Mike Fahey, was knowledgeable about the music scene. While plenty of mayors may be generally familiar with what’s happening with local music, Fahey was able to recognize Saddle Creek and Bright Eyes as key players. He knew “the city was emerging as an indie rock mecca,” Seman says, and encouraged the planning department to work with the Slowdown developers, as well as undertake other music-related activities.

Seman also saw this in Denton, where several musicians eventually became part of local government and were able to systematically unite their love of music and their decision-making influence.

COLORADO MUSIC STRATEGY FINDINGS

Music contributes
to the state economy
in several ways.

**\$1.4
billion**

Revenue generated
as part of Colorado's
music ecosystem

16,076

People employed
in music

**\$489.8
million**

Revenue in live events
ecosystem sector

4,649

Jobs from live events

24%

Growth in employment
in the Colorado music
industry between 2010
and 2016

SOURCE: COLORADO
CREATIVE INDUSTRIES
MUSIC STRATEGY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For example, they assisted with the music festival permitting process, encouraging the city to close downtown streets to make these festivals walkable.

Ultimately, Seman says, "they legitimized the music scene in Denton in the eyes of other policy makers." He credits this partly to the social nature of being part of a local music community; that experience of relationship building is very useful for government. Musicians who have gone on tour have also had the chance to see what works and doesn't in other cities, which allows them—if they become policy makers—to apply those lessons at home.

The cutting edge of music cities

One laboratory for music-led urban development is Colorado, which has created the only statewide music strategy in the U.S. Planning at the city level has formalized the Fort Collins Music District and created a bevy of innovative programs in Denver. According to the 2018 *Denver Music Strategy*, the city's music industry accounts for more than 8,600 jobs and \$842 million in revenue yearly.

This music strategy built on partnerships across Denver's music ecosystem, including, of course musicians, but also nonprofit leaders, music educators, academics, business owners, cultural policy makers, and others.

The person who spearheaded it was Lisa Gedgaudas, who runs the Create Denver initiative of Denver Arts & Venues, a city and county arts agency. Create Denver advocates for affordable living and working spaces for local creatives, a key factor that keeps musicians in, or pushes them out of, a city. This is especially important because of the explosion of the marijuana industry in Colorado, which has taken over much of the available space.

Denver Arts & Venues also help venues to quickly get up to code through the Safe Occupancy Program, created in 2017. Another dedicated source of financing is the Denver Music Advancement Fund. Launched in 2018, this fund "supports music initiatives that drive social change," in Gedgaudas's words. In its first year, the fund attracted 90 applicants, of which 30 were successful. These included projects on rap as literature, a podcast about the Colorado sound, and a neighborhood children's choir.

It remains to be seen exactly what the Denver Music Advancement Fund grantees will do. And a general problem across music cities is a lack of data about the specific benefits of this kind of investment. There's abundant anecdotal evidence that music retains and attracts young people, and that this has

knock-on effects on other sectors (like restaurants). But it will be important to track the data related to urban policies focused on music.

While Denver's music policy initiatives are innovative in their scale, they reflect lessons learned from other cities. Gedgaudas explains, "We have learned from Seattle, Austin, Nashville, New Orleans, and so many others on topics related to displacement, how we build our cities, night mayors, nighttime economy, experiential economy, coliving/working initiatives, affordable spaces, and even touching on disaster relief and emergency preparedness for creative spaces and personal archiving of works."

For other planners, Gedgaudas stresses the importance of "saving and creating space for creatives now. Buy buildings, offer spaces as developers or cities—this is crucial for a city to survive." She also recommends attention to alternative or DIY spaces: "mixed use, collaborative, and 24 hour [places] that can be safe for folks of any age."

Sound Diplomacy's Shapiro warns, "[Music's] ubiquity means that we unintentionally take it for granted. And we don't realize that it's not a renewable resource." He advises incorporating it into planning documents to keep it front of mind.

Seman's major suggestion is to have advisory organizations for music, as Seattle and Austin do. He says, "See if you can create a music advisory board, a music commission, a music panel, made up of people within the music ecosystem that can be music educators, professors, promoters, musicians."

Working music into planning, convening music advisors, and carving out space for music—these are three actionable steps to help keep all the benefits of music flowing in cities. ■

Christine Ro is the managing editor of *Environment and Urbanization*, as well as a journalist focusing on the arts, science, and international development.

RESOURCES

FROM APA

"Planningpalooza," (*Planning*, June 2018): planning.org/planning/2018/jun.

"When Arts and Culture Take Center Stage," (*Planning*, November 2015): planning.org/planning/2015/nov/artsculture.htm.

APA Learn: Regional Planning for Arts and Culture: bit.ly/2QlwPF7.

Arts and Culture Briefing Papers: planning.org/research/arts.

Copyright of Planning is the property of American Planning Association and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.