

Report to the Community and Economic Development Committee - July 2026

Building a More Sociable Anchorage: Lessons from the Sociable City Summit and Americans for the Arts

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Executive Summary

Recent participation in both the Sociable City Summit and the Americans for the Arts Conference reinforced a central finding: successful communities increasingly view the creative economy, nightlife economy, and social economy as interconnected components of economic development infrastructure rather than discretionary cultural amenities.

Across jurisdictions, communities that are attracting residents, retaining talent, increasing tourism, and improving public safety are investing intentionally in arts, culture, public spaces, and nighttime activity. These investments are not treated as separate from economic development—they are treated as essential drivers of economic resilience, community identity, and long-term growth.

For Anchorage, this presents an opportunity to expand our understanding of economic development beyond traditional sectors and recognize the role that artists, cultural organizations, entertainment venues, festivals, public gathering spaces, and creative entrepreneurs play in creating a vibrant and economically competitive city.

Key Observation #1

The Creative Economy is Economic Infrastructure

One of the strongest themes emerging from the Americans for the Arts conference was that arts and cultural organizations are not merely program providers—they are community infrastructure.

The session “Doable, Desirable, Durable: Coordinating Local Assets for Long-Term Impact” emphasized that arts and culture organizations already provide the trust networks, community connections, and civic infrastructure communities rely upon during periods of economic uncertainty, disaster response, and social disruption.

The framework presented challenges local governments to view cultural organizations as:

- * Economic development partners
- * Community resilience partners
- * Civic engagement partners
- * Public space activation partners

For Anchorage, this aligns directly with the Community and Economic Development Committee's ongoing work to establish a formal Creative Economy Framework.

Anchorage Opportunity

Instead of asking:

"How do we support the arts?"

The more strategic question becomes:

"How do the arts support Anchorage's economic development goals?"

Examples include:

- * Tourism attraction
- * Small business development
- * Downtown activation
- * Workforce retention
- * Neighborhood revitalization
- * Public safety through activation
- * Community resilience and disaster preparedness

Key Observation #2

A Sociable City is Built on a Strong Creative Economy

The Sociable City Summit repeatedly emphasized that vibrant daytime and nighttime economies do not happen accidentally.

Cities that succeed in building thriving social economies intentionally cultivate:

- * Live music
- * Arts programming
- * Cultural districts
- * Festivals
- * Public performances
- * Food and entertainment venues
- * Creative entrepreneurs

These activities create the social experiences that attract residents and visitors into public spaces.

What This Means for Anchorage

Anchorage possesses many of these assets already:

- * Local musicians
- * Indigenous artists
- * Public art
- * Performing arts organizations
- * Festivals
- * Cultural institutions

The challenge is not the absence of assets.

The challenge is coordinating them into an integrated economic strategy.

Key Observation #3

The 24-Hour City Begins with the 18-Hour City

The Sociable City Summit challenged participants to rethink traditional assumptions about economic activity.

A successful city center should support activity throughout the day and evening, creating a seamless transition between:

- * Work
- * Recreation
- * Dining
- * Arts
- * Entertainment
- * Social gathering

Many cities are adopting a “24-Hour Economy” framework.

For Anchorage, a more practical goal may be developing an 18-Hour Economy, where activity extends well beyond traditional business hours.

Indicators of an 18-Hour Economy

- * Restaurants open late
- * Live music programming
- * Evening arts events
- * Public gathering spaces
- * Night markets
- * Extended retail activity

- * Safe transportation options
- * Activated public spaces during winter months

Key Observation #4

Public Safety Improves When Places are Active

One of the most important lessons from the Sociable City Summit was the concept that public safety is often created through activity rather than enforcement alone.

Active spaces create:

- * More people on the street
- * Natural surveillance
- * Increased foot traffic
- * Greater economic activity
- * Stronger community ownership

This concept is often described as creating “eyes on the street.”

Anchorage Opportunity

Rather than viewing nightlife solely as a public safety challenge, Anchorage can explore how strategic activation supports safety.

Examples include:

- * Outdoor performances
- * Seasonal programming
- * Public markets
- * Extended cultural venue hours
- * Art installations
- * Evening community events

Key Observation #5

Community-Centered Development Produces Better Outcomes

The Americans for the Arts session “Innovative Program Strategies for Community-Centered Nonprofits” focused on building programs that reflect actual community needs while remaining sustainable and impactful.

The session emphasized:

- * Collaboration among artists
- * Partnerships with community leaders
- * Cross-sector coordination
- * Long-term relationship building
- * Shared implementation frameworks

These principles closely mirror emerging best practices in economic development.

Anchorage Opportunity

The municipality can strengthen collaboration between:

- * Artists
- * Business owners
- * Community councils
- * Tourism organizations
- * Indigenous organizations
- * Nonprofit partners
- * Educational institutions

This approach would help ensure economic development investments are community-driven rather than solely market-driven.

Key Observation #6

Resilience is a Cultural Strategy

A particularly valuable takeaway from the Americans for the Arts conference was the recognition that cultural infrastructure plays a critical role in disaster preparedness and community resilience.

The session highlighted that preparedness should not be treated as an emergency add-on, but as a core function of community infrastructure.

For Anchorage, this is particularly relevant given:

- * Earthquake risk
- * Climate impacts
- * Economic volatility
- * Seasonal isolation

Arts and cultural organizations often become trusted gathering places before, during, and after crises.

Anchorage Opportunity

Future resilience planning could incorporate:

- * Cultural institutions
- * Libraries
- * Community arts organizations
- * Public gathering spaces
- * Creative communication networks

as part of broader municipal resilience strategies.

Anchorage Sociability Scorecard

Area	Current Status	Future Opportunity
Creative Economy Strategy		
Arts as Economic Infrastructure		
Nighttime Economy		
Cultural Tourism		
Downtown Activation		
Public Space Utilization		
Community-Centered Development		
Public Safety Through Activation		
Resilience Through Culture		

Recommendations for CEDC Consideration

Short-Term

1. Develop a formal Creative Economy Action Plan.
2. Explore the creation of a Nighttime Economy Working Group.
3. Inventory Anchorage's cultural and creative assets.
4. Identify regulatory barriers to arts and entertainment activation.

Medium-Term

1. Establish cultural districts and activation zones.
2. Integrate creative economy objectives into economic development planning.
3. Expand support for festivals, live music, and public art programming.
4. Explore permitting reforms that encourage mixed-use cultural activity.

Long-Term

1. Position Anchorage as the premier Arctic creative city.
2. Develop a comprehensive 18-hour economy strategy.
3. Integrate cultural infrastructure into resilience planning.
4. Create a permanent framework connecting tourism, arts, nightlife, cannabis policy, and economic development.

Conclusion

The central lesson is that thriving cities do not separate economic development from culture, social connection, or creativity. They recognize that the creative economy is an economic sector, that nightlife is economic infrastructure, and that public spaces are investments in community well-being.

For Anchorage, the opportunity is not to replicate Nashville, New York, or other cities. The opportunity is to leverage Anchorage's unique cultural assets, Indigenous heritage, arts community, winter identity, and entrepreneurial spirit to create an Anchorage model of a sociable, resilient, and economically vibrant city.



BUILDING A MORE SOCIABLE ANCHORAGE

LESSONS FROM THE SOCIABLE CITY SUMMIT AND AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS

Creative Economy. Nightlife Economy. Social Economy.
STRONGER ECONOMY. SAFER COMMUNITY. VIBRANT CITY.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR ANCHORAGE Office of Assemblymember George Martinez

ECONOMIC GROWTH
Arts, culture, nightlife and social experiences drive tourism, jobs, and local spending.

TALENT ATTRACTION & RETENTION
Vibrant communities attract and keep talent and young professionals.

PUBLIC SAFETY THROUGH ACTIVITY
Active, well-programmed places create "eyes on the street" and stronger communities.

COMMUNITY IDENTITY & WELL-BEING
Arts and culture build pride, connection, and a stronger sense of place.

RESILIENCE
Cultural organizations and public spaces are trusted assets before, during and after crises.

6 KEY OBSERVATIONS

1 THE CREATIVE ECONOMY IS ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Arts, and cultural organizations are more than program providers—they are infrastructure.

- Economic development partners
- Community resilience partners
- Civic engagement partners
- Public space activation partners

2 A SOCIABLE CITY IS BUILT ON A STRONG CREATIVE ECONOMY

Live music, arts, festivals, cultural districts, venues and entrepreneurs create the social experiences that attract residents and visitors into public spaces.

Anchorage has the assets. The opportunity is to coordinate them into an integrated strategy.

3 THE 24-HOUR CITY BEGINS WITH THE 18-HOUR CITY

Activity that extends beyond traditional business hours builds a more vibrant, economically productive and socially connected city.

Indicators of an 18-hour economy:

- Restaurants & retail open late
- Public gathering spaces
- Night markets
- Live music & arts events
- Safe transportation
- Activated public spaces

4 PUBLIC SAFETY IMPROVES WHEN PLACES ARE ACTIVE

Activity creates "eyes on the street."

- More people in public spaces
- Natural surveillance
- Increased foot traffic
- Greater economic activity
- Stronger community ownership

Opportunity: Activation is a public safety strategy.

Performances & Events

Public Markets

Art Installations

Extended Venue Hours

Seasonal Programming

5 COMMUNITY-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT PRODUCES BETTER OUTCOMES

Collaboration and partnership lead to programs that reflect community needs and deliver lasting impact.

- Collaboration among artists
- Partnerships with community leaders
- Cross-sector coordination
- Long-term relationship building

Opportunity: Build a connected network of partners.

Artists

Business Owners

Community Councils

Tourism Organizations

Indigenous Organizations

Nonprofits & Education

6 RESILIENCE IS A CULTURAL STRATEGY

Cultural infrastructure is critical before, during and after crises.

- Trusted gathering places
- Community communication
- Support for mental well-being
- Stronger recovery and connection

Opportunity: cultural assets in Anchorage's resilience planning.

Cultural Institutions

Libraries

Community Arts Organizations

Public Spaces

Creative Networks

ANCHORAGE SOCIABILITY SCORECARD

AREA	CURRENT STATUS	FUTURE OPPORTUNITY
Creative Economy Strategy	○○○○○	○○○○○
Arts as Economic Infrastructure	○○○○○	○○○○○
Nighttime Economy	○○○○○	○○○○○
Cultural Tourism	○○○○○	○○○○○
Downtown Activation	○○○○○	○○○○○
Public Space Utilization	○○○○○	○○○○○
Community-Centered Development	○○○○○	○○○○○
Public Safety Through Activation	○○○○○	○○○○○
Resilience Through Culture	○○○○○	○○○○○

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CEDC CONSIDERATION

SHORT-TERM (0-12 MONTHS)	MEDIUM-TERM (1-3 YEARS)	LONG-TERM (3+ YEARS)
Develop a formal Creative Economy Action Plan.	Establish cultural districts and activation zones.	Position Anchorage as the premier Arctic creative city.
Explore the creation of a Nighttime Economy Working Group.	Integrate creative economy objectives into economic development planning.	Develop a comprehensive 18-hour economy strategy.
Inventory Anchorage's cultural and creative assets.	Expand support for festivals, live music, and public art programming.	Integrate cultural infrastructure into resilience planning.
Identify regulatory barriers to arts and entertainment activation.	Explore permitting reforms that encourage mixed-use cultural activity.	Create a permanent framework connecting tourism, arts, nightlife, cannabis policy, and economic development.

THE ANCHORAGE ADVANTAGE

Unique Indigenous Heritage

Vibrant Arts Community

Spectacular Natural Setting

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Distinct Winter Identity

CONCLUSION

Thriving cities do not separate economic development from culture, social connection, or creativity. They invest in people, places, and experiences.

Anchorage has the opportunity to create an 18-hour economy that is sociable, resilient, and uniquely our own.

“When we invest in arts, culture, and social connection, we invest in our economy, our safety, and our future.

A more sociable Anchorage is a stronger Anchorage.”

The following infographic is AI-assisted

WE HAVE THE ASSETS. TOGETHER, WE CAN BUILD THE STRATEGY.