

# Public Art/Image Improvement Master Plan

## 1. SUMMARY

The arts have played a crucial role in the development of Horse Cave. From the Vaudeville stage at the Thomas Opera House that attracted locals and tourists in the early 1900s, to the 37 years of professional productions at Horse Cave Theatre (later called Kentucky Repertory Theatre), to the establishment of incentives to attract arts-related businesses, and the designation as one of Kentucky's first Cultural Districts, Horse Cave has been seen as a leader in rural arts statewide and even nationwide.

Market studies funded by the Appalachian Regional Commission in 2004 and 2014 identified arts-related businesses and projects as well as the enhancement of the appearance of downtown as priorities for enhancing the quality of life and creating an atmosphere that would nourish residents and attract business. Surveys of downtown shoppers and students supported those findings.

This Public Art/Image Improvement Master Plan is the beginning of a process to analyze the existing and potential opportunities for nourishing the character, art, culture and economy of Horse Cave by using public input to create a new platform for public art policies, guidelines and recommendations.

The plan is a working document that will be expanded to include:

- Venues, art types and theme for public art based on public input and historic design analysis;
- Identification of educational and outreach programs for implementation that will increase the understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of the history, art, and culture of the area;
- Opportunities for local artists and arts-related businesses.

## 2. Vision

### a. Public Art and Image Improvement Vision

The vision of the Horse Cave Public Art Committee is to revitalize the downtown Horse Cave Cultural and Historic District using art installations and related beautification projects to enhance a sense of civic pride in Horse Cave's unique identity and to make downtown an inviting place for residents and visitors to shop and congregate and for new arts/culture-related businesses to locate.

### b. Objectives

- i. Improve the self-image of Horse Cave;
- ii. Bolster the economy by attracting new, family-friendly, culturally-related businesses to downtown;
- iii. Increase tourist visitation and length of stay;
- iv. Share the unique history and heritage of our community with residents and visitors;
- v. Promote a sense of ownership and community pride by engaging youth and other volunteers in the design and implementation of community art installations;
- vi. Involve local industries in the Public Art project to enhance their sense of civic engagement.

### 3. Horse Cave's Unique Identity

#### a. The City and the Cave

Horse Cave may be the only city in the United States built around the entrance to a cave. The cave's impact on the community cannot be overstated. Hidden River, which flows through the cave provided the early community of Horse Cave with running water. Later it generated hydroelectric power, making Horse Cave the second city on Kentucky to have electric lights and the first to have incandescent street lights. Electricity made it possible to open the cave as a show cave with lighted walkways. The story of the Cave Wars, the pollution of Hidden River, and the monumental efforts that restored the river and the cave to environmental health is chronicled in the American Cave Museum, Horse Cave's primary attraction. The recent addition of a zipline and rappelling to the cave's entrance has increased visitation and attracted a new demographic of younger, more active visitors. The extraordinary creatures that live in the cave are included in the City's streetscape as educational graphics embedded in the sidewalk.

#### b. History and Architecture

The City has a historic commercial district registered with the National Registry of Historic Places that includes over 50 historic buildings. The district is documented in the Horse Cave Historic District Designation Report. For oversight of this invaluable asset, the City has a Historic Preservation Ordinance, a Board of Architectural Review, and Design Guidelines.

#### c. Themes – arts and science

The American Cave Conservation Association relocated their national headquarters to Horse Cave in 1987 with the goal of restoring Hidden River Cave and establishing a museum and educational center at the site. Today, thousands of tourist visitors and school children annually tour Hidden River Cave and the American Cave Museum at the cave's entrance. The cave, which has been called "the greatest cave restoration success story in the United States" is open year-round to visitors and focuses on the history, culture, and geology of the interconnection of caves and the world above.

#### d. Performing and Literary Arts

The performing arts have played a crucial role in the development of Horse Cave. From the Vaudeville stage at the Thomas Opera House that attracted locals and tourists in the early 1900s, to the 37 years of professional productions at Horse Cave Theatre (later called Kentucky Repertory Theatre). Jammin' on the Porch, weekly acoustic music jam sessions at The Bookstore, attract professionals, hobbyists, young aspiring musicians and tourists who enjoy the free sessions at one of the state's largest independently-owned new/used bookstores. The Horse Cave Book group meets monthly here, and the Hart County Choral Society presents concerts twice a year at the nearby Baptist Church.

## 4. Inventory of existing public art

### Updated cultural district asset inventory

- i. **Maple Avenue Park** - The City is in the process of developing a park and creative play area in the Maple Avenue property behind the Thomas House. This area's unique features, which blend cultural assets into local amenities, make it an important component of the public art landscape. The aggregate sidewalk and cave play area showcase the area's caving heritage while the stage and sound and music area pay homage to the City's strong history in the performing arts. The adult reading area, ringed with native wildflowers, pays tribute to the importance of both the literary arts and appreciation of the native environment. The addition of a small fountain, decorative benches, and "stalagmite" bike racks could enhance this area.
- ii. **National Register of Historic Places Commercial District** – Horse Cave's charming downtown commercial district has more than 50 buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Colorful awnings and Victorian gingerbread decorate the town.
- iii. **Horse Cave Stories Cell Phone Tour** - Horse Cave's award-winning cell phone walking tour showcases the history and culture of the tiny town built on top of a cave. The tour is linked to a website ([www.horsecavestories.com](http://www.horsecavestories.com)) that is full of stories about tobacco farming, cave wars, Harlem Globetrotters, the Kentucky Repertory Theatre, the town's narrow streets, feuds and much more. The 20-stop tour begins right downtown Horse Cave and takes about 30 minutes. You can even scan bar codes with your smart phone and go directly to the website while you're touring. Or just check out the website on your home computer, and make plans for a later visit.
- iv. **Streetscape with amenities and cave outline** -. In the mid-1990s, the city received two TEA-21 grants to rehabilitate the downtown streetscape including new sidewalks, streetlights, benches, planters, landscaping. The sidewalks and streets are marked with the pathway of the cave under your feet. Many of the amenities were funded by local donations.
- v. **Historic Thomas House community meeting facility** – Purchased with Heritage Land Conservation Funds, the historic Thomas House was built by William Martin Wilson in 1860. He was the son of Elizabeth Wilson, who had come to this territory in 1802 to take up a Revolutionary War land grant to her deceased husband, James. With her were her eight children and several slaves. Among them they had all the skills to survive on the frontier. Another son had died on the banks of the Cumberland River as the pioneer party was attempting to cross. She built a house, which does not survive, on what is now Church Street. This land where the Thomas House now stands is part of the original land grant and W.M.

Wilson's inheritance from her. Wilson, his heirs, and generations of the Thomas family owned the home until the City of Horse Cave purchased it in 1999. Exterior restoration was funded with grants from the Kentucky Heritage Council and the Dart Foundation. The city has completed first-floor interior renovations of the beautiful Queen Ann house, and the building is available as a community meeting space.

- vi. **Hidden River Cave and American Cave Museum-** Hidden River Cave, the largest privately operated cave in Kentucky, is located on Main Street in historic downtown Horse Cave. A tour of Hidden River Cave takes you through one of the state's most scenic cave entrances to a subterranean river flowing 100 feet below ground. Visitors can take a leisurely tour or get "down and dirty" on their "Wild Cave Tour" or zipline across or rappel down the largest cave entrance in the region. Adjacent to the cave is the American Cave Museum, honored by The Nature Conservancy Magazine as "a little bit of Smithsonian in rural Kentucky". The museum has state-of-the-art exhibits of cave bats, blindfish and other cave animals; prehistoric and modern cave explorers; the history of cave country; and the "cave wars".
- vii. **Artists and Arts-related businesses -** Many of the historic buildings in the downtown district have been rehabbed, and some arts-related businesses are currently located there. Sims Studios & Art Shop has a working studio, a gallery, art supplies, art parties and classes. They have recently moved to a larger building and added custom framing. Wrought Apricity has recently opened in the former Sims space. They have a working studio, gallery and various types of consigned art pieces for sale. Each November and December, the Horse Cave Cultural District operates Deck the Halls: The Christmas Store, a pop-up store that houses local artisans arts & crafts booths. The American Cave Museum gift shop has selections crafted by local artisans. The Bookstore is one of the state's largest independent bookseller. They have an extensive selection of new, used, and signed books with a large array of Kentucky books. Each Thursday evening The Bookstore hosts Jammin' on the Porch, free jam sessions for local musicians and visitors. The Horse Cave Book Group meets monthly there, as well. The Hart County Choral Society has concerts twice a year at the nearby Baptist Church. The Horse Cave Cultural District has assembled a list of area artists.
- viii. **Kentucky Repertory Theatre** – Vacant for 3 years, this complex houses a ¾ thrust stage, seats, concession area, rehearsal space and offices that are a potential venue for an arts/conference/events center.
- ix. **Library and Publications** – The city has a public library, 3 pictorial history books, a Commercial Walking Tour publication, a Paint the Town coloring book, and a Horse Cave Trails brochure that features the cell and walking tours.

- x. **Horse Cave Heritage Festival** - Horse Cave celebrates its rich heritage each September with a local festival. The event is particularly well known for its musical entertainment, from rock & roll to gospel. More than 20 bands are scheduled for continuous free performances on 2 outdoor stages. Other activities include: antique cars & farm machinery, local crafts, agricultural exhibits, food booths, kids arcade, historic walking tours, and more. Special narrative stages highlight local art and culture through a partnership with The Kentucky Folklife Program at Western Kentucky University.
- xi. **Tourist Information Centers at the I-65 rest areas** – The Horse Cave/Hart County Tourist Commission maintains and staffs Tourist Information Centers at the northbound and southbound I-65 rest areas located just outside the city limits at mile marker 60. The centers have video, exhibits and photo murals that highlight the area, offering venues for distributing information about local artists, businesses and events.
- xii. **Kentucky Down Under Adventure Zoo** – At the edge of the city near the I-65 interchange, this interactive animal park is a major area attraction. They have an annual Chainsaw Carvaroo that features artists who create and auction their work.
- xiii. **Mammoth Cave Basketmakers** – This group of artists has been featured by the KY Folklife Program and KY Arts Council for their unique, delicate handmade white oak baskets that are similar to the sweet grass baskets of South Carolina.

## 5. Plans for future development

a. Public Art and Image Improvement Committee will function under the auspices of the Horse Cave Cultural District.

b. Types of public art to be considered

i. **Mural installations.** These will be developed as panels and installed on the sides of buildings.

ii. **Functional Art:**

1. Bronze castings in the shape of stalagmites to be used as bicycle racks
2. Interactive playground materials constructed of natural materials
3. Decorative benches
4. Signs that indicate parking areas on side streets and incorporate art

iii. **Sensory Art**

1. Small fountain in the park area
2. Sound and music area in the park

iv. **Temporary art panels** to be placed in the windows of vacant buildings and moved as needed.

v. **Dynamic art:** Create outdoor performance spaces in the Maple Avenue Park and possibly at the back entrance to the American Cave Museum.

vi. **Architecture:** Preservation of buildings with historic significance is a priority, especially Kentucky Repertory Theatre Building.

c. Locations for public art

- i. Within the designated historic/cultural district
- ii. The side streets where visitors park are a priority
- iii. The side of the former tobacco warehouse, the side of Turtlelinis Pizza \$& Pasta and the laundromat that faces the Maple Avenue Park
- iv. The exterior of the American Cave Museum
- v. The storage building owned by Tri-County Oil, which was the first “horseless carriage” garage.
- vi. Creative and attractive “parking” signs to be designed and mounted on the corner of Main Street and Cave Street and Guthrie Street showing the location of city parking lots.
- vii. Paint historical signs on a series of panels that would wrap around the metal pawn shop building off Cave Street.
- viii. Top projects to work on:
  1. Bill Veach building – Decorative sign directing visitors to public parking lot and paint his porch.

2. Rear of cave museum -- Attach painted panels to the building, directing people to museum and town from public parking lot. This area may eventually be developed as an amphitheater facing the museum with its back to the residential area.

d. Artists – invitational or competitive

- i. **Commissioned Art and Community Art**
- ii. **Selection criteria**
- iii. **Selection committee and process**

e. Funding – Cash and In-Kind

- i. **Private** – Corporations, businesses, individuals – cash, space for public art, space for meetings, materials, volunteers
- ii. **Public** – Municipal improvement budget, incentives, administrative support
- iii. **Partnerships** including non-profits
- iv. **Grants**
  1. ARC Flex-E-Grant
  2. KY Arts Council Access to Artistic Excellence
  3. National Endowment for the Arts – Challenge America
  4. KY Foundation for Women Arts Meets Activism
  5. Alternate Roots
  6. ArtPlace America

## 6. Community outreach and engagement

- a. Public input**
  - i. Previous plans and surveys**
  - ii. Meetings**
  - iii. Media stories**
  
- b. Community art projects**
  - i. Summer camp**
  - ii. Artist residencies**
  - iii. Series invitational**
  
- c. Awareness**
  - i. Unveilings and ceremonies**
  - ii. Social media**
  
- d. Volunteer engagement**

## 7. Logistics

- a. Policies
  - i. Use of funds, loans, donations**
  - ii. Eligible artists**
  - iii. Eligible artworks**
  - iv. Owner permission**
  - v. Ordinance compliance**
  
- b. Management
  - i. Budgeting and record keeping**
  - ii. Contracts**
  
- c. Conservation and maintenance plans

## 8. Action Plan

- a. **Establish an executive committee** – This is the Horse Cave Cultural District Committee
  - i. To write the Public Art/Image Improvement Plan
  - ii. To recruit volunteers, organize implementation of tasks listed in Flex-E grant, and plan for additional image improvement tasks
  - iii. To undertake project listed in Flex-E grant and plan for additional outdoor installations
  - iv. To apply for future grants to fund the Master Plan
  - v. To work with media and create public awareness
  
- b. **Develop/expand partnerships** with local industries, businesses, non-profit organizations for pooling resources, sponsorships, and grant seeking
  
- c. **Prepare and present a proposal** to City government to adopt a Public Art Policy including consideration for capital construction processes and incentives
  
- d. **Consider partnerships** or joint undertakings with Hart County, other Hart County municipalities, regional organizations, etc.
  
- e. **Identify next project(s)**