



Backgrounder – 4.12.21

Cloquet was selected for the 2020 cohort of the Artists on Main Street Program, a multi-year program that explores how the arts help address the challenges affecting Main Street communities today.

Along with Cook, Mahnommen and Two Harbors, Cloquet will work with local leaders – to develop arts-based approaches to community development. RETHOS and Springboard for the Arts will provide support on planning and implementing artist-led projects through training, one-on-one technical assistance, and cohort exchanges.

Artists on Main Street communities receive \$15,000 for project funding and program implementation the first year and \$10,000 the second year. These four communities join the 2018 cohort of Faribault, Mankato, and Winona, and the 2019 cohort of Northfield, Olivia, Wabasha, and Willmar. Since the launch of Artists on Main Street in 2018, over 200 artists and creatives have attended Creative Placemaking Workshops resulting in a total of 98 artist-led projects in the seven Artists on Main Street communities.

West End Flourish held its first meeting with West End business leaders and owners on January 6, 2020. The project was introduced by Mayor Roger Maki and Councilor Kerry Kolodge, with Emily Swanson of OACC explaining how the Artists of Main Street project works with local communities, and Holly Hansen reviewing Cloquet's Downtown Revitalization Strategy

Then the West End Flourish Outreach Team was recruited to make sure local artists learn about West End Flourish and how to apply for a commission to carry out a creative project. West End Flourish went on pause for the pandemic, and is now starting up again.

The West End Flourish Workshop for Creatives will be held on April 29, 3-6pm. RETHOS staff and local partners will answer questions about the proposal process and review selection criteria. Creatives must attend one of the workshops to apply for funds to do their projects. Proposals are welcomed to help 'change the narrative' of the West End and generate more:

- pride in our geography, our Indigenous and Settler history, wisdom and talent
- foot traffic and economic activity
- warmth and connection among residents, visitors and customers
- interaction between leaders and creatives
- aesthetic improvements, revitalization and investment
- positive ripple effect and impact across the entire region

From our Proposal to Revitalize the West End:

Cloquet's leaders endorsed the West End Flourish project because it:

- celebrates the extraordinary beauty of the St. Louis River and its 2 billion-year old granite and slate geologic formations, enjoyed by so many local residents
- honors the immense cultural and environmental contributions of the Anishinaabe people living now on the Fond du Lac Reservation.
- appreciates the distinguished histories of the settlers of Carlton and Cloquet, beginning as lumber industry and railroad towns; restored after the devastating 1918 fires; and known for their contributions to the US cooperative movement.
- treasures the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College that serves as an effective hinge in engaging Native and Non-Native people in educating and training our community's young adults – and in nurturing our community's unity and vitality.
- values the artists, writers, musicians and other culture bearers who make their homes here.
- recognizes the benefits arising from artists and culture bearers working with the 'industrial, business and urban' scene in Cloquet

Cloquet's Historic West End Business District has strong, intact historic architectural character and is located near the St. Louis Riverfront's trails, parks and campgrounds. The West End District has the potential to become the 'heart of Cloquet.'

However, the West End struggles with limited visibility and poor traffic patterns leading to the area. This has resulted in a high number of storefront vacancies, storefront conversions into blighted uses such as garage doors, and buildings lacking necessary utilities. Trucking patterns from nearby industry also conflict at times with pedestrians and bicyclists.

The City of Cloquet and its Economic Development Authority worked with Oldenburg Arts and Cultural Community (OACC) to apply for this Artists on Main Street grant to encourage new creative endeavors and entrepreneurial investment, including:

1. improve the nearby intersection entry to tie the West End and Downtown Districts of the City together;
2. strengthen the West End District's building aesthetics with distinctive signage, historic building information and artistic elements;
3. recruit new businesses and organizations to fill empty storefronts; and
4. heighten the visibility of the West End District with targeted marketing events and programs that celebrate the District's business and the region's geography, history, and the artistic and cultural contributions of its Fond du Lac Tribe and Non-Native residents.

Cloquet's administrative and elected leaders, along with its Economic Development Authority, recognize the unique abilities artists and culture bearers bring to problem solving and collaboration in community development. Artists and culture bearers have become trusted advisors and catalyzing agents in breathing new life into the marginalized and neglected areas of many cities and towns – and Cloquet is ready to join their ranks.

