

## Community Advisory Council (CAC)

### December 2025 Meeting Notes

The Council received the latest updates on priority projects, as well as a report on the research findings provided by contracted industry consultants on the opportunities and best practices for cultivating, supporting and growing local festivals and events that create economic impact and community benefit.

The Council participated in breakout discussions to provide their thoughts on what the ideal community benefit would be for festivals and events in Durham and what Durham Next's role should be in supporting that effort. Overarching themes in the feedback received by the Council include:

- Creating opportunities for community connection and cultural inclusion
- Showcasing the cultural heart of Durham and creating positive perceptions of the destination
- Generating economic opportunities for local businesses and residents
- Incentivizing the private sector to help create community benefit through festivals and events in Durham

To make this happen, the Council advocated for a centralized, streamlined process to make event production more accessible and more public-private investment to support more local activations throughout the year. This feedback will be shared with the Festival Ecosystem project team, which will work to develop a plan to address needs and opportunities in Durham's local festival and events landscape.

The CAC will meet in-person in March for its next quarterly meeting. The group will also have the opportunity to participate in virtual office hours during the months of January and February to share any additional feedback or ideas they have with the Durham Next staff.

*See meeting presentation deck below.*



**DURHAM NEXT**

December Quarterly CAC Meeting



# Agenda

- Welcome & Intros
  - Name & Community Affiliation
- Ice Breaker
- Project Updates
- Festival Research Findings Review
- Group Breakout Discussion & Report Out
- Final Announcements
- Networking & Refreshments

# Ice Breaker

1. Take 5 minutes to meet 5 other people.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Share one of your favorite holiday traditions or memories (bonus points if it happens in Durham).



# Project Updates

# “Welcome to Durham” Signage at RDU

- Design Methodology:
  - Data Identifying Top Points of Interest for Durham’s Visitors
  - 675 Community Survey Responses Weighted by Travel Frequency
  - Visual Capability
- Next Steps: Issuing RFP for Installation
- Expected Completion: 2026



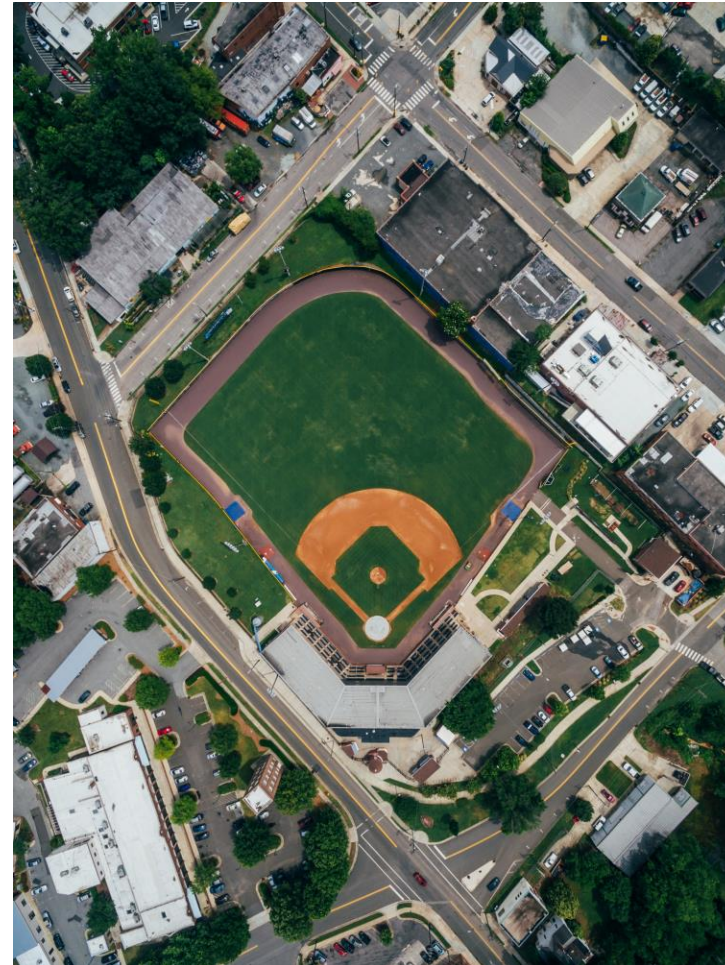
# Durham County Memorial Stadium Feasibility Study



- RFP Issued
- Next Steps: Project Team selects vendor early 2026
- CAC will be engaged to help shape future plans for the stadium

# Durham Athletic Park Preservation

- Year-long Feasibility Study  
Options:
  1. Preservation/Restoration
  2. Transformation
  3. New Development
- Preserving history is a top priority according to local engagement
- Durham Next + Durham Sports Commission working to support City Council's decision to explore Option #1



# Matching Grant Program



- Staff has begun internal processes to create the program
- Slated to be the next priority project focus for Durham Next
- More to come



# Festival Research Findings Review

# Research Methodology

- Timeline: July - October
- Engagement of stakeholders in Durham:
  - 13 Interviews
  - 3 Workshops
  - Survey of festivalgoers
  - CAC engagement
- Competitive market research & analysis
- Gap analysis



From this work, consultants delivered Research Analysis + Recommendations for Phase 2:  
Festival Plan Development

# Festival & Events Engagement Prompts

1. How do you feel about the current level and mix of festivals, events and programming happening in Durham on an annual basis?
2. Are there elements from festivals you've been to in other destinations that could be applied in Durham?
3. What are some barriers you've experienced in accessing festivals and events in Durham?
4. If Durham were to be put on the map by a signature festival, what kind of festival would it be?
5. What goals should festivals in Durham aim to achieve? (ex. Local business support, economic impact, community connection, new and diverse experiences, etc.)

# Competitive & Inspirational Markets

## Markets Include:

- **Austin, TX**
- **Charleston, SC**
- Fort Worth/Arlington, TX
- **Providence, RI**
- Raleigh, NC
- **Richmond, VA**
- Savannah, GA
- Seattle, WA
- Washington, D.C.

Markets in bold received deeper dives based on the following criteria:

- Comparable population size (*w/ Austin, TX as an outlier*)
- Presence of signature festivals that attract visitors and residents
- Known for arts and cultural activity

# Competitive Insights

## Best practices demonstrated by peer cities:

- Singular office for centralized coordination that works collaboratively
- Sustained municipal funding of festivals, ranging from \$800K to \$4.5M from occupancy tax allocations and/or grants
- Robust public-private partnerships, corporate sponsorships and city-nonprofit co-productions
- Strategic placemaking activations to drive visitation and local pride
- Streamlined permitting processes for producers

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# RICHMOND

## Coordination is Key

Richmond Folk Festival (21 yrs; \$1.8M event), 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Festival (37 yrs; \$300-400K event)

## Econ. Impact/Attendance:

- Richmond Folk Festival: \$37.5M; 200K annual attendees
- Events bring ~500K people downtown annually

## Policy/Practice:

- Venture Richmond, non-profit downtown leadership org, produces Folk Festival, 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
- VR receives \$1.3M annually from the City, plus \$200K for Folk Fest & \$75K for 2<sup>nd</sup> Street
- Budget also includes BID funding, sponsorships, donations



## Notable:

- Activate Brown's Island riverfront; Arts District
- Downtown nonprofit operator model; free, high-quality flagship anchor
- "We do festivals to bring people downtown and activate neighborhoods"

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# AUSTIN

## Build on the Brand:

Austin City Limits Festival,  
SXSW Conference &  
Festival, Austin Film Festival

## Econ. Impact:

- ACL Fest 2024: \$534.8 M (2024), \$4.1B (since 2006)
- SXSW: \$377.3M (2024)

## Philosophy:

GOO – Grow Our Own

## Policy/Practice:

- Partnership bet. Austin Parks Foundation & C3 Presents benefitting Austin parks; % tickets → \$71M/20 years
- Austin Live Music Fund



Pecan Street Festival

Fusebox Festival

Cine Las Americas

Bat Fest

Out of Bounds Comedy Festival

Texas Book Festival

Armadillo Christmas Bazaar

Trail of Lights

# Key Findings

- **Durham's Strengths:** A diverse mix of festivals, an entrepreneurial spirit and dedicated producers make Durham's festival landscape a key part of its creative identity and community life.
- **Vibrant but Under-Resourced:** Homegrown, grassroots festivals thrive on community pride yet face ongoing challenges around funding, shared infrastructure and coordination.
- **Funding Gaps:** Despite a recent doubling of City support to \$400K, requests outpace available funds by roughly fourfold; reimbursement-based grants create added strain for smaller producers.



# Key Findings (cont.)

- **Structural Challenges:** Fragmented processes, inequitable access to resources, limited venue capacity and a limited corporate sponsorship base constrain the ecosystem's growth.
- **Pathways Forward:** Opportunities include stronger municipal coordination, streamlined permitting, diversified funding (public, private and tourism-based), producer mentorship and a strategic approach that balances economic impact with community inclusion.



# Opportunities Identified

- Amplify existing Durham festivals and develop signature festivals for Durham
- Create flexible funding tools and incubation programs to support festival owners
- Leverage public-private partnerships and hotel tax revenues generated by visitors
- Reimagine underused spaces for activation
- Strengthen communication and data-driven planning across agencies that work within the festival ecosystem
- Grow economic impact and community participation



# Next Steps

- Research has been turned over to project team.
- Project team is working to develop a plan that will also outline Durham Next's potential role in the work.



# Breakout Discussion



What's  
Good for  
the  
Visitor

Durham  
Next's  
Mission

What's  
Good for  
the  
Resident

# Prompt #1

The benefits of festivals and events include small business support, job creation, tax revenue generation, cultural inclusion, local vibrancy, community connection and repeat visitation. How should community benefits from festivals and events take shape in Durham specifically?

# Prompt #2

How should Durham Next be involved in the festival ecosystem? Rank the options listed below.

- One Stop Shop
- Financial Investment
- Technical Support
- Advocate w/ City for more Investment
- Team Member @ the City
- Building or Investing in an Events Venue
- Recruiting Corporate Sponsors
- Other



## Group Report Out