

*A New Vision for Music Row:
Recommendations and Strategies
to Create a
Music Row Cultural Industry District*

May 2016

Executive Summary



**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**
Save the past. Enrich the future.

Purpose

A *New Vision for Music Row* was undertaken by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its consultant, Randall Gross/Development Economics, to provide Nashville's decision makers with a robust toolbox of historic preservation-based tools and strategies to build a sustainable future for Music Row, the centerpiece of Nashville's international reputation as Music City.

The overarching recommendation is the designation of the Music Row Cultural Industry District—a first for the city and the state. The Music Row Cultural Industry District will give property and business owners more collective power and resources for planning and implementing a shared vision for the long-term sustainability of Music Row.

This report is intended to compliment the *Music Row Design Plan*, a separate document authored by the Metro Planning Department which addresses design-based planning and land use factors such building heights, setbacks, streetscape design, parking and transportation. The *Music Row Design Plan* is expected to be finalized in the summer of 2016.

Overview

The report's overarching recommendation is for Metro Nashville government to designate Music Row as the city and state's first Cultural Industry District. The *New Vision for Music Row* document serves to lay out the many benefits that would flow from such a designation, and to serve as the foundation for a strategic plan for operating, funding and managing a new Music Row Cultural Industry District. Key to the success of establishing the Music Row Cultural Industry District will be an engaged and informed board of directors and the creation of staff positions to implement the District's strategic plan.

The Music Row Cultural Industry District would give existing property and business owners more collective power and resources for planning and implementing a shared vision for the long-term sustainability of Music Row as a concentrated locus of music related businesses with a rich historical legacy that is known the world over.

This document also identifies key incentives and tools for the Music Row Cultural Industry District to utilize that would support the preservation of both Music Row's historic built environment and its music businesses, such as discounted rent and discounted rates on financing for real estate projects that would balance historic preservation with modernization of facilities.

Assumptions

Nashville's brand, its identity, and its economic engine are tied to the idea that our city is a creative one, a hub not only for making country and all other genres of music but for the creating all types of great culture, and for encouraging entrepreneurship in a collaborative environment that incubates talent.

Music Row and its special significance to Nashville and the nation is now threatened. Real estate development pressures, a technological revolution, and rapidly changing business formats for the purchase and distribution of music are all threatening Music Row's 60-year old tenure as a densely-concentrated locus for music creation and production.

Music Row's densely-concentrated, compact nature is essential to what makes Music Row so special and successful. The close physical proximity of its more than 200 music-related businesses promotes collaboration, creativity, contracting, personal networking, marketing, business deal-making, and entrepreneurial development in a way that cannot be as easily achieved when businesses are spread geographically throughout an increasingly traffic-clogged and sprawling metropolitan area.

The Opportunity

Adopting a strategic vision and plan for how Music Row can develop while retaining its unique heritage and character are keys to its future. Envisioning Music Row as more than a collection of office buildings or as one of Nashville's several office zones but as the world's creative hub for making music is an unparalleled opportunity.

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Key Recommendations

Establish a Music Row Cultural Industry District to provide holistic, streamlined leadership in managing the long-term sustainability of Music Row. This district would function as a not-for-profit entity with the mission of strengthening, developing, and promoting the music industry and associated businesses in Music Row. Its staff would implement a package of incentives, branding, promotion, financing, amenities, infrastructure investment, and other tools to leverage the growth and sustainability of the music industry in Music Row.

Brand Music Row to emphasis its unique role in national and international music production and cultural influence. A key step in creating awareness is the creation of a consistent visual and graphic identity, often referred to as "Brand Identity." This process includes more than creating a logo. It encompasses considering the message of Music Row (its past and present), the desired image and how it is visually communicated. If planned properly, Music Row can become what Broadway is to the theater industry or Hollywood to the film industry, in terms of a globally-recognized brand.

Create a Music Row Investment Trust to give business and property owners more collective control over prospective development on Music Row. The primary purpose of the trust is to help individual property owners and businesses come together to plan and finance the acquisition, rehabilitation, expansion, and redevelopment of existing properties--helping these businesses stay competitive in an ever-evolving industry and promoting the viability of Music Row as a whole. A Music Row Investment Trust can help ameliorate conflict between individual stakeholders where there is consensus that music-related uses should remain in the district by facilitating partnerships, collaborations, and joint ownership agreements that promote solutions.

Create a Metro or State Government loan guarantee program to help smaller music businesses afford building rehabilitation and business expansion/acquisition. The availability of loan guarantees or letters of credit could support financing the Music Row Investment Trust might undertake for acquisition, rehabilitation, preservation and other functions such as recruiting and retaining music-related businesses on Music Row.

Establish the Music Row Historic and Cultural Preservation Fund to assist smaller cultural businesses that are operating in historic buildings. Metro Government should provide funding in the form of grants, capital expenditures, or seed money to launch a fund that would help finance historic rehabilitation projects that meet preservation standards.

Create a Cultural Legacy Music Row Business Fund to encourage qualified "legacy" music businesses to stay on Music Row. This fund would provide a package of incentives to support the viability of the music industry in the district and support the preservation of Music Row's historic built environment. Incentives could include local sales tax exemption for expenditures on preservation construction materials or music industry related equipment, and tax credits to defray historic rehabilitation project costs.

Standardize planning and zoning regulations according to the Music Row Design Plan to manage approval of new development projects. Most of the new construction on Music Row in the last three years received “Specific Plan Zoning” from the Metro Planning Commission meaning the building plans were approved outside the zoning district’s established design standards for building height and size, setbacks, buffers, signage and materials. The granting of special zoning exceptions can contribute to land speculation, rapid escalation in property prices, and replacement of music-related businesses. As a matter of policy, specific zoning exceptions should be limited and the new Music Row Design Plan should guide planning commission decisions in consultation with the Music Row Investment Trust.

This report also identifies key components of a plan to bolster the long-term viability of Music Row as a hub of the cutting edge creative music economy, including:

- **Technology development** - Internet infrastructure, technology training and education, and collaboration between the music industry, local universities, and hi tech companies should be encouraged and promoted within Music Row. The district should serve as a “laboratory” and the “R&D” department for music technologies. The Music Row Cultural Industry District should help facilitate and foster collaborations with Belmont and Vanderbilt universities on technology innovation and development.
- **Affordable housing** - Music Row enjoys a competitive advantage over Los Angeles and New York due to its relatively less expensive cost of living. Rapid real estate appreciation is making the construction of new high-end condos and apartments more attractive to developers than more modest housing options.
- **Physical Improvements** - Streetscape, parks, open space, unique signage, gateways and building treatments can be employed to strengthen Music Row as a unique district with its own character. Public art is also encouraged to help invigorate the streetscape.
- **Mixed use commercial real estate** - Demand for mixed-use, walkable neighborhoods is up, especially among younger workers who want to walk to lunch, meet friends for coffee or a drink after work, hear live music, and live near their offices. Music Row’s ability to attract a young, dynamic work force would be strengthened by developing a mix of offices, retail and housing.
- **Music Row Tourism** - One of many tourism-related activities that will benefit local music businesses while minimizing potential negative impacts is to develop a behind-the-scenes tour system for recording studios. This system will generate revenue that could help supplement income for Music Row studios. Other tourism activities include a walking tour app and an annual open house event that would let locals and visitors alike experience the sights, sounds and stories that make Music Row such a unique place—with minimal disruption to the studios’ operations.

About Nashville's Music Row

The neighborhood's built environment dates to the late 19th century when it developed as a streetcar suburb, but it is the area's unique role over the past 60 years as the center of Nashville's music industry that defines its transformative impact on national and international culture. Although the neighborhood has experienced considerable redevelopment in recent years, Music Row continues to retain its historic sense of place and distinctive character, based primarily on the resilient and spirited community of music industry businesses that support Nashville's economy.

Research by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which named Music Row a National Treasure in 2015, recently revealed that over 200 music related businesses operate on Music Row, making it the last remaining music industry cluster of its kind in the country. Research also revealed that 63 of its structures are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places but that approximately 35 historic music-related buildings were demolished between 2013 and 2015 for redevelopment projects.

Acknowledgements

The National Trust has worked with many local partners including the office of Mayor Megan Barry, Metro Council, the Music Industry Coalition, Music Row Neighborhood Association, Metro Planning Department, Metro Historical Commission, Nashville Convention and Visitors Corporation and Historic Nashville, Inc.

For more information on this recommendations report, please contact Carolyn Brackett, Senior Field Officer, National Trust for Historic Preservation, cbrackett@savingplaces.org or 615-226-4078.

More information on our National Treasure campaign for Nashville's Music Row can be found at savingplaces.org



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