



**Walnut
Creek 2050**
Rooted. Evolving. Thriving.



Arts and Culture

Existing Conditions Report

OCTOBER 2026

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Key Issues and Opportunities	5
Context	7
Community Context.....	7
Approach and Methodology	8
Policy and Planning Context	9
Existing Conditions.....	11
The City’s Role in Arts and Culture	11
Structure and Context	11
City Arts Programs.....	11
City Arts Facilities	14
Public Art Program.....	17
Walnut Creek’s Arts and Culture Assets	23
Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations.....	23
The Public Art Collection as a Community Asset.....	24
The Creative Economy	25
Conclusion	27
Appendix A: Terms and Definitions	28
Appendix B: Cultural Asset Inventory	30

Figures

Figure 1. Public Art..... 18

Figure 2. In-Lieu Public Art Fee Revenue, FY23–FY26..... 22

Figure 3. Creative Economy, 2024 Observed vs. 2036 Projected 26

Tables

Table 1. City Arts Programs 12

Table 2. City Arts Facilities 15

Table 3. Public Art Inventory..... 19

Introduction

Walnut Creek is recognized throughout the region for its vibrant arts and culture scene, sustained by more than six decades of municipal investment. The City plays a substantial role in supporting and delivering arts and cultural programming through a major performing arts center, a nationally recognized contemporary gallery, a resident professional theater company, a regional community arts education program, and an extensive public art collection. As a cultural center for the surrounding region, the City primarily focuses on delivering arts and culture programs to residents and visitors, rather than directly supporting the independent producers, companies, and individual artists who bring the City's venues to life but operate independently.



Mona Caron, *Balsamorhiza*, 2022. KEIM Soldalit sol-silicate mineral paint.

This Existing Conditions Report (ECR) establishes a shared, evidence-based foundation for the Arts and Culture topic of Walnut Creek's General Plan Update (GPU). It provides the City, its partners, and the community with a common understanding of where arts and culture stand today, reflecting on the City's own

programs and assets, the wider cultural ecosystem, the relevant policy framework, and the conditions and trends that the General Plan can address.

WHAT DOES ARTS AND CULTURE MEAN?

Arts and culture, as used in this General Plan, refers to the full range of creative and cultural activities that shape community life. This includes the performing arts (theater, music, dance, opera), visual arts (galleries, exhibitions, public art), community arts education, and the individuals, organizations, and institutions that sustain them. It encompasses both the City's direct programs and facilities, such as the Leshner Center for the Arts, Bedford Gallery, and Center for Community Arts, and the broader ecosystem of nonprofit producers, individual artists, cultural and heritage organizations, and creative economy businesses that operate independently and contribute to civic and economic vitality.

Key Issues and Opportunities

This analysis of baseline conditions points to a clear set of issues and opportunities for the City's Arts and Culture topic, summarized below and developed fully in the ECR.

- **The City's role as a provider and a convener.** Walnut Creek's arts model is built primarily around delivering services to residents and less around developing the broader cultural ecosystem. Convening and ecosystem-building functions, such as shared marketing, a unified calendar, regular producer coordination, and possible cultural affairs capacity, alongside the City's direct programming, could be considered in future GPU policy discussions.
- **A clear and inclusive vision.** External perceptions of Walnut Creek as affluent and exclusive have not kept pace with the community's increasingly diverse population and programming. Reaffirming Walnut Creek's identity as a leading regional cultural center and broadening it to emphasize inclusiveness, belonging, and connection could be considered during GPU policy discussions to help reflect the current reality of programming, marketing, and visible signals of welcome.
- **City cultural facility capital needs.** City cultural facilities face significant capital needs and deferred maintenance. The Leshner Center and the Shadelands Art Center have both identified needed capital improvements. Measure O's investment in facility replacement demonstrates the value of dedicated, proactive capital funding and provides a model for systematically identifying, prioritizing, and addressing future capital needs. There is an opportunity with the General Plan to address aging arts infrastructure and deferred maintenance.
- **Space and facilities.** A significant constraint across the arts system is a shortage of affordable rehearsal, performance, studio, exhibition, and open-access "maker" spaces. The GPU could support organizations and independent artists alike by considering a long-term vision for purpose-built, flexible arts facilities and the deliberate use of development tools to address it.
- **Organizational sustainability.** Key organizations, including the Leshner Center and Center REP, face rising costs, a shifting rental mix, and audience change. Supporting their long-term financial health in addition to their current operations could be an opportunity to explore during future GPU policy discussions.
- **Public art stewardship, inclusion, and access.** The Public Art Program is a genuine asset, with a growing in-lieu public art fund¹ and a valuable art collection. The in-lieu

¹ The City of Walnut Creek requires new private construction and significant alteration projects valued at \$500,000 or greater to either install onsite public art or pay an equivalent [In-Lieu Public Art Fee](#) to the city's Public Art Fund prior to receiving occupancy certificates.

fund has grown rapidly, from roughly \$43,000 in FY23 to \$1,768,434 in FY26, with nearly \$1 million uncommitted and available for allocations, creating a meaningful new policy lever just as the decade-old Public Art Master Plan is due for renewal. The GPU could consider policy discussions and opportunities to guide deployment of the fund with attention to geographic inclusion, serving local artists, expanding temporary work, and improving public access to the collection.

- **Arts education and access.** The educational Community Arts program is a regional asset already operating at capacity, despite ongoing affordability and space constraints. GPU policy discussions could discuss arts education as a core City service and examine capacity, affordability, and the underserved "missing middle" of adult learners.
- **Supporting individual artists.** A substantial population of individual artists remains an underutilized civic resource. The GPU could look into opportunities to support artists, including convening arts groups, teaching artist services, revising grant structures, expanding opportunities in public art, and making access to affordable space for artists.
- **Affordability and artist housing.** Rising costs of living are displacing artists and arts organizations throughout the Bay Area. GPU policy discussions might consider connecting arts and housing policy and leveraging new development and State housing requirements to support housing needs in the arts community of Walnut Creek.
- **Arts and economic development.** The 'architecture, drafting, and design' sector is the largest creative sector employment base within the local creative economy. Expanding and activating the downtown arts district, building an economic impact evidence base, and concentrating efforts on the design anchor and related clusters could be further explored to strengthen and diversify the city's economic base while infusing it with arts and culture.



Leshner Center for the Arts. Photo by Chris Gill, WestBoundary Photography.

- **Partnerships, governance, and metrics.** The City's arts ecosystem depends on a web of partnerships—including the Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA), foundations, the County, school districts, and regional organizations—that are not yet formalized, and the City lacks a shared framework for measuring its arts programs' own performance. Opportunities for consideration through this process include strengthening partnerships and cross-sector collaboration and establishing an integrated framework to measure the performance and impact of arts and culture programs. The framework could track indicators such as participation, access, public art growth, facility conditions, arts education reach, and economic impact, with regular reporting to the City Council and Arts Commission.

Context

The following section sets the stage for the existing conditions analysis in three ways: by describing the community that Walnut Creek's arts and culture serve, summarizing the policy and planning framework already in place, and outlining the methodology used in this report. Together, these elements provide a contextual foundation the GPU will build upon.

Community Context

Walnut Creek is a community of approximately 70,700 residents located at the geographic center of Contra Costa County and serving as a regional hub for the East Bay.² Its daytime population surges to approximately 124,300, reflecting its reputation as a destination for shopping, dining, employment, and culture.³ The city is highly educated, with about 70% of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher.⁴ Median household income is also higher than the county and regional medians⁵ and the city is home to more than 5,200 businesses.⁶ Its central location, BART station, and highway connections make Walnut Creek a transportation hub where people from across the county can conveniently gather. The city is widely described as beautiful, walkable, and park-like, with a mature "small-town" feel. Strong schools, an attractive and safe downtown anchored by Broadway Plaza, the Leshner Center for the Arts, and Bedford Gallery attract residents and visitors of all ages.

² California Department of Finance. 2026. BAE, 2026.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2015 and 2024 five-year sample periods, Table B08526; BAE, 2026.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 five-year sample period, Table S1501; BAE, 2026.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2024 five-year sample period, Tables B19001, B19013, B19113 & B19301; BAE, 2026.

⁶ Walnut Creek Economic Development. Walnut Creek by the Numbers. Retrieved from: <https://www.walnutcreekconnected.com/home-econdev>.

Walnut Creek’s quality of life is distinguished by its natural landscape, parks, and open spaces, as well as its high-quality arts and culture community, which the City has prioritized and sustained over the years. A broad ecosystem of nonprofit producers, presenting partners, community and heritage organizations, regional service agencies, and a substantial population of individual artists has grown around the City’s own programs. Stakeholders indicated that many artists and arts workers live in nearby communities.

Demographically, the city has a substantial senior population, alongside a growing presence of families and youth.⁷ Changes in the retail mix at Broadway Plaza (with a shift from a department-store anchor toward restaurants and services) and the evolution of the City’s cultural programming to include events such as Diwali and Latino cultural festivals reflect Walnut Creek’s changing demographics and a growing cultural diversity.

These demographic changes intersect with differing perceptions of Walnut Creek’s identity and reputation. Stakeholders shared perceptions of the city as affluent, exclusive, and conservative. Some also reported that certain audiences, including people of color, have not always felt a strong sense of connection to downtown. Stakeholders also noted that Walnut Creek is not always perceived as a place associated with creativity, culture, energy, or belonging. At the same time, participants noted that the community is changing and identified efforts by local organizations, including Bedford Gallery, to broaden participation and engagement.

Approach and Methodology

The approach and methodology for preparing this Arts and Culture report included reviewing the City’s existing plans, budget, and program records along with direct engagement with community stakeholders. Documents reviewed included the Public Art Master Plan (2016) and the public art ordinances; the Mural Grant Guidelines; Leshner Center Annual Reports for Fiscal Years 2024 (FY24) and 2025 (FY25), along with the Center for Community Arts Annual Reports; arts division budgets, public art budget actuals, and FY24–25 capital projects; the 2026–27 Economic Development Action Plan and the Economic Development Community Data Snapshot; the Parks & Open Space Summary Booklet and 10-Year Parks



Diwali Outdoor Stage Dance Lesson. Source: Randy Taradash.

⁷ Note: From correspondence with City of Walnut Creek staff.

Plan; and a creative economy trend analysis prepared for the City of Walnut Creek.

Primary stakeholder engagement was conducted from June 10 to June 15, 2026, and included interviews with City arts staff (from the Leshner Center, Center Repertory Company, Bedford Gallery, Public Art, and Center for Community Arts); meetings with economic development and City Manager's Office staff; conversations with cultural organizations including Festival Opera, Poison Apple Productions, the Walnut Creek Concert Band, Synergy Theater, Arts Contra Costa County, Art of the African Diaspora, the Arts Education Alliance of the Greater Bay Area, and the Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society; and two virtual artist discussion groups. Participants spoke candidly under an assurance of confidentiality; engagement findings are presented in aggregate throughout this report.

Policy and Planning Context

Walnut Creek's commitment to arts and culture is reflected in its existing plans and policies. While several are now dated, together they demonstrate a long record of aspirational cultural policies and planning on which the new General Plan can build.

- **General Plan 2025 and Goal 12.** The City's existing General Plan articulates a longstanding ambition for Walnut Creek to maintain and enhance its position as a leading regional cultural and arts center (Goal 12), an aspiration backed by sustained operating investment and active programming.
- **Public Art Master Plan and Ordinances.** The City's Public Art Program rests on a mature policy framework: a Public Art Master Plan (adopted in 2000 and later updated in 2016), municipal-code chapters governing public art for public works and private development, defined public art zones, and an in-lieu fee mechanism. The ordinances require that major City construction projects set aside one percent of construction cost for public art or pay into the In-Lieu Public Art Fund, and that qualifying private development (generally nonresidential buildings of 25,000 square feet or more, with a half-percent tier for certain Core Area projects between 15,000 and 25,000 square feet) either install public art or pay the in-lieu fee. Artworks are recommended by the Public Art Committee of the Arts Commission and approved by the Commission, with the Design Review Commission approving scale and location for certain projects. A newer Mural Grant program extends the program's reach to privately owned building surfaces and broadens the range of artistic voices.
- **Public Art Strategic Plan.** The plan is a five-year reaffirmation and update of Walnut Creek's Public Art Strategic Plan, originally accepted in 2018 as a working document to guide growth of the Public Art Program. Staff recommended that the Arts Commission review and reaffirm the plan's priorities for the next five years, with updates reflecting

progress since 2018 and new opportunities for 2023 to 2028. It includes three primary goals: grow the public art program, engage the community, and support the public art program.

- Economic Development Action Plan.** The City’s 2026–27 Economic Development Action Plan explicitly names the Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA) and the arts sector as partners in downtown vitality. Its actions include coordinating visitor-attraction efforts with DRAA and Visit Walnut Creek, using the “experiential feel” of downtown, including arts programming, as a competitive differentiator, tracking placemaking best practices, and aligning the General Plan with strategies that make Walnut Creek a premier regional destination. Economic development staff describe the arts as already “interwoven” in the community’s fabric while acknowledging that the City has never developed a consistent, evidence-based framework for treating arts as an economic driver.
- Parks, Open Space, and Measure O.** The City’s parks planning (as reflected in the Parks & Open Space Summary Booklet and the 10-Year Parks Plan) is directly relevant to arts and culture, because much arts programming is delivered in community centers within the parks system. The voter-approved Measure O half-cent sales tax (2022) is projected to generate \$12–15 million annually for a decade and is funding the new Heather Farm community center, creating both new multipurpose space with arts potential and a precedent for dedicated cultural-facility investment.
- Arts and Economic Prosperity Report.** The report provides an economic and social impact study of nonprofit arts and culture organizations and their audiences in Walnut Creek. In 2022, the nonprofit arts sector generated \$36.1 million in economic activity, including spending by arts attendees of an average of \$34.64 per person per event, beyond the cost of admission. That economic activity supported 776 jobs, provided \$27.6 million in personal income to residents, and generated \$8.5 million in tax revenue to local, state, and federal governments.
- Your Parks, Your Future.** Initiated in 2017, Your Parks, Your Future (YPYF) is the City’s multi-phase planning process for four aging arts and recreation facilities: the Heather Farm Community Center, Clarke Swim Center, Civic Park Community Center, and Shadelands Art Center. Phase 1A concluded with Council direction in February 2020 to consolidate industrial arts programs (including ceramics, jewelry, weaving, and related studio programs) at the Shadelands Art Center in a new, larger building, while retiring the Ceramic Studio at Civic Park and Studio H at Heather Farm Park. Phase 1B produced a conceptual site plan, accepted in February 2023, for a combined aquatic and community center of approximately 25,500 square feet at Heather Farm Park. The proposed center’s atrium, multipurpose rooms, and rentable Lakeside Room could also accommodate arts programming. Phase 2 master planning for the parks’ outdoor spaces remains deferred, and because YPYF addresses only these four facilities, the City’s other

arts venues (including those with maintenance and modernization needs) fall outside of the scope of its planning process.

Existing Conditions

This section provides a detailed overview of the current state of arts and culture in Walnut Creek. It first examines the City's own role, including its programs, facilities, and public art, and then examines the broader arts and culture ecosystem that it supports—which, in turn, supports and strengthens the City, nonprofit organizations, individual artists, the public art collection, and the for-profit creative economy. It closes by drawing out the issues and opportunities these conditions present for the arts and culture topic of the GPU.

The City's Role in Arts and Culture

Structure and Context

Walnut Creek's arts and cultural functions are administered through the Arts + Recreation Department, in partnership with the Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA), the City's strongest arts partner, co-producer, and fundraiser based at the Leshner Center. For more than 60 years, the City has invested directly in arts and culture, building an institutionalized, multi-layered, and operationally mature program spanning performing arts, visual arts, community arts education, and public art. City arts programs are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through program-generated revenue, such as fees and ticket sales. A citywide fee and cost-recovery study is currently underway to evaluate its financial model. Staff consistently expressed both pride in the City's commitment and awareness of its strain, noting that the City sustains a level of artistic quality that sometimes exceeds its available resources, and that maintaining this standard will require continued investment. The sections that follow profile the City's programs, facilities, and public art.

City Arts Programs

The City delivers arts and culture through four principal programs, summarized below in **Table 1** and described in the sections that follow.

Table 1. City Arts Programs

Program	Type	Key Scale Indicator
Lesher Center for the Arts	Presenting and rental venue with three theaters plus the Bedford Gallery	~145,000 tickets across 500+ events (FY24)
Center Repertory Company (Center REP)	Resident professional theater operating under a LORT D agreement with Actors Equity Association	~5 productions per year
Bedford Gallery	Contemporary visual arts venue	~22,000 visitors (FY24)
Center for Community Arts	Community arts education	~6,900 registrations; ~\$2.0M revenue (FY25)

Lesher Center for the Arts

The Lesher Center for the Arts is the centerpiece of the City’s performing and visual arts infrastructure, housing multiple performance venues, the Bedford Gallery, the offices of DRAA, and serving as home to Center Repertory Company (Center REP). The venue serves both as a presenting organization and a rental facility, hosting substantial activity. In Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24), it hosted more than 500 events and issued approximately 145,000 tickets, supported by a dedicated volunteer corps that contributed more than 11,500 hours of service. Since the pandemic, the Lesher Center has added its own programming as a presenter and festival producer, including a Headliners series of 15–20 events per year. Staff and producers identified several financial and operational challenges. The City’s cost-recovery expectations can be difficult to meet given the high cost of operating in the Bay Area. In addition, the programming mix has shifted toward more one-day rental events as the number of long-term producing and presenting organizations has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Center Repertory Company

Center REP is the City’s resident professional theater company and one of the oldest in the region. Operating under a League of Resident Theaters (LORT D) smaller nonprofit theaters agreement with Actors' Equity Association and embedded within the Lesher Center, it produces approximately five productions per year, including an annual holiday production. Its programming emphasizes new work alongside classic titles, with one or two regional or

world premieres annually, and Center REP has expressed interest in future commissioning opportunities. Like many regional theaters across the country, it faces challenges with attracting audiences, maintaining subscriptions, and generating enough revenue to cover rising operating costs. These financial pressures may affect the theater’s long-term sustainability and are an important consideration for the General Plan Update.

Bedford Gallery

Bedford Gallery, located within the Leshner Center, is the City’s contemporary visual arts venue and a source of national recognition. Its traveling-exhibition program is among the City’s biggest revenue-generating arts activities and has built the gallery’s national profile. Meanwhile, its juried exhibition program is predominantly local (roughly 60-70%). The gallery draws strong annual attendance (about 22,000 visitors in FY24), embeds the City’s public art curatorial function, operates fully accessible school programming such as “Art in a Suitcase,” as well as hosts sold-out public art walking tours. It has made deliberate efforts to diversify its programming and audiences, exemplified by initiatives such as the Leshner Center’s Latino cultural festival “Fiesta Cultural” and an earlier Frida Kahlo exhibition, and broadening its longtime docent corps. Stakeholders flagged the need to attract a new generation of docents and to sustain the gallery’s national standing.



Bedford Gallery. Source: City of Walnut Creek.

Center for Community Arts

The Center for Community Arts is the City’s community arts education program and a regional provider operating at significant scale, growing from roughly 5,900 registrations in FY24 to about 6,900 in FY25. In the same period, overall revenue rose from about \$1.85 million to roughly \$2.0 million. Programming includes painting, drawing, ceramics, glass, music, dance, and preschool classes across three locations: Shadelands, Civic Park, and Heather Farm. The program serves participants of all ages, from young children to a growing cohort of working adults. Several pressures impact current offerings. First, the Civic Park ceramics studio runs at 100% capacity from 8:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and cannot meet demand. Second, implementation of universal Transitional Kindergarten has compressed the preschool program to ages two to three, and post-COVID enrollment has become less

predictable. Staff interviews indicated another trend influencing enrollment: an increasing share of children under age six with all available parents in the labor force, which has increased demand for full-day care rather than part-day preschool programs. The program's financial aid function serves low-income families, awarding aid to roughly 107 students in FY24 and 118 in FY25. City staff report that about half of scholarship applicants come from outside Walnut Creek, underscoring both the program's regional role and the affordability barriers families face.

City Arts Facilities

Walnut Creek's arts programs are delivered across a facility network deeply intertwined with its parks and open space, a connection residents value highly as shown in **Table 2**. The Civic Park and Heather Farm community centers, along with the Shadelands community facilities, host arts programming in multipurpose settings. Much of this infrastructure is aging: the Heather Farm community center and pool date to the early 1970s and are more than 50 years old (though as of this writing is in the midst of redevelopment and is anticipated to be complete in 2027) while the Civic Park facilities occupy converted civic buildings from the 1950s and 1960s that were not originally designed for arts uses. Some community arts classes operate in portables more than 20 years old that often lack adequate office and storage space.

The City maintains a list of substantial capital improvement needs for its facilities, including several identified needs at arts facilities. At the Leshner Center, these include: a \$431,000 sound system upgrade, which has already been completed; planned restroom and accessibility upgrades estimated at \$800,000; backstage improvements estimated at \$200,000; and flooring and catwalk repairs, for which costs have not yet been determined. Civic Park Community Center has similar needs, including a \$305,000 kitchen upgrade and a \$71,000 concrete patio replacement. The facilities at Shadelands, which house both the Shadelands Museum and the Center for Community Arts' art center, are additionally in need of exterior improvements; however, a firm cost estimate has not yet been established.



Poppy, a planned sculptural installation by Hou de Sousa, at Heather Farm Park.

Existing plans and community planning efforts, such as Your Parks Your Future, provide an important foundation for identifying facility needs and future priorities. The General Plan provides an opportunity to recognize the importance of long-term capital planning and

sustainable funding strategies to maintain, modernize, and replace aging infrastructure and public facilities over time. Several aging facilities, including the Shadelands Art Center, the Civic Park Ceramics Studio, and the Fiber Arts Studio at Heather Farms Park are being evaluated as part of Your Parks Your Future.

Table 2. City Arts Facilities

Facility	Description	Year Built	Updates
Lesher Center for the Arts	Hofmann Theatre (785 seats) Margaret Lesher Theatre (300 seats) Vukasin Theatre (130 seats) Operated by City	1990	Fire Panel Replacement Project (2017) Roof Silicone Coating (2018) Generator Replacement (2019) Chiller Replacement (2020) Exterior Expansion Joint & Window Caulking Replacement/Waterproofing (2020) Stage Flooring Replacement (2025) Cooling Tower Replacement (2025) BMS System/Controls Replacement (2026) Lesher Theater Catwalk Decking Replacement (2026) Hoffman Sound System (2026)
Bedford Gallery	Located within Lesher Center 3,500 sq. ft. exhibition space Operated by City	1990	See above
Shadelands Art Center	Home of Center for Community Arts	1973	Replaced all HVAC Units (2017)

Facility	Description	Year Built	Updates
	Auditorium plus meeting rooms/classrooms, patio, professional kitchen Operated by City		Replaced the Auditorium Flooring (2017) Remodel of the Front Counter (2017) Kitchen Refresh (2025)
Shadelands Ranch Museum	Historic home plus outbuildings (barn, water tower) Operated by Walnut Creek Historical Society	1902	Shadeland Museum Roofing Replacement (2020) Shadeland Outbuilding and Restroom Roofing Replacement (2025)
Lindsay Wildlife Experience	28,000 sq. ft., museum in Larkey Park Operated by Lindsay Wildlife Experience	1993	Replaced All HVAC Units (2017) Exterior Paint (2017)
Civic Park Ceramics Studio	7,600 sq. ft. ceramics studio in Civic Park Operated by the City.	1950	Kiln Replacement (1) (2020) Kiln Replacement (2) (2023)
Fiber Arts Studio Heather Farms Park	3,000 sq. ft facility within Studio H Tot Learning Center in a raised portable trailer unit.	1972	Minimal improvements have been conducted

Source: City of Walnut Creek, Public Works Department, 2026.

Heather Farm Park facilities have begun to address its aging infrastructure. The community center and pool are being replaced entirely, with an approximately 27,000-square-foot Aquatic and Community Center funded largely through Measure O,⁸ Construction began in 2026 and is expected to continue through 2027, adding aquatics and multipurpose community space with potential for arts classes.

⁸ Note: Measure O is the City's voter-approved half-cent sales tax is projected to generate \$12–15 million annually for a decade and is allocated to a variety of community projects, <https://www.walnutcreekca.gov/government/measure-o>.

Stakeholders repeatedly described an aspiration for integrated "one-stop" spaces, combining parks, playgrounds, community rooms, and arts facilities, that make participation easy for families. A longer-term vision of purpose-built, flexible, contemporary arts space can strengthen Walnut Creek's position as a regional arts destination. The relationship between local arts facilities and the City's parks and open space system is a natural subject for integrated planning.

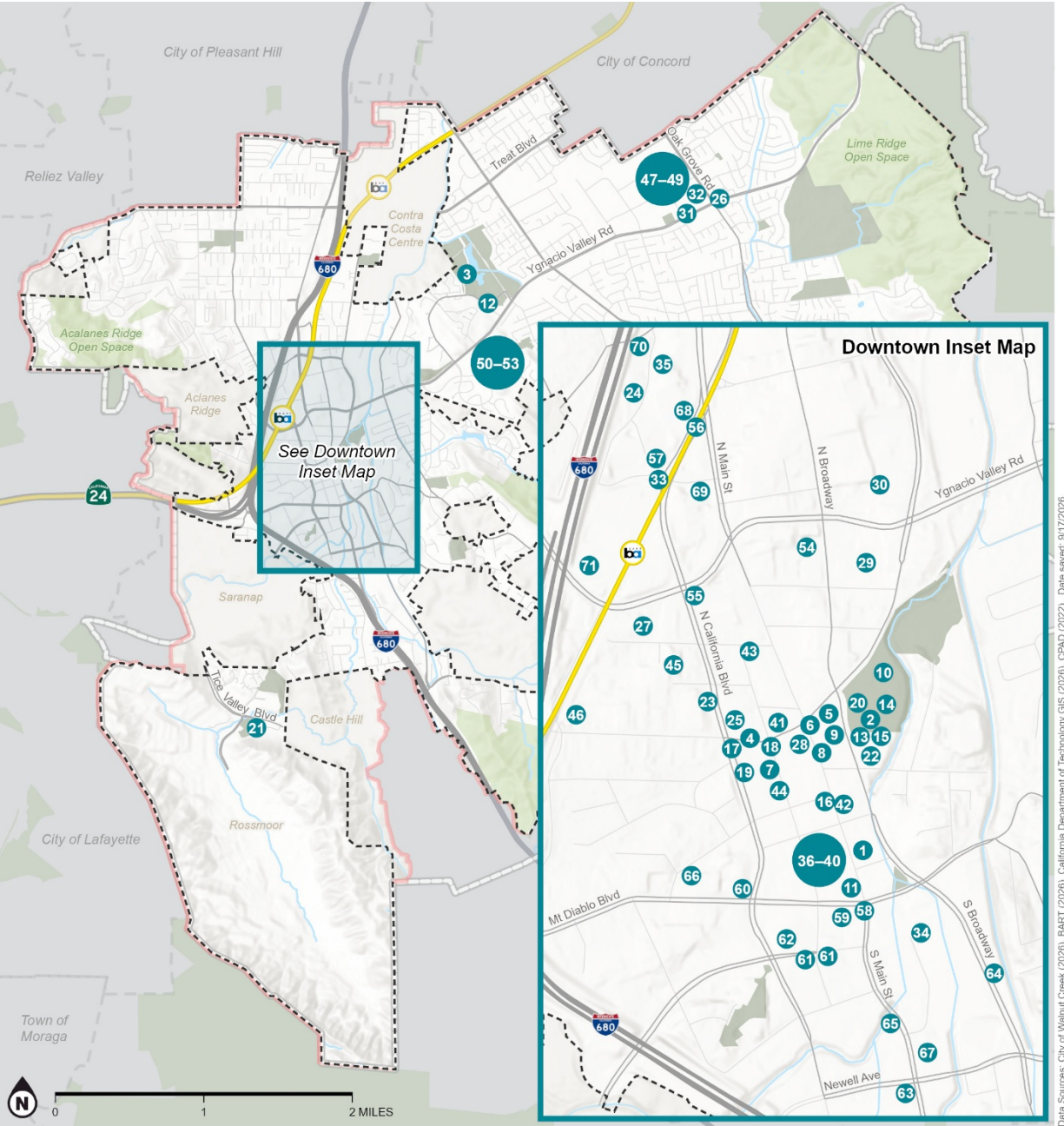
Public Art Program

The City's Public Art Program combines a strong institutional framework with a significant collection and a growing dedicated fund. As described in the **Policy and Planning Context** section, the program operates with a structure and policies established in a Public Art Master Plan adopted in 2000 and updated in 2016. The public art ordinances require a one percent dedication for major City and private projects with an in-lieu fee option, with works recommended by the Public Art Committee and approved by the Arts Commission. The collection numbers more than 70 artworks encompassing outdoor sculptures and murals, and two- and three-dimensional works indoors as shown in **Figure 1** and **Table 3**. Because the location of the art is primarily determined by the site of public or private real estate development, works are concentrated in and near downtown and at Shadelands.



Seyed Alavi, *Fountain Head*, 2012. Fiberglass. Photo source: Kevin Shea.

Figure 1. Public Art



Data Sources: City of Walnut Creek (2026), BART (2026), California Department of Technology/GIS (2026), CPAD (2022). Date saved: 9/17/2026

PUBLIC ART

Public Art Inventory*

CITY OF WALNUT CREEK
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE



*Please note that location of art may not be completely accurate due to ensuring all pieces are visible on the map. Refer to table of artworks for exact address/location.

FEATURES + BOUNDARIES

- City Boundary
- Sphere of Influence
- Planning Area
- Parks
- Open Space
- Waterbodies
- Freeways
- BART Stations

Table 3. Public Art Inventory

Number	Artist	Title
1	Seyed Alavi	Fountain Head
2	Beniamino Bufano	Hand of Peace
3	Beniamino Bufano	Boy and Bird
4	Willard Carmel	Monument to Shell Ridge
5	Stephen De Staebler	Untitled
6	Stephen De Staebler	Untitled
7	Dan Dykes	Wings
8	Ludell Deutscher	Le Passant
9	Julie Firth	Megamo
10	Cliff Garten	Veteran's Memorial Plaza
11	Gerald Heffernon	Bullman with Bulldog
12	Bruce Johnson	Strata
13	Christian Moeller	Shh.....Portrait in 12 Volumes of Gray
14	Richard O'Hanlon	Stele Meridian
15	Marta Thoma	Journey of a Bottle
16	Wowhaus	Geologica
17	Mona Caron	Balsamroot
18	Kristin Farr	West Coast Barn Quilt
19	Josh Keyes	Treadmill
20	MCXT	We Well All Be...
21	Nigel Sussman	Where's Walnut Creek?
22	Netsanet Tesfay	Bookworm: The Tortoise and the Hare Storytime

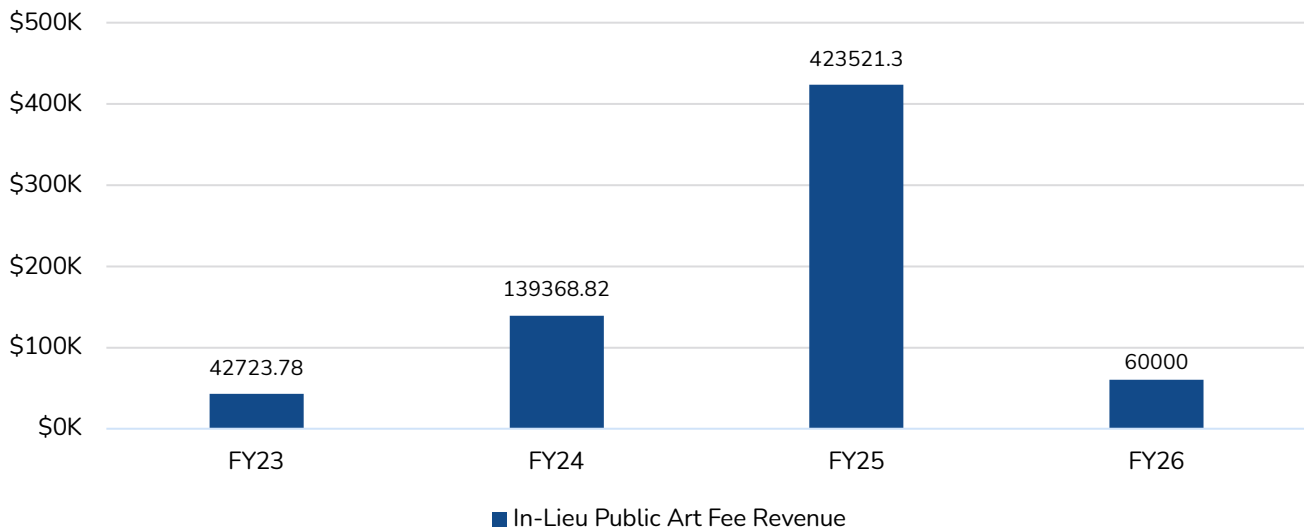
Number	Artist	Title
23	Martin Webb	The First Object He Looked Upon, That Object He Became
24	Bill Concannon	Entropy
25	Allie Bill Skelton	Transitions
26	Robert Holmes	Bolero
27	Shane Dark	Intersect in Red
28	Jacques Overhoff	Lost in the Mail
29	Lloyd LeBlanc	Flock of 17 Mallard Ducks Taking Flight
30	Philip K. Smith III	Gradient Column
31	Wowhaus	Story Vanes
32	Cork Marcheschi	Skinny Grove
33	Brad Oldham & Christy Coltrin	The Bee Effect
34	Jenny Phillips	Unfurl
35	Anthony Pearson	Untitled
36	Sirron Norris	Cartoon Creek
37	Cannon Dill	Wolf
38	Ricky Watts	Walnut Creek Rollercoaster
39	Casey Gray	Hands Free
40	Velia De Iuliis	Floral Beauty
41	David 'Hyde' Cho	Earth, Fire, Water, Wind & Sky
42	Ally McKay	Better Days
43	Trent Thompson & Trinity Center staff and participants	A Sign of Hope
44	Jen Lewin	Light up pathway (untitled)

Number	Artist	Title
45	Linda Fleming	Sparks
46	Pard Morrison	Estimated Prophet
47	Peter Forakis	The Three Graces
48	Norie Sato	In the Fold
49	Nicky Statius	Baskets
50	Joe O'Connell	Uplifting Together
51	Talley Fisher	Nature Experience
52	Barbara Grygutis	Regeneration
53	Gordon Huether	Mountain Range
54	Eric Lee	Untitled
55	Ann Gardner	Uno, Dos, Tres
56	Jerry Peart	Wicked Witch
57	Roslyn Mazzilli	Untitled (Ascension)
58	Ned Kahn	Wind Fins
59	Olivia Kuser	Shadowmaker
60	Louis Pearson	Fantasy
61	Yoshio Taylor	Echo (two pieces)
61	Yoshio Taylor	Echo (two pieces)
62	Doron Rosenthal	Geological Evolution of Mt Diablo
63	Royce	Vestiges, Fall
64	Cliff Garten	Liliales
65	Archie Held	Urban Family
66	Bruce Beasley	Intersections II
67	Richard Ellis	Family
68	Fletcher Benton	Folded Square Alphabet G

Number	Artist	Title
69	Jerome Kirk	Aris
70	Jerome Kirk	Tiltambulation
71	Dan Corson	Spiraling and Radiating Light

Program revenues are shifting in notable ways as shown in **Figure 2**. General Fund expenditures on public art were relatively steady (about \$228,000 in FY24 and \$234,000 in FY25), but in-lieu public art fee revenue grew significantly—from roughly \$43,000 in FY23 to about \$139,000 in FY24, approximately \$424,000 in FY25, and \$60,000 in FY26. This produced a growing fund balance and real opportunity for new investment. The total public art fund balance in FY26 was \$1,768,434, of which \$959,816.58 is unallocated and available for future appropriation. Maintenance and conservation of the collection are handled with annual appropriations, currently \$35,000 for the two-year budget cycle. The City plans to engage a consultant in the current year to develop a maintenance plan for the collection.

Figure 2. In-Lieu Public Art Fee Revenue, FY23–FY26



Source: Public Art Budget Actuals (Fund 159).

Stakeholders consistently praised the public art program while identifying gaps and opportunities for improvement. They noted the lack of an easily accessible map and suggested improvements to the collection’s self-guided tour. Stakeholders also expressed interest in seeing how the program can prioritize local and regional artists more deliberately. Additionally, there’s an appetite for more interactive, community-engaging, and

geographically distributed public art, including along trails and in neighborhoods beyond downtown.

Walnut Creek's Arts and Culture Assets

Beyond the City's own programs, Walnut Creek's cultural life rests on a network of nonprofit organizations and individual artists, a valuable public art collection, and a for-profit creative economy. A full cultural asset inventory and public art inventory are provided in the appendices; this section provides a characterization of each.

Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations

Many of the organizations that animate Walnut Creek's venues (particularly the Leshner Center) operate independently of the City and, in many cases, are based outside the city limits, drawing audiences and participants from across the region.

Resident and cornerstone performing arts organizations. A constellation of established performing arts organizations makes their home, in whole or in part, at the Leshner Center, such as the California Symphony, Diablo Ballet, Smuin Ballet, Chamber Music San Francisco, and Festival Opera as cornerstone producers, and the City's resident Center Repertory Company. Festival Opera, founded in Walnut Creek 35 years ago, is a professional regional opera company that has expanded since 2018 to include free park operas, a chamber series, and school outreach. The Walnut Creek Concert Band, the official band of the City (founded 1985), performs civic concerts and receives an annual City grant to offset Leshner rental costs.

Independent and rental-based producers. A broader range of organizations also rents the Leshner Center and other venues. This includes the Diablo Symphony Orchestra, Contra Costa Wind Symphony, Jazz Walnut Creek, Dance Fusion, the Ballet School Performing Arts/Fantasy Forum Actors Ensemble, Synergy Theater (an improv-based company), and Poison Apple Productions. Some renter organizations, like Poison Apple Productions, are based outside of Walnut Creek. Several organizations described the rising cost of using the Leshner Center as an increasing barrier, and many flagged a shortage of affordable rehearsal and performance space in the community.

Visual arts, galleries, and service organizations. The visual arts ecosystem includes Valley Art Gallery, the California Watercolor Association, and the Clay Arts Guild and Community Arts Foundation (both fundraising partners of Community Arts), along with newer commercial supports such as a downtown art-supply store, Diablo Valley Art Supply. Regional organizations also play an important role in supporting Walnut Creek's arts and culture community. Arts Contra Costa County (ARTSCCC), the County's official arts agency, provides

arts grants and youth programming; the Arts Education Alliance of the Greater Bay Area connects school districts with community arts partners across nine counties; and Art of the African Diaspora supports approximately 200 artists each year through exhibitions and satellite shows, including events in Walnut Creek. The Walnut Creek Arts Alliance, in partnership with Walnut Creek Downtown, has been actively advancing public art and convening a monthly producer task force.

Community and heritage organizations. The ecosystem also includes community institutions such as the Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society, a volunteer organization founded in 1948 that draws over 1,000 visitors per weekend show in a city-owned facility at Larkey Park shared with the Lindsay Wildlife Museum, also a city-owned facility. These organizations broaden the definition of cultural assets and illustrate both the breadth of the City's informal cultural network and the visibility and communication gaps smaller organizations experience.

Individual artists. Walnut Creek and its surrounding communities are home to a substantial population of individual artists working across visual, performing, and design disciplines (one participant maintains a database of roughly 400 regional artists). Many described practicing in relative isolation and expressed a desire for shared studio or gathering space and clear pathways into City programs and public art opportunities. This independent creative population is a significant and underutilized civic resource.

The Public Art Collection as a Community Asset

Walnut Creek's permanent public art collection is among the most notable municipal collections in the region for a city of its size, with an appraised value of approximately \$2.5 million. It includes major works such as the Laddie John Dill installation at City Hall Plaza, valued at nearly \$1.8 million, among the most valuable single works in the region's municipal collections and a significant statement of civic commitment. In addition to its monetary value, the collection is one of the most accessible of all City arts functions, free and almost always publicly available, and residents expressed evident pride in it. As noted above, the principal asset-management questions concern public access (e.g., the need for an improved self-guided map or interpretive tools), geographic distribution beyond downtown, ongoing stewardship and maintenance of the collection, and the priority given to local and regional artists. A full existing inventory is provided in **Appendix B: Cultural Asset Inventory** work-by-work.

The Creative Economy

While the City maintains strong arts programs and nonprofit organizations and artists continue to thrive in the community, Walnut Creek is also home to a vibrant for-profit creative economy. These businesses and jobs are built around creative work, such as architecture firms, design studios, photographers, and advertising agencies.

The City supports the creative economy in more indirect ways. For example, the Mural Grant Program pays working artists to create murals on private buildings; the public art ordinance requires private developers to fund public art as part of new construction; and the Economic Development Department's ongoing coordination with the Diablo Regional Arts Association and Visit Walnut Creek seeks to use downtown's arts and culture offerings to draw visitors and businesses.

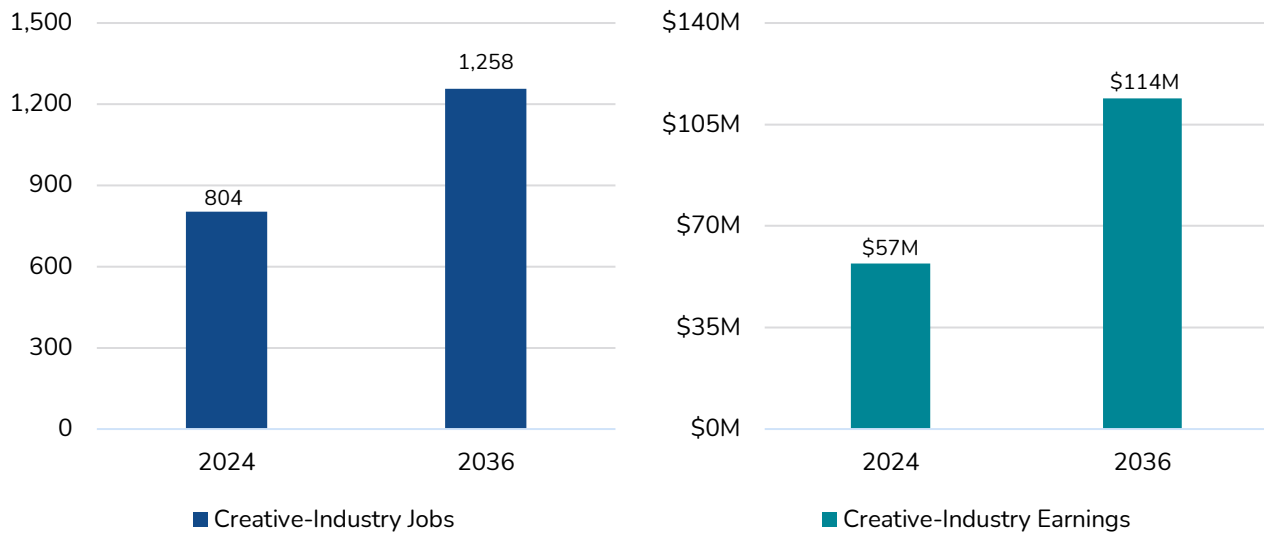


MCXT, We Well All Be, 2019. Nova Color acrylic mural paint. Photo courtesy of Shaun Roberts.

This section draws on an analysis of jobs and business data for Walnut Creek's zip codes (94595–94598) from 2004 to 2024, with projections out to 2036.⁹ This data reflects a general direction and pace of change, rather than exact counts.

Walnut Creek's creative economy lost jobs during the national recession of the late 2000s, hitting its lowest point around 2009, but rebounding since. In 2024, creative businesses in Walnut Creek supported roughly 804 jobs and about \$57 million in earnings. Creative occupations, people doing creative work across all types of employers, accounted for roughly 995 jobs, as shown in **Figure 3**. While the number of creative-sector jobs has not fully returned to 2004 levels, total earnings have surpassed them, suggesting that earnings per worker have increased even as overall employment remains lower.

⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW), and U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts. Data for ZIP codes 94595–94598, 2004–2024, with model-based projections through 2036.

Figure 3. Creative Economy, 2024 Observed vs. 2036 Projected

Note: Projections are model-based and directional.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Architecture and design represent the largest segment of Walnut Creek’s creative economy, with both the highest number of jobs and the highest earnings. Architects earn about \$154,000 per year on average, and architectural and civil drafters earn approximately \$102,000. Other notable segments include commercial creative services, such as advertising, commercial photography, screen printing, and public relations; a small group of cultural and information institutions, such as museums and libraries; and a fast-growing private arts-education sector, which has quadrupled in size since 2004.

Looking ahead, projections through 2036 indicate continued growth in Walnut Creek’s creative economy, reaching approximately 1,258 jobs and \$114 million in earnings, as shown in **Figure 3**. This represents an estimated annual employment growth rate of approximately 3.8%, while total earnings are projected to nearly double. Growth is expected to be concentrated in four areas: architecture and design; commercial creative and marketing services; creative education and workforce training; and cultural and heritage institutions that contribute to tourism and quality of life. These areas may provide opportunities for the City to support the continued growth of the creative economy through its economic development efforts.

Economic development staff noted that Walnut Creek's high cost of doing business has historically discouraged broader creative economy growth and that workforce development is typically handled at the County level rather than by the City. They also noted that while the arts clearly help bring people downtown, the City has not conducted a formal economic impact study of this for-profit creative economy specifically. This is a separate discussion from

the nonprofit arts sector, where Walnut Creek has participated in the National Arts & Economic Prosperity study since 1994. The most recent Prosperity study found that nonprofit arts and culture activity generated \$36.1 million in economic activity in the city in 2022.

Conclusion

Walnut Creek's arts and culture system rests on a unique foundation of more than six decades of sustained municipal investment, a set of regionally and nationally recognized City-run programs, and a broad, engaged nonprofit and artist community that has developed around them. This cultural ecosystem also includes the places and activities that support everyday community life, including individual artists and creative practitioners, galleries, studios, performance venues, and event spaces. This Existing Conditions Report illustrates how these elements form the City's strong cultural foundation while also acknowledging that the system is experiencing growing pressures that are testing the capacity of its current model. Space is increasingly limited as the city is mostly built out, key facilities require capital reinvestment, and arts and culture organizations face ongoing financial pressures.

These conditions shape the opportunities, challenges, and choices ahead for the GPU. The issues and opportunities identified in the ECR are not independent problems but interconnected aspects of a single underlying question: how can Walnut Creek sustain and deepen the cultural life that has long distinguished the city as its community continues to change? This includes considering how land use and development patterns, space availability, supporting infrastructure, and the broader mix of public and privately operated spaces may support the community's everyday cultural life. The GPU provides an opportunity to consider how the City can build on its longstanding commitment to arts and culture, update the policy tools that support it, and establish clear priorities and metrics of success for the next chapter of the City's cultural life.

Appendix A: Terms and Definitions

The following terms recur throughout this report. They are defined here for shared reference, particularly for readers, commissioners, and community members who may be new to arts-and-culture planning vocabulary or to Walnut Creek’s specific institutional arrangements.

Term	Definition
Arts + Recreation	The City department that administers Walnut Creek’s arts and cultural functions.
Cost-recovery/semi-enterprise fund	A budgeting approach under which a facility or program (such as the Lesher Center) is expected to recover a defined share of its operating costs through earned revenue rather than relying solely on the General Fund.
Creative economy	The portion of the economy made up of creative industries (firms) and creative occupations (jobs across all industries), spanning design, media, performing, and visual arts, and cultural institutions.
Creative industries, or creative occupations	Two complementary ways of measuring the creative economy: by firms classified in creative sectors, and by people in creative jobs regardless of their employer’s industry.
Cultural asset	Any organization, venue, program, collection, or individual that contributes to the community’s cultural life—including nonprofits, artists, heritage groups, and creative businesses.
Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA)	The City’s strongest arts partner; a nonprofit coproducer and fundraiser based at the Lesher Center for the Arts.
In-lieu public art fee, or in-lieu fund	Payment made into a dedicated City fund when a qualifying project does not install public art on site; the accumulated balance can be invested in public art elsewhere.

Term	Definition
Location quotient	A measure comparing the concentration of an industry or occupation locally against a larger benchmark; noted in this report as not available in the current creative economy data.
LORT (League of Resident Theatres)	The national association of nonprofit professional regional theaters; Center REP operates under a LORT D agreement with Actors Equity Association, a category reflecting budget and contract scale.
Measure O	A voter-approved half-cent sales tax (2022) projected to generate \$12–15 million annually for a decade, funding community facilities including the new Heather Farm community center.
Percent-for-art ordinance	A requirement that major City and private construction projects dedicate one percent of construction cost to public art or pay an equivalent amount into the In-Lieu Public Art Fund.
Placemaking	The practice of shaping public spaces, often through arts and culture, to strengthen community identity, vitality, and economic activity.
Public art zones	Geographically defined areas established by ordinance within which public art requirements and priorities apply.
Service delivery vs. ecosystem support	A distinction used in this report between providing arts programs directly to residents (service delivery) and enabling the independent producers, companies, and artists who make up the wider cultural sector (ecosystem support).

Appendix B: Cultural Asset Inventory

The following organizations and groups are identified by the project team as key arts and culture assets and stakeholders through City and IRS lists. Note that there are likely to be more organizations and groups in and near Walnut Creek not on these lists that are part of the cultural ecosystem.

Organization	Relationship
Art of the African Diaspora	Regional artist-support organization
Arts Contra Costa County (ARTSCCC)	Countywide arts agency
Arts Education Alliance of the Greater Bay Area	Regional arts education hub
Ballet School Performing Arts and Fantasy Forum Actors Ensemble	Lesher Center rental clients; downtown businesses. Dance school and performing arts company
Bedford Docent Board and Bedford Guild	Bedford Gallery volunteers
California Symphony	Cornerstone producer at Lesher Center; professional orchestra
California Watercolor Association	Walnut Creek nonprofit; artist association
Chamber Music San Francisco	Cornerstone producer at Lesher Center; chamber music series
Clay Arts Guild	Community Arts fundraising partner
Community Arts Foundation	Community Arts fundraising partner
Contra Costa Wind Symphony	Lesher Center rental client; community symphonic band
Dance Fusion Co.	Lesher Center rental client; dance company
Diablo Ballet	Cornerstone producer at Lesher Center; professional ballet company
Diablo Regional Arts Association (DRAA)	Lesher Center fundraising partner and co-producer

Diablo Symphony Orchestra	Lesher Center rental client; community orchestra
Festival Opera	Cornerstone producer at Lesher Center; regional opera company
Jazz Walnut Creek	Lesher Center rental client; jazz series
Lesher Foundation	Lesher Center funder; Newsmakers Speaker Series producer; grants and scholarships
Lindsay Wildlife Museum	Located in Larkey Park; natural-history museum
Poison Apple Productions	Lesher Center rental client; youth/community theater
Smuin Ballet	Cornerstone producer at Lesher Center; professional ballet company
Synergy Theater	Lesher Center rental client; improv company
Valley Art Gallery	Walnut Creek–based art gallery
Walnut Creek Arts Alliance	Advocacy; public art; producer task force
Walnut Creek Chamber and Visit Walnut Creek	Tourism and business partners
Walnut Creek Concert Band	Lesher Center rental client; official band of the City
Walnut Creek Downtown	Downtown business improvement district (BID)
Walnut Creek Model Railroad Society	City-owned facility; community heritage organization

Source: City of Walnut Creek, 2026