



IN OUR VIEW

Editorial: Counting on economic power of creativity

Edmonds is the first city in a state program to establish a district to promote creative businesses.

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By The Herald Editorial Board

Edmonds Mayor Dave Earling likes to say, regardless of the weather, that it's "82 and sunny in Edmonds."

The hyperbole is excused, coming from a city official with a sunny disposition — especially on the first day of a gray Northwest winter — but the mayor has a new boast that is no exaggeration: Edmonds has been named as home to the state's first certified creative district, a program launched by the Legislature in 2017 that intends to assist communities throughout the state strengthen their local economies through an emphasis on the arts and cultural activities.

More than drawing boundaries and posting signs that identify the district, the effort is seen as a way to encourage job growth, tourism, the tax base and the livability of Edmonds and other communities, inspired by similar programs in Colorado and Louisiana.

Edmonds is a fitting choice for the new program for a few reasons.

First, as Earling notes, Edmonds has little else on which to rely economically. It doesn't have the retail engines of a mall or big-box stores that Lynnwood relies on. Nor does it have the aerospace and manufacturing base that Everett enjoys. What it does have is an active downtown and a thriving community of arts and creative organizations and businesses.

Second, it's been working on just such an effort — including development of a five-year plan — long before the state launched its Certified Creative District program. Prior to its designation, the city began identifying goals, objectives and strategies, with an Arts Summit in 2013 and a 2017 study of the economic impact of arts and culture for the city. As well, its Community Cultural Plan, an effort dating to the 1990s, was updated in 2014.

And Edmonds already has a strong and diverse arts and cultural base that includes: performance spaces such as the Edmonds Center for the Arts; museums including its history museum and the Cascadia Art Museum; the Cascade Symphony and Driftwood Players; numerous restaurants, breweries, distilleries, cafes and specialty food markets; and creative businesses including photographers, jewelers, architects, gardeners, graphic designers, software developers, publishers, travel businesses and more.

Edmonds' emphasis on its creative economy, Earling said, already is paying off, especially for city coffers. The city's retail tax receipts were about \$5.3 million in 2013, is projected to bring in \$8.3 million for 2018. The creative sector accounts for about \$50 million of the city's economy and several hundred direct and in-direct jobs, said Patrick Doherty, director of Edmonds Economic Development and Community Services, who with the city's Arts and Cultural Program manager, Frances Chapin, is leading the creative district program.

That's growth that Edmonds wants to continue, Chapin said, by showcasing Edmonds as supportive to creative businesses in a way that attracts and retains those businesses.

One project that Edmonds has already started planning for is creation of its Fourth Avenue Cultural Corridor, which would promote creative development along the downtown street between Main Street and the Edmonds Center for the Arts.

With the honor of being selected for the state's first Certified Creative District comes the responsibility of helping to develop a template that can be used by other cities and communities to do similar work, as well as promote the program to other communities.

Edmonds already has talked with a few cities about the program, notably Everett, Chapin said.

Everett, like Edmonds, would seem a good fit for the program, being able to define a district that includes attractions such as the Everett Performing Arts Center and Village Theater's productions; the Schack Arts Center and the Artspace Artists Lofts apartments and studios; the Historic Everett Theatre; and creative businesses, notably Funko and its colorful collectibles.

The program isn't limited to strict district boundaries, however. Chapin said the Edmonds' effort is connecting with both the Edmonds School District and Edmonds Community College, for example. Likewise, a program in Everett could reach beyond the downtown to include creative organizations and businesses elsewhere in the city.

Small towns, too, throughout Snohomish County and the state could also benefit through the development of creative districts, Chapin said. There's particular interest in reaching out to the state's smaller and more rural communities.

Attention on economic development often focuses on the state's larger industry leaders, including Boeing, Microsoft and Amazon. Those three and others, it should be noted, have their own creative aspects. But an effort that

looks to diversify local economies — and does so through endeavors that add to each community's culture and livability — should shine on all communities.



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