

Barrio Logan Named California Cultural District

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Barrio Logan has been selected as one of California's premier state-designated cultural districts, the California Arts Council (CAC) announced today.

The Barrio Logan Cultural District joins 13 other districts that will launch the innovative new program highlighting cultural diversity and unique artistic identities within California.

A cultural district is considered a well-defined geographic area with a high concentration of cultural resources and activities. The 14 districts that comprise the program's first cohort were selected with variety in mind to meet the complex needs of a state kaleidoscopic in nature.

“I am so pleased to learn that Barrio Logan has been selected for the California Arts Council Cultural District program,” said Councilman David Alvarez of Council District 8. “The Barrio Logan community is enriched by arts and cultural resources of historic significance and this designation stands to solidify its reputation as a preeminent arts and culture hub in our City.”

The Barrio Logan Cultural District will receive the designation for a period of five years, per state legislation. The cultural districts program is designed to assist communities in leveraging state resources and grant funding in the areas of culture, creativity, and diversity.

Designation under this pilot launch of the program includes benefits such as technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges, branding materials, and promotional strategy.

The application was spearheaded by the Barrio Logan Association (BLA) and the Barrio Logan Maintenance Assessment District (MAD) in partnership with the City of San Diego and district partners Glashaus Artist Studios, and the Logan Avenue Consortium, a grassroots group dedicated to promoting arts and culture on historic Logan Avenue.

“Barrio Logan is one of the oldest and most culturally rich urban areas in San Diego,” says Josephine S. Talamantez, member of the BLA, Founder and Board Chair of the Chicano Park Museum and Cultural Center, and former Chief of Programs and Legislative Liaison at the CAC. “What makes Barrio Logan unique is that it is driven by a grassroots coalition of artists, community leaders, residents, and business owners who embody culture and are passionate about preserving it while also staying highly relevant.”

Barrio Logan has been characterized as an “emerging cultural district” but has been an unofficial arts and cultural district for decades. Chicano Park is the crown jewel of the community and an internationally celebrated destination. The 7.4-acre park came about after a 12-day occupation of the site on April 22, 1970 by Chicano students, activists, and area residents, when plans for a recreational area were nearly set aside to make way for a Highway Patrol station.

Today, over 88 historic murals grace the pillars of the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge, giving way to an outdoor open-air museum. The park — recently named a

National Historic Landmark — boasts the world’s largest collection of Chicano murals.

The park also serves as venue for a multitude of community, arts and cultural events including lowrider car shows, Aztec dance and drumming groups, and balet folklórico dance troupes, which meet regularly on the Chicano Park’s kiosk stage.

Barrio Logan as a whole has taken a nod from Chicano Park and boasts a vibrant and burgeoning artist community with a rich cultural tradition long rooted in the struggles of this working class neighborhood.

The area surrounding Chicano Park boasts a high concentration of artist collectives, galleries, eateries, and shops, the latter of which also showcase local art.

The nearby Mercado del Barrio development has become a thriving town center with offerings such as Mariscos el Pulpo, Iron Fist Brewing Co., and Mish Mash.

A stretch of Logan Ave. just east of Chicano Park has become a nucleus for the art scene in the last five years. Places like Salud, La Bodega Art Gallery, Chicano Art Gallery, Por Vida Café, Mesheeka, Border X Brewery, and La Esquina, to name a few, actively embrace and preserve the Barrio’s cultural identity.

Amidst the galleries and mural-clad businesses on Logan Ave. are other unique offerings including art classes, live-work artist studios, the eclectic Americana Tattoo Company, the Don Diego VFW, and thChrch, a thriving video production house.

The Logan Avenue Consortium unifies creative efforts here and collaborates to produce events such as the bi-monthly Barrio Art Crawl, Latin Jazz Nights at Border X, the Logan Avenue Flea Market, or La Vuelta, a weekly showing of lowriders cruising the strip.

“Barrio Logan delivers a cultural immersion you can’t experience anywhere else,” says Marissa Cassani, representative for the Barrio Logan Association and district manager for the Barrio Logan MAD. “The creative spark found here has long been ignited, but others are just finding out about it. People are thirsty for the authentic, homegrown vibe that surges in this community.”

According to Cassani, selection for the California Cultural Districts program was conducted through a multistep process, including an open call for initial letters of intent, a peer panel review, site visits for semi-finalists, and an invited finalist application. The program was highly competitive and received interest and submissions from dozens of communities across the state.

“State-level designation of Cultural Districts, with California’s diverse geography and regional variety, allowed for an entirely new and comprehensive look at our deeply valued cultural assets,” said California Arts Council Chair Donn K. Harris. “Barrio Logan’s personal and generational commitment to these assets speaks of a state deeply invested in the places and people that celebrate local traditions and creativity.”

Originating with the adoption of Assembly Bill 189 in 2015, authored by Assemblyman Richard Bloom, the Cultural Districts program aims to leverage the state’s artistic and cultural assets. The districts will celebrate the diversity of California while helping to grow and sustain authentic grassroots arts and cultural opportunities, increasing the visibility of local artists, and promoting socioeconomic and ethnic diversity. Districts will also play a role in tackling issues of artist displacement.

Barrio Logan Cultural District and 13 other pilot districts, including an additional two in San Diego County—Balboa Park Cultural District and Oceanside Cultural District—will offer feedback to the Council to ensure the subsequent launch of the full program will be supportive, accessible, and appropriate for all types of cultural centers.

The pilot cohort program will run until 2019, after which additional new districts will be eligible to apply for a state designation through the finalized certification process.

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