



the San Jose Brain Trust

September 16, 2010

There are three factors that make cities work:

**Quality of Talent**

**Quality of Place**

**Quality of Opportunity**

And without leadership, none of these can be realized.



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## Introduction

On September 16, 2010, CEOs for Cities, the City of San Jose and 1stACT Silicon Valley convened the San Jose Brain Trust, a cross-sector group of 40-50 urban leaders who engaged in a robust discussion about the role of art and design in creating the next generation of great American cities. The Brain Trust included local leaders as well as artists, designers and curators visiting San Jose for the 01SJ Biennial.

After opening remarks by Carol Coletta, President & CEO of CEOs for Cities, the group was asked to answer three questions designed to tease out the key barriers, assets and opportunities for San Jose to become a place where beauty is always present.

1. What would have to change in San Jose to make it possible for art, good design and nature to be always present?
2. What are the things that demonstrate progress toward this ambition that we can build on?
3. What are the three most important actions we need to take as a city?

Results are presented in this report.

The San Jose Brain Trust is a program of the US Initiative, a civic movement to imagine a new kind of future for urban life in America. The US Initiative was launched in 2010 by CEOs for Cities with support from The Rockefeller Foundation and advances the work of the CEOs for Cities network of corporations, universities, foundations and cultural institutions with a comprehensive public engagement campaign.

Outcomes of the Miami Brain Trust will be compiled and put to use in national publications related to the project, including a book to be published by The Rockefeller Foundation.



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**Our ambition is to make beauty, in the form of art,  
good design and nature, always present.**



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## **If this ambition were realized in San Jose, what would have to change in our city to make it possible?**

Vision: Short-term thinking and low expectations have prevented San Jose from forming a concept to rally around. Citizens don't ask for good design because they don't expect it. An underlying lack of regional self-confidence or models and programs that encourage citizens to imagine/envision the future means starting from scratch. San Jose needs to work through the "art is a luxury" attitude in order to understand beauty in contemporary forms and the value of making aesthetic investments.

Communication: If beauty is to be a pervasive asset, there needs to be more outreach to people making decisions and public recognition of its value. The stories of small changes making big impacts are not being told. Conversations about controversial art encourage openness, which leads to beauty. Regional audiences don't think of San Jose.

Private Sector: Silicon Valley companies are not engaged locally or investing in communities, especially with respect to great design and beauty. The burden falls on the public sector to initiate; there is no sense of local obligation, advocacy or proactive participation by the private sector. The entrepreneurial culture limits long-term investment; it is unclear how long companies will even exist. Large companies are focused regionally on San Francisco (ZER01 is an exception) and increasingly big company philanthropy is going international.

Public Sector: Is there political will to make aesthetics a priority? San Jose doesn't have a "Chief Urban Designer" whose job is to lead the city's commitment to design. The public sector can change the culture of San Jose by making investment (broadly defined) easy; eliminating regulations, policy restrictions and red tape; and providing the leadership required to make art, good design and nature available to every citizen every day. The nature of government needs to be more inclusive (engaging citizens in zoning decisions and design) and experimental (e.g. signs).



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Land Use Patterns: Downtown San Jose doesn't feel like the 10th largest city because its geographic distribution is very spread out and there is no central destination. It lacks a street level retail experience for pedestrians, thereby eliminating incentives to walk or use public transportation. Redevelopment discussions are conducted in isolation and made on a block-by-block basis rather than with the whole city or center city vitality in mind. As such, there are pockets of activity that don't converge. Zoning changes need to be made to promote a connected, walkable downtown core.

Local Culture: San Jose has predominantly a commercial and suburban culture with a deep-rooted philosophy of economics and function over aesthetics and collaboration. The top-down hierarchical approach makes goal of beauty tough to achieve because the process is what creates the goal. An organic approach is needed, but San Jose is too expensive for grass roots organizations to take root. The student population has not been engaged and the local audience is not in touch with offerings.



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## What are the things that demonstrate progress toward this ambition that we can build on?

Public and Non-Profit Sectors: Nearly every participant group pointed to cross-sector collaboration at the city level between the City, 1stACT, the Arts Commission and the Office of Cultural Affairs as being an asset that moves different groups in similar directions toward innovation. Also cited was a city program to help artists become more business savvy.

Public art, public sector development and other city investments help spur additional economic development (e.g. 2040 plan, ZER01, San Jose State library). Local arts organizations and the local hockey team were also named as assets.

Private Sector: The Silicon Valley brand is a powerful brand that can be leveraged. The most creative software companies are based in San Jose and represent an untapped resource; they haven't yet realized the value of beauty or engaged in supporting public initiatives outside of their respective campuses.

Natural Environment: Every table cited the clean natural environment as chief among San Jose's assets. Examples included: climate and weather, proximity of mountains, Guadalupe Run Park and Garden (green open space), outdoor living/cafe culture, creeks, hills, trails system and parks.

Built Environment: San Jose has a youthfulness about its built environment; there is no embedded old guard or buildings that can't be touched. This enables risk-taking. Existing architecturally significant buildings are relatively recent, including the MLK Library connection between the state and city. Specific examples of assets in the built environment included: the SOFA District, Alviso, the North 1st land plan, Santana Row and the downtown infrastructure. Flexibility that allows for architectural diversity should be extended to opportunities that enhance the 'spacial experience.'



Cultural Expressions: San Jose boasts bold public art program with strategic investments (e.g. airport, ZER01), festivals and events (e.g. Cinequest, jazz fest, ZER01) and museums. The public sentiment tends to agree that cultural investments are part of creating a great city.

People: San Jose citizens were described as: creative, diverse, happy, interested in public discussions, willing to have conversations and exchange information, talented, freethinking, educated, appreciative of different cultures (open) and respectful.



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**What are the three most important actions we need to take as a community?**



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- 1. The public sector should set the priority that the arts make a difference.** This will create the financial and policy supports, as well as the public/private partnerships required to accomplish civic beautification projects. An artist-in-residence at City Hall would go a long way in showing how the City values the arts and recognizes it as an important industry in San Jose. From there, the City can create compelling arguments for companies that focus on distinctiveness and “great place” creation as integral to employee retention. Goals should include making “art” an essential partner to technology through a joint forum that brokers connections and motivates Silicon Valley companies and foundations to give more locally (increase from 10% to 20% or even 50%).
- 2. San Jose needs a set of BOLD goals as well as political will and empowered networks to connect to them.** Develop the leadership that will set the community values and guiding principles that drive short- and long-term decisions related to aesthetics and design. An open discourse about beauty (what it is, why it’s important) should create the basis for these values over the long term and establish how/why we are and what we want to be. A vibrant artistic culture is not just about art; it’s both top down and bottom up and includes multi-layered experiences that occur on a regular basis. Engaging more people who are not part of the establishment could tell a new story about the future of San Jose as the vanguard of US cities. This includes younger San Jose residents. Make them disciples/evangelists. Encourage creative ideas and proposals from young and emerging artists through scholarships, grants and competitions. Leverage social media and other tools to get the word out.
- 3. Integrate acts of culture inside and outside in a coordinated way at community gathering spaces to bring beauty into everyday experiences.** This creates multiple points of access and leverages existing space downtown. Focus on the SOFA District (retail, food, art) and more mixed-use zoning that promotes walkability and activates downtown with people (people enhance the downtown experience). Use design review processes to promote good design and perhaps create a design award for San Jose. San Jose has the best weather in the world, so why not the best parks system in the world? Radically rethink the definition/management and value of parks as an urban amenity. Both Guadalupe Park and the wetlands were identified as opportunity areas.



## Ideas

## Score

1. Attract creative enterprise to the Sofa District by making continued investment	41
2. Raise the bar on internal city processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reinstate design review</li><li>• Celebrate creative thinkers/ideas</li><li>• Set and adhere to bold goals</li></ul>	35
3. Nurture pipeline of young/emerging artists and designers (ex. Artist in residence in City Hall)	29
4. Radically rethink public parks/public spaces/public center. Change the vision and the rules. The best weather in the world should equate to best outdoor spaces in the world.	28
5. San Jose ReImagined – A master vision for San Jose	26
6. Create a forum for tech businesses to share and connect with each other	19
7. Create a forum for public discourse (ex. SPUR)	14
8. Tell a new story to and with a new audience through new methods	13
9. Promote and encourage mixed-use zoning	13
10. Create and encourage an artist residence program for art + tech/social practice artists	10
11. Cultivate a vibrant artistic culture, both top down and bottom up	8
12. Educate large companies on where dollars go. Increase local corporate foundation giving from 10% to 50%. Make strategic giving local.	7
13. Integrate 'acts of culture' inside and outside in a coordinated way at community gathering spaces and points of access.	6
14. Engage city officials in more strategic conversations with the private sector more frequently (e.g. Mayor and city council working groups).	5
15. Leverage partial blind donations/investments as platforms to invest in education, housing connecting technology and arts.	2
16. Leverage bold goals of the 2040 Cultural Plan to create leadership constituency.	
17. Develop audience paths to San Jose both locally and regionally.	1
18. Nurture acceptance and support for arts.	0
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**Are you with  ?**

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