The Short North Arts District, which is centered on High Street, consists of 14 blocks north of downtown Columbus just south of the Ohio State University campus. Once home to neglected buildings, boarded-up windows, and few businesses—and visited frequently by the police—the area once known as the “Near Northside” became known as “Short North” after the Columbus police gave the area that moniker for being just short of the northern boundary of the downtown precinct. Short North underwent a makeover when local artists, historic preservationists, and small businesses began to transform the area into an arts district in the 1980s.

In 1983, the Short North Business Association was founded to access funding and develop the area into a thriving community. One year later, a group of area gallery owners created the Gallery Hop, a monthly event to showcase new art exhibits. That move brought an influx of visitors, residents, and businesses to the area.
By the late 1980s, a group of local residents created a satirical and countercultural annual July Fourth event now known as the Doo Dah Parade. Thirty years later, programming continues and consists of many events concentrated on or near High Street, including the street concert and fashion show "HighBall Halloween"; a weekend-long concert titled the “Community Festival,” which features local bands; and the Stonewall Columbus Pride Parade.

In 1999, the Short North Special Improvement District (SID) was created by community leaders to enhance the safety, cleanliness, and beauty of the Short North Arts District. The organization is funded through the collection of property assessments from district businesses, and that funding enables the organization to provide services and public improvements.

In 2012, the Short North Business Association merged with the Short North SID to form the Short North Alliance (SNA), which is contracted annually by the SID. The SNA works to continue the Short North Arts District's development as a vibrant, creative, and inclusive community and arts destination while maintaining the area's position as "the art and soul of Columbus." To accomplish these goals, the SNA has continued to market the area and to serve property and business owners while maintaining the management and scheduling of events.

As programming and an organizational structure have come together, the Short North Arts District's community health and social connectedness have greatly improved. Today, the Gallery Hop includes restaurants, galleries, and shops, and it attracts more than 25,000 attendees a year. More than 30,000 people participate in HighBall, an estimated 80,000 attend the Community Festival, about 500,000 spectators watch the Pride Parade, and the Doo Dah Parade has become locally renowned. Through the SID, Columbus's tradition of illuminated arches was restored with the installation of 17 steel arches that create an identity for the district.

Those improvements have gained much national attention: the Short North Arts District has been recognized by the New York Times, USA Today, Fox News, and various other media outlets. Moreover, 34 new businesses opened in 2015, and 2.5 million people visited the community the same year. By bringing a variety of groups together, the Short North Arts District has become a more vibrant and livable community.