

## **Make. Do. Space for Creative Endeavors.**

### **Importance of the Creative Economy**

A growing body of research suggests that arts, culture and creative activity, once dismissed as “frills” or “niceties,” are, in fact, essential to economic success and community prosperity. Cultural amenities and the ability to participate in creative endeavors, help attract and retain skilled workers. Even in the middle of a severe recession, Wisconsin manufacturers report ‘finding skilled labor’ as the single biggest obstacle to their expansion and growth.

### **The Creative Sector in Dane County**

Dane County enjoys many of the features that support what Richard Florida calls “the Creative Class.” Several studies have shown the significant economic contribution to the Dane County economy made by large nonprofit cultural institutions, like the Overture Center or the University of Wisconsin cultural offerings. Such studies drastically underestimate the role arts and culture play in Dane County’s economy and community, since they do not include the contributions of the region’s thousands of individual full-time and part-time artists, small galleries, local music, theater and dance scenes, artist leagues, lectures, or craft guilds. All of those activities in turn create multiplier effects of their own, including sales of artistic materials, work for editors, set designers and lighting technicians, among others. Finally the presence of a talented, creative population provides a natural pool for industries such as software and web design, graphic illustration, marketing, publishing and education.

Despite its natural advantages, and institutional support, Dane County and its communities could do much more to support its “creative class.” In 2010, the City of Madison surveyed 240 artists and creative workers, as part of the *City of Madison Cultural Plan*. Respondents

***“were most dissatisfied with the sufficiency of Affordable Space including spaces for production, studio, storage, rehearsal, administration, experimentation, growing, or display spaces, with over half (55.6%) of all respondents choosing the descriptors ‘poor’ or ‘weak.’”***

The *Madison Cultural Plan* goes on to conclude:

***“In fact, the preeminent finding of the Madison Cultural Plan 2011 is this: Madison is a community rich with creative characteristics, energy, and activity of nearly every sort, but it is bereft of an infrastructure to sustain and grow those riches and to capture their value.”***

Some Dane County communities have attempted to make public and private capital investments in such artistic workspace infrastructure, with mixed success. Projects such as the renovation of Madison’s Garver Seed Building and Stoughton’s Tobacco Warehouse failed, in part due to the enormous capital costs. Other projects, with more modest capital requirements, such as the Commonwealth Gallery in Madison, have met with better success.

### **Dane County Role**

Dane County has the regional perspective to look at economic and community development across municipal lines. Because of its broad property tax base and sales tax revenue collection,

Dane County government has a vested interest in seeking tools that promote economic activity throughout the county. Dane County Planning and Development staff have expertise in land use inventory, GIS mapping, preference surveys, land use policy development, stakeholder consensus-building, and infill planning grant program administration. The county also has other in-house expertise and resources, including the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission and University of Wisconsin Extension community development staff. Finally, Dane County's successful Institutional Food Management (IFM) program can provide a useful model for matching local producers (in this case artists) with purchasers (art patrons) and landowners to identify obstacles or needed investments to encourage a successful creative economy.

### **Commercial Real Estate in Dane County**

Compared with other similarly sized cities, the Madison metropolitan area has relatively high rents and relatively low vacancy rates for warehouse and industrial space. At the same time, areas of underused or vacant industrial space suitable for art workspace persist in some areas of the county. Many have been for sale/rent for several months. Other areas have been targeted for redevelopment and/or acquired by public entities (i.e. East Washington Avenue Corridor). There also appears to be vacant commercial/retail/office space that may be appropriate for studio space. Countywide there is untapped potential for adaptive reuse of a variety of structures, from storefronts to barns.

### **Community Planning Goals**

Whether in the land use, economic development or cultural resources section, every comprehensive plan in Dane county contains goals and objectives related to infill development, redevelopment, adaptive reuse, encouraging mixed use development, and similar strategies for revitalizing communities. Artist workspace is an excellent use that fits within all of these goals.

### **Obstacles**

Why isn't market working to match demand with supply? Throughout this project, we will be asking questions and hopefully finding answers to why the market is not meeting demand. For instance, is this simply market failure, or are there other issues at play that may be easily addressed. Possible issues include:

- 1) Price mismatch (rents too high for artists/ability to pay to low for landlords).
- 2) Liability issues – are both the artists and property owners concerned about liability? And if so, what specifically? Is there confusion over insurance costs and coverage that can be resolved with research and education?
- 3) Lack of information – Artists could use assistance in defining what they do, describing what they need (space, equipment, supplies, etc.), and would benefit from information and education for topics such as liability and insurance. The other side of the information gap is simply finding a way for those with supply (space) to find the demand (artists looking for space).
- 4) Opportunity cost is a recognized issue.
  - a) Artists/creative professionals: What if I get locked into a lease I can't afford?
  - b) Landowners/landlords: What if an opportunity for higher rent / redevelopment comes along?

- 5) Scale issues: Individual artists may require relatively small space while it may not be worth it for landlords to rent small space at low rents. One possible solution is to aggregate enough artists.

### **Project Approach/Rough Timeline**

#### Surveys (complete by end of October 2012)

Online survey technology will be used. Care will be taken to cover the entire county without duplicating work already done in Madison's Cultural Plan. First, countywide surveys of various themes from various perspectives will be conducted as listed below:

- 1) Survey of artists and creative professionals.
  - a) Build on and complement Madison Cultural Plan survey work.
  - b) Focus on specific work/production/rehearsal space needs rather than exhibition or performance venue. The survey will ask:
    - i) How much rent can you afford?
    - ii) How much space do you need?
    - iii) What kind of space do you need for your work?
    - iv) What kind of neighbors would you like to have?
    - v) Where would you like your work space to be?
    - vi) Interested in short-term or long-term lease?
- 2) Survey of landholders with commercial/industrial/community buildings.
  - a) Build on and complement 2005 and 2010 Land Use Inventory, MLS data, and other identified commercial listing service (PropertyDrive.com)
  - b) Focus on specific types of space available, asking:
    - i) How little rent are you willing to accept?
    - ii) What size of space are you willing to rent?
    - iii) What concerns do you have about types of uses or activities that occur in the building?
    - iv) What other tenants do you have?
    - v) What is your current zoning and what uses will it allow?
    - vi) Interested in short-term or long-term lease?
- 3) Survey of municipal officials. The intent of this effort is to identify needs from the local government perspective. It will also provide an opportunity to learn about, and inventory, communities' cultural assets. Surveys, interviews and review of existing municipal plans and documents will all be part of this process. We anticipate that common themes will emerge. The list below describes the survey effort in more detail.
  - a) Include city, village, town and school district staff.
  - b) Local comprehensive plans and other plans
    - i) Cultural resources
    - ii) Economic development
    - iii) Infill development
    - iv) Adaptive reuse of existing development
    - v) Commercial/industrial use
    - vi) Redevelopment
  - c) Local zoning and building codes
    - i) What kind of zoning/permits are needed for:
      - (1) Art or photography studios

- (2) Industrial welding or machining
- (3) Woodworking
- (4) Working with oil paints, lacquers, industrial solvents/adhesives, etc.
- (5) Loud noises (music, industrial, etc.)
- (6) Live/work or mixed use space
- (7) “Gallery night” receptions or public or private parties/alcohol service
- (8) Performances
- d) Use of publicly-owned facilities
  - i) Requirements for community use
  - ii) Parks, schools, garages, community centers, city hall, libraries, shelters, etc.
- e) Other local efforts to promote creative, artistic or cultural life in your community.
  - i) Fairs, festivals, parades, etc.
  - ii) Adaptive reuse/historic preservation/redevelopment/renovation programs.
  - iii) TIF and other financial programs.
  - iv) Neighborhood planning and organizational support.
  - v) Volunteer programs.
  - vi) Local Chamber of Commerce
  - vii) Local downtown district/business group

Conference / Workshop (end of 2012)

The second step, will be holding a conference/workshop. At this workshop, the following will happen:

- a) Share results of survey and other research
- b) Present preliminary recommendations
- c) Brainstorm ideas to overcome identified obstacles
- d) Provide networking opportunity for artists, landlords and municipal officials.

Final Report (complete early in 2013)

The third, and final step will be a final report. This report will:

- a) Summarize results
- b) Make policy recommendations
- c) Establish ongoing networking and collaboration opportunities

**Project Needs / County Fiscal Impact.**

We anticipate this phase of the project can be accomplished with existing staff resources in the Department of Planning and Development, with some assistance from existing staff to the Cultural Affairs Commission, the Madison Arts Commission and possibly University of Wisconsin Extension.

Depending on the recommendations that emerge from this process, additional or redirected county or municipal resources may be needed in the future for full implementation. This project will seek to identify strategic, targeted areas of public investment, as well as opportunities to leverage other public, private and nonprofit resources, to minimize taxpayer cost. If the project is successful, Dane County should benefit from an enhanced property tax base and increased sales tax revenues resulting from greater economic activity.