



REPORT TO EVANSTON CITY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

March 15, 2013

Submitted by

evanstARTs Working Group

Judy Kemp, Chair

Amina Dickerson, Project Consultant

Introduction: Arts, A Vital Ingredient of Community

"... we know from the 40,000 people [who responded to] the Knight Foundation's Gallup poll, that aesthetics and beauty and opportunities for social engagement and activities that you can do together are the top three key elements that make people love their community and artists are often at the center of those actions. So the community needs to support and love its artists. And appreciate how they make life better for everyone from little kids to senior citizens."

Joan Shigakawa, Acting Director, National Endowment for the Arts (2012)

Arts and Identity

The arts lend concrete form to our built environment, provide a bridge across cultures, shape our civic identity and convey traditions we pass on to our children. Beyond creating consciousness of our common humanity, the arts offer us unique tools to create a better world. Certainly, a seminal feature of any truly livable city is the degree to which it provides an environment that stimulates creativity and innovation, both vital ingredients of the arts. Evanston's place in this same bold tradition can be secured by building on the City's aspiration to be "a unique, livable, innovative city on the edge of Chicago."

Arts and the Economy

Investing in the arts benefits not only quality of life, but supports economic growth as well. Data from Americans for the Arts indicate that some \$135 billion dollars in economic activity can be attributed to the arts nationwideⁱ:

- \$61.1 billion (2010) in spending by nonprofit arts and cultural organizations
- 4.1 million full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs
- \$22.3 billion in total government revenue generated by these jobs

This suggests that far from being a frill, the arts are a meaningful contributor to the economic fabric of communities fortunate to have vibrant arts resources. Research also documents that the arts provide a stimulus through the spending that occurs when audiences attend arts events: they pay for parking, dine at nearby cafes and restaurants, perhaps travel and need lodging. **The same national survey showed that local patrons spend, on average, some \$24.60 per person beyond admission; for nonlocal audiences, spending increases to \$39.96.** Such impact is echoed in Evanston. According to information generated by Arts Alliance Illinoisⁱⁱ, using the formula Americans for the Arts used for its 2012 *Arts & Economic Prosperity IV Study*, a sample of only 47 of Evanston's 85 nonprofit arts organizations in Evanston:

- Contributes nearly \$20 million in household income to residents
- Supports 683 FTE equivalent jobs
- Delivers \$2.64 million in state and local government revenue

Artists and arts organizations help shape our identity and provide meaningful expression for the experiences that are fundamental to our lives. In major and mid-size cities, small towns and rural communities, the arts have been embraced with increasing fervor in recognition of the unifying power they embody and their potential economic benefits. **Evanston has many strengths in the arts: if nurtured, aligned, and networked together to meet the arts needs of local residents and to attract patrons from throughout the region, Evanston should be able to capitalize on its arts resources for economic development and to satisfy its residents' appetites for the arts throughout their lives.**

The Study and its Recommendations

When several trends converged in early 2012, the City reached out to the Community Foundation and engaged leaders of the Evanston Arts Council to explore residents' perspectives on the arts. What do residents want from the arts and how do they respond to the arts in Evanston today? Could the arts be well served by creating venues in downtown Evanston that would draw larger audiences to performances and generate additional business for downtown establishments? The City named the arts one of its six target business sectors that could drive economic development in Evanston, and won a 2011 coveted NEA grant to explore the potential for a downtown arts district. Were residents enthusiastic about this approach? What were the possibilities for arts organizations in City-owned structures to expand into new spaces? At the same time, parents in D.65 were leading efforts to strengthen the arts in Evanston schools.

In 2012, the community-wide outreach project now known as *evanstARTs, creating our cultural vision*, was funded, supported by the partnership of the City and the Community Foundation. Arts consultant Amina Dickerson, assisted by cultural geographer and Evanston resident, Amanda Carlson, was engaged by ECF to conduct the community engagement process, supported by a small working group. More than 750 people, representing all wards in the city, participated in an on-line survey, public listening sessions, sector focus groups, and stakeholder interviews over a period of six months.

The charge to the Working Group was to develop a vision for the arts in Evanston and a roadmap to attain it—a “plan to plan” that was based on current opportunities and perceptions in Evanston in 2012. We are grateful to all for sharing their insights, hopes, and concerns.

This executive summary draws excerpts from the full report that will be finalized following our March 18 report to the Evanston City Council.

What Kind of Vision?

As part of the process of engagement, participants were asked to imagine a robust future for the arts in Evanston. What follows is a synthesis of many of their thoughts.

Imagine Evanston 2025: A culturally-rich community...

Looking back from 2025, a unique arts "ecosystem" has been built through sustained engagement of diverse sectors of the city, including arts organizations, associations serving artists and the field, business representatives from downtown and other commercial regions of the city, funding entities including city government, the schools and the university, city planners, entrepreneurs, civic associations and others. Working together they created a comprehensive cultural plan and a structure to guide planned arts growth. Efforts began with a focus on the downtown arts corridor and construction of facilities to house the arts in the central business district. This corridor is further animated by adjoining spaces dedicated to visual arts, film, cafes and lively gathering places for artists, families, students and visitors. The result is a flourishing downtown enlivened by a spirit of celebration and participation. The Cultural Corridor, as imagined, became a key anchor in arts and economic development, while spurring the reputation of Evanston as an arts hub throughout the North Shore.

Evanston Arts Today

“the arts are already an important component of Evanston’s economy...The pieces need to be organized and addressed, and promoted comprehensively to benefit the entire city.”

Evanston resident, 2012 evanstARTs survey

Such desires for an arts-rich environment as voiced by residents are built on a rich and promising landscape that has distinctive strengths:

- Evanston is home to ten times more artists and residents employed in arts-related work than the national average
- Evanston has a sizeable and active visual arts community and a noteworthy array of theatres
- Along the Dempster/Dodge commercial corridor, the Evanston Dance Center has quietly become an incubator for small dance companies, leading to increased opportunities for dance instruction and performances
- A significant number of musicians reside in Evanston – providing for an eclectic mix of classical, choral, contemporary and pop musical offerings and expanding efforts by training organizations including the highly-regarded and expanding Music Institute of Chicago and the small and growing Musical Offering
- The pioneering Actor’s Gymnasium has helped shape the artistic aesthetic of local companies, by training actors for a variety of other theatre organizations
- Evanston parents and schools have supported Young Evanston Artists (YEA!) for more than 25 years, and today Evanston is one of four "Arts at the Core" communities selected by Arts Alliance Illinois
- Rich craft traditions in jewelry, quilts, ceramics thrive in home studios and garages alongside active informal arts activity that includes praise dance, gospel choirs and ethnic dance traditions of Mexico and Brazil

Yet, while many of the city’s artists find Evanston a comfortable place to live and raise their children, they do not find their employment here. Rather, they find it in Chicago.

Calls for Investment

The 750 evanstARTs participants (roughly 1% of Evanston's population) expressed their strong desire for the arts to be a core community asset in Evanston. Patrons, seniors and youth, parents and business leaders, and especially artists, pointed to the strong foundation that already exists in Evanston. Participants identified four key areas that could elevate the arts scene in Evanston from “good” to remarkable: Infrastructure, Arts education, Patronage and Support. The community voiced a strong yearning for something in the arts that expresses "Evanston" and also expressed faith in the city's potential to foster growth in a manner that generates increased recognition and support. The vision of attracting visitors from beyond Evanston’s borders is itself a promising development, one that is aligned with the City’s economic development goals, with its most livable city focus, and with key features of other national models.

One chief concern raised by participants is the need for a clearly-articulated vision for what the arts can and should represent in Evanston. Artists and patrons alike were steadfast in their calls for knowledgeable and forceful leadership. And leadership should, they noted, be complemented by a responsive and effective management structure, one that would unify multiple sectors in pursuit of creative and

economic growth. These necessary elements, buttressed by a comprehensive cultural plan and coherent arts identity, are critical to elevate the city's profile among artists and arts patrons.

Among the other needs expressed by Evanstonians were:

- A cultural facility, capable of hosting multiple events, centrally located in a defined "cultural district"
- Coherent "branding" and arts identity for the city, broadly promoted
- A central clearinghouse of information on the arts and arts activity
- Live/work space for artists
- Responsive zoning and permitting
- Technical and capacity building support, including meaningful levels of grant funding
- Support for arts education, both in-school and out-of-school

Encouraging Arts Growth

In recent years, numerous efforts to bolster support for and awareness of the arts in Evanston have been mounted. The Arts and Business Committee of the Evanston Arts Council created a website, evanstonartsbuzz.com, as a central resource listing arts events and activities. The committee also created special events such as BackStage Evanston to promote local arts. Downtown Evanston has invested in studies of arts development, including the potential renovation of the Varsity Theater. This organization's members regularly provide discount coupons and other financial and in-kind support. Downtown Evanston also includes arts information in its promotional efforts and distributes arts brochures and information on arts festivals from its office.

Local financial support for the arts has actually increased since 2005 despite the fact that Arts Council grants have been sharply reduced. That budget was \$47,200 in 2005 but has dropped to slightly above \$10,000 in 2012. Since 2007, ECF's funding has increased to an average of nearly \$60,000 per year. The Foundation's arts grants are now made from 5 funds in all and in 2 grantmaking cycles. Findings in 2006 from ECF's *Advancing the Arts* study set priorities for its arts grantmaking in an area that we also identify today as a priority: grants for building operational capacity. Since 1987, ECF has awarded \$650,000 to arts organizations and projects, more than \$350,000 of this since 2007. However, we note that the decline in Arts Council awards has meant reduced support for individual artists and for funds available to arts organizations and their productions as ECF's funding generally has an "arts in community," orientation consistent with ECF's purposefully community-wide focus. Municipal funding from the City of Evanston appears to lag behind other cities, based on information from the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

Models from Around the Nation

Evanston can benefit from examples outside its border. More than 600 communities nationwide have designated cultural districts which are seen not only as vehicles to stimulate business activity, attract tourists and help revitalize neighborhoods, but also as initiatives that help to brand a city's unique cultural identity. A key ingredient to enhancing local cultural activities is recognition of the importance of strategic planning around the arts. With no single formula, our research underscored the importance of crafting plans aligned with a city's size, history and cultural assets. And while leadership and organizational structures may vary, successful ones share this characteristic: individuals, government and organizations from multiple sectors are engaged and committed to establishing a climate that encourages arts growth. Our scan of cities that share some features with Evanston offers some useful models:

- **Arlington County, VA: A Culturally-Rich Arts Community Committed to the Arts Ecosystem**

In 1990, the Arlington, Virginia, County Board (“County”) approved the Arlington County Policy for the Support of Arts Organizations and Artists (“Policy”). Arlington County formally recognized the important role that cultural activities play in fostering high quality of life by committing to the following goals:

- To create a climate within the County that is conducive to the growth and development of Arlington's artists and arts organizations through public and private support.
- To foster the development of excellence and diversity in the arts insuring that a varied program of cultural activities is available to satisfy the interests of Arlington's citizens.
- To guarantee to all artists and arts organizations an open and fair policy which assures equal access to County arts resources.
- To encourage development of a public/private partnership in support of the arts.

The county promotes itself as an economically competitive and sustainable community through an Arlington economic development entity which brings together operating groups from cultural affairs, convention and visitor service, business investment, and real estate developer to integrate the arts into the County’s overarching economic development strategies.

- **Asheville, NC: Supporting Individual Artists by Creating the Space for Artistic Practice**

Asheville, North Carolina, is one of the best examples of a city that supports its artists and crafts-people through the celebration and promotion of various cultural districts.

Beginning in the late 1980, as the area’s concentration of artists grew, so did their ability to organize. Artists assembled the River District Artists organization, and negotiated with the city government to undertake projects to support the district’s vitality. After 20 years and a five-year branding process, the River District Artists worked with the City to formalize the River Arts District’s title and undertake a marketing campaign.

Cultural Planning is Fundamental

The **evanstARTs** effort reveals a strong, latent desire among artists and the lay public for a “continuum of arts experience.” This continuum would be evidenced in high quality, artistic range and diversity of offerings. The goal is to position Evanston as a “gateway to the North Shore.” **To achieve this reputation a thorough, imaginative, and ambitious blueprint for the arts is imperative.** A host of ideas and objectives—for arts education, space utilization, collaboration and promotion, were articulated through public engagement but require refinement and prioritization. The hopes for Evanston are summed up in the draft statement of vision:

A Vision for Evanston Arts

Evanston is invested in fostering a dynamic, accessible and culturally-rich arts community. Creativity flourishes in a welcoming, collaborative environment that encourages lifelong participation in the arts by residents and visitors alike.

Vision into Action: A Roadmap for Progress

“...it’s time to end the talk and take action.”

2012 evanstARTs Interview

The next step will require more comprehensive research and vetting of the many suggestions submitted to identify viable—and fundable—strategies to achieve them. Such a plan should of course have specific timelines and metrics, and identify the entities (public/private) responsible for implementation.

This type of plan must also align with the overall economic goals of the City. In addition, it must balance the short- term challenging economic realities that Evanston now faces. As national evidence reflects, the arts can be a cornerstone for tourism, offer a positive stimulus to retail and commercial development, and play a key role in building the workforce of the future.ⁱⁱⁱ Successful models of cultural plans are available to guide this phase of development. However, it is essential that arts planning not take place in a vacuum. The creation of a cultural plan must be tailored to Evanston’s unique profile and integrated into the overall blueprint for the future of the City. The arts deserve the City’s investment, reflected, among other ways, by direct inclusion in the City budget. Such investment is critical to reach the economic development potential of Evanston’s arts assets.

Priority Actions: The best way to move Evanston forward is to pursue three top priorities:

1 City Action: Create a NEW cabinet level position to focus on arts sector and economic development

→Community sentiment favored City in supportive role, helping to convene community leaders and stakeholders and collaborating with them in forging civic leadership that advances the next phases of planning and development

→ Role calls for a skilled, knowledgeable and charismatic leader, capable of galvanizing public and private sectors into an effective coalition to advance arts development

→ Position must build relationships and internal alignment to effectively coordinate pro-arts efforts with the functions of other City departments

2 Community Action: Work in partnership with community organizations and stakeholders to drive research, planning, and implementation of the cultural vision

→ In consultation with arts, business and civic leaders, appoint a committee of high-level public/private representatives to drive the next phase of research and planning

→ Solicit initial funding from multiple sources to create first 2-3 years of budgets for planning and new initiatives

→ Ensure appropriate levels of services and facilities to support arts development, in consultation with person in new City position

→ Spearhead planning, ecosystem development, advance new arts economic initiatives with City

3 Joint Action: Create a comprehensive plan for cultural development that is aligned with and integrated into Evanston's goals

→ Conduct more extensive research on national models of civic arts management, arts district structures and related funding mechanisms for the scale and size of Evanston, a precursor to planning

→ Conduct a gap analysis on regional arts activity to identify a potential niche or unique offerings Evanston can provide

→ Determine first steps to connect arts ecosystem to the new comprehensive plan and its implementation

Key Community Recommendations*

1. Explore Creative Use of Space

2. Accelerate Efforts to Identify and Grow Financial Resources & Support

3. Build a Coherent Identity as an Arts City

4. Intentionally Nurture Artist Practice

5. Build a Stronger Partnership with a Key Collaborator: Northwestern University

6. Reposition Arts as Integral to K-12 Education

7. Establish a Seamless Arc of Arts Experiences Over a Lifetime

** Note: Specific initiatives linked to each recommendation are detailed in the full report.*

Indicators of Progress:

- Revisit and ratify arts district/arts center Decision to better reflect public sentiment.
APPROVE AN OPTION AND MOVE FORWARD WITH CAPITAL PLANNING.
- Review existing permitting and zoning policies and make recommendations to appropriate committees on changes that would advance housing and/or aid independent artist activity in the downtown district as well as other Evanston communities.

- Establish a kiosk or “awareness generator” in a prominent downtown location. This can be accomplished in partnership with Downtown Evanston, the Chamber of Commerce, the Arts Council and other groups.
- In collaboration with the Arts Council and other groups, continue the initiative evanstARTs to map locations of arts organizations and performance/exhibition sites.
- To confirm the size of the arts community and create a more reliable data base and profile of working artists, conduct a voluntary artist “census.” These are first steps in cultivating the arts ecosystem that will become essential elements of the planning process.

Suggested Next Steps

Adopt the vision and incorporate into the City’s central plan, thereby signaling to artists and community that the arts are an integral part of Evanston’s future and economic growth

Building on the composition of the evanstARTs Working Group, invite principals in the parallel arts education and facilities initiatives along with other key stakeholders and arts leaders to continue discussions focused on aligning top priorities and establishing principles and methodology to ensure a unified planning process

ⁱ *Arts & Economic Prosperity IV*ⁱⁱ, Americans for the Arts. Art Facts. 2012.

ⁱⁱ Arts Alliance Illinois, Brian Inman.... (detail)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

Working Group Members

Judy Kemp, Committee Chair, Board, Evanston Community Foundation

Judy Aiello, retired, City of Evanston, Board, Evanston Community Foundation

Ann Berkeley, Co Chair, Evanston Arts Council

Heidi Bloom, Co Chair, Evanston Arts Council

Jeff Cory, Cultural Affairs Division, City of Evanston

Joan Gunzberg, retired, Arts and Business Council, Board, Evanston Community Foundation

Sara Schastok, President and CEO, Evanston Community Foundation

Amina Dickerson, Project Consultant, Dickerson Global Advisors

Amanda Carlson, Project Advisor