

NORTHSIDE COMMUNITY - CREATIVE - CULTURAL ARTS PLAN
Spartanburg SC
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INTRODUCTION

In coordination with the HUD Choice Neighborhood Master Plan for Northside, the City of Spartanburg in association with HubCulture Inc received a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Own Town design grant to “support an arts and cultural plan for Northside, a 400-acre neighborhood undergoing redevelopment.” Collaborating with the larger community master plan team of Purpose Built Communities, Columbia Residential, JHP Architects, McMillan Pazdan Smith Architecture, Northside Development Corporation, City of Spartanburg, Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg, Spartanburg Housing Authority, The Northside Voyagers, HubBub, Wofford College, and Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Public Art Collaborative participated in design charrettes in January 2014, directed and facilitated a Cultural Arts discussion with Northside and Spartanburg residents, and in February 2014 affirmed proposals with community leadership and project planners. Each organization offered important perspectives and ideas to the arts planning process, which are described herein.

There continues to be strong commitment to the arts throughout downtown Spartanburg as evidenced by public sculpture, public parks, performance spaces, and murals. The Community-Creative-Cultural Arts Plan for Northside neither diminishes nor diffuses this momentum. The proposed Arts Plan for Northside is specifically and exclusively layered into the larger Northside Redevelopment Master Plan. It is grounded in nurturing existing social and physical assets within a catalytic framework to bring art and design into the foreground of how this community can be experienced. The Plan deemphasizes free-standing works of art and shines a klieg-light on how the arts can seamlessly be incorporated into the redevelopment.

The Plan summarizes the preferences of Northside residents for how to genuinely embed the arts in daily life and rituals. It supports authentic attributes, memory, tradition, and meaning of place via tangible and intangible connections. Its goal is to influence cohesion and answer the question, “who are we when we are here?”

PLAN OVERVIEW

The Plan proposes new strategies, organizational alignments, and short- and long-term projects and programs to support the Northside Development Corporation’s goal to create a new model for arts integration in redevelopment projects. This Arts Plan is sensitive to the complex alchemy of social and economic history, demographics, and community desires described by Northside residents as “a collective front porch.” The Plan helps to amplify the culture of place while offering innovative approaches to how the arts may be experienced and appreciated. Community qualities of aesthetics, history, culture, sociology, and economics were used to anchor the development of contemporary interpretations so as not to lose the thumbprint of Northside as it transitions into a Purpose Built Community.

There are four primary areas of arts integration : Infrastructure, Impromptu, Integral, and Invention. These four art-centric dimensions support and align with design directions identified in the larger Northside master plan. These strategic initiatives are intentionally conceived to be effective community-building attributes for current and future Northside residents as well as the broader Spartanburg population. Infrastructure, Impromptu, Integral, and Invention are structured holistically to help reestablish community cohesion; like jazz, these proposals ricochet off each other and reinforce the authentic character of Northside as remembered by

those who live there. That said, the Plan is not a fabricated or reminiscent approach to art and design; instead, it captures the love and energy of the community and brings these aspects into a revived context.

The City of Spartanburg has made substantial investments to the arts and its public spaces. This Plan extends those commitments and recommends potential organizational affiliations and programming opportunities to support interdependent creative alliances and projects. Vertical and horizontal relationships are proposed among government agencies and the private and non-profit sectors to facilitate increased organizational capacity and reciprocity.

Because the redevelopment of Northside may occur over a decade and the community is eager to more immediately see manifestations of positive change, the Plan recommends structuring visual, performing, culinary, and applied-industrial art and design proposals into short-term (1-3 years) and long-term (4-7 years) implementation schedules. The four planning priorities described below are interconnected for economic development and linked to the larger master plan that is assisting Northside with its renaissance.

THE FOUR PLANNING PRIORITIES

INFRASTRUCTURE *Northside is Understood through its Stories, Trails, and Trees*

The cultural history of Northside is evidenced in its rituals, traditions, knowledge of natural and built assets, and intrinsic manner with which the community communicates. Many decades ago, a spring served not only as the source of water for Northside, but also as a central space for community interaction. It was where the children, who are now parents and grandparents, collected water for the family, learned responsibility, and how to locate 'home.' Sometime ago, this natural resource was piped and visibly closed-off. The Northside Redevelopment Master Plan has made a priority of daylighting this historic feature, which will traverse the community along approximately 500 feet. Daylighting this natural asset, which will occur in two phases - engineering followed by landscape design - will offer significant contemplative and gathering opportunities for the neighborhood. It is in these areas that the arts can amplify the history and use of the neighborhood. Specifically, creating permanent and designed embankments along its edge will provide for communal experiences among residents. Initial exploration of this idea has been considered with textile manufacturer Milliken & Company, which is headquartered in Spartanburg SC. Among its many products, Milliken produces a flexible cement that forms to any shape when immersed in water. The new retaining walls or edges of the Creek could be designed for reclining and sitting using this material in shapes that correspond to the human back and spine.

Adjacent to the Creek are planned landscaped green spaces, a response to community desire to "decrease barriers to greenspace." These places could be visualized and developed by artists, landscape designers, and the community, recreating and replanting the trees and bushes that were once abundant throughout Northside. Micro-orchards of blackberries, pomegranates, plums, apples, dates, figs, pecans, and other fruits could be reestablished to affirm Northside as it once was, while making it a contemporary civic garden-forest for residents. To further establish connections with other master planned project elements, these designated spaces for edible plants, trees, and bushes could have a more formal relationship with the new Food Hub, which is located at the terminus of the Creek. The Food Hub, which has a commercial kitchen and an adjacent urban farm, could serve as an extension of these landscaped areas and a production facility for sale of these prepared foods.

Other Infrastructure integral to the Northside Master Plan that offers opportunities for aesthetic and artistic reinterpretation and recognition of community are playgrounds and play equipment,

residential and street lighting, bridges, bus stops, traffic calming, streetscapes, and sidewalks. Each of these elements should be designed so as to break down the psychologically perceived barriers and the physical separations between Northside and the City of Spartanburg.

IMPROMPTU *A Collective Front Porch*

The realm and raison d'être of artists is to provide visual clues reminding residents that where they live has meaning, and to inform visitors that they are in a distinct community. In Northside, this identification is found through connectivity and engagement along a street, among residents, and across the City. To increase occasions for spontaneous creativity, the Northside "Artlet" was generated as an informal and place to join with residents. Artlets are everyday places for anyone to meet, make music, read alone or with children, teach, draw, sew, contemplate, nap, and observe. They are magnets for engendering the arts and community aesthetics and increase physical, social, and artistic exchanges.

Artlets are small round spaces designed as a permanent disk approximately eight feet in diameter that supports a five foot high screen made of porch slats. The vertical screen covers approximately twenty-five percent of the base and is connected using ball-bearings so as to be able to rotate around the perimeter of the platform. The flexibility of the design provides acoustic buffering for music practice, Praise Dancing and choir rehearsal; sun-shading; and when desired, privacy from the street. These are impromptu outdoor performing venues for the community and are the street's front porch. Artlets are located throughout the neighborhood's pocket parks, medians, at selected street corners and intersections, bus stops, and public spaces to activate place.

INTEGRAL *Our Environment Shapes Our Connections and Behaviors*

The social history of Northside reflects a community whose residents functioned as extended families, supporting one another with resources, time, an ear, and advice. There were few secrets among neighbors. People shared because of collective desire for greater good. This cohesion saturated daily activity.

Tangibly learning about human relations and our interdependency - a core value of Northside past and future - could be exemplified by Four-Corner Gardens. These gardens are a highly visible identification of how we share, work cooperatively, and mature. As conceived, within street blocks of the new residential development, there are shared productive gardens where residents determine what to grow. These spaces could range from vertical bean stalks to raised potato beds to heirloom seed victory gardens. They are small and dense with an emphasis on neighbors and families tending their gardens whether the food is for sale at the Food Hub, prepared for monthly gatherings, or for trade among residents. This undertaking was enthusiastically received by charrette participants because it celebrates humanity and connection. To date, the Hub City Farmers Market, located at the Food Hub in Northside, is developing approaches to the creation of raised beds; sixteen such beds have been produced in association with Milliken employees.

Four-Corner Gardens are block-by-block manifestations of creativity. To achieve a beautiful and sustainable program, Northside could have a neighborhood Environmental Artist-in-Residence each year whose responsibility is to assist in determining what to plant and grow; collaborate with residents of all ages to design and build unique armatures, watering systems, cisterns, beds, vertical racks, and other necessary components for healthy gardens; and, work alongside the community to develop hybrids and other ways in which residents connect among one another. Alternatives and complements to a residency program include collaborations with area product manufacturers to provide and/or invent innovative tools - from rubber mats to hand-held

equipment to storage devices - that offer distinction to Northside and contribute to its contemporary reinterpretation of place.

In addition to the Gardens, the comprehensive Northside Master Plan lists five primary capital redevelopment projects : housing; education; parks, bikeways, and recreation facilities; child development center; and, urban farming. The City of Spartanburg and the Mary Black Foundation are also in the early stages of siting and funding a permanent Child Development Center in Northside, and the anticipated 2014 dedication of the new Food Hub will collectively bring renewed commitment to a sustainable and thriving neighborhood. Each project offers specific occasion to engage artists, artisans, and designers in the architecture of the buildings and landscape of the sites.

Special mention needs to be made with reference to the placement of neighborhood Gateways. Northside residents have concerns about how the neighborhood is psychologically and socially disconnected from Spartanburg. Placing iconic gateway markers at its pedestrian and vehicular entrances would intensify this sense of disconnection and further identify Northside as separate from other parts of the City. Gateways are symbols of place and indicate important physical and aesthetic transitions. It is therefore recommended that these representations of community identity be developed with modest scale and outward from the center of the neighborhood over a ten year period or be sited at major public buildings and assets within Northside. Specific examples of these opportunities include the Food Hub; the proposed Community Center and Child Development Center; at entrances to bicycle paths and greenways; and, recreation and park facilities. One entrance to Northside along Howard Street (including Mill, Millpond, and College Streets) is easily seen from downtown Spartanburg because of the four houses painted on the hill. One portal to the community could be the repurposing of three adjacent houses along this primary street to support three complementary creative enterprises. The artists-artisans-designers in residence would teach after school classes in their respective disciplines to Northside youth. Connected by a shared front porch, the houses would be labs or spaces where works are always in-progress demonstrating the resilience and ingenuity of the community.

INVENTION *The Arts are Fundamental to 21C Skills... Innovation is Applied Imagination*

Seeking to repurpose existing buildings that could make a positive contribution to the redevelopment of Northside, the design team suggests creating the Northside Artisan - Technology Development District, which could be developed in phases and anchored by an existing and unoccupied or abandoned warehouse within the community; some possible sites have plentiful parking and/or direct connections to the rail line that abuts one edge of Northside.

The proposed Artisan-Technology District is neither an arts incubator nor accelerator; it is a job training and apprenticeship hub that teaches artisan and craft skills to area youth, students of Cleveland Academy, and those seeking a second or alternative means of employment. The District in general, and the possible warehouses or repurposed buildings in particular, emphasize the applied and industrial arts, makers, and producers while providing new workforce skills. Artisan enterprises will foreground local ingenuity and creativity. This is a new twenty-first century model that demonstrates the entrepreneurial difference between getting-a-job and making-a-job for oneself, which is supported by data showing correlations between self-employment levels and community support structures. Researchers refer to these synergies as “high social capital communities.” As recently argued by two faculty at Michigan State University, artists and engineers and inventors; “hobble the arts, hobble innovation.” (<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/imagine/200902/missing-piece-in-the-economic-stimulus-hobbling-arts-hobbles-innovation>)

The axis of the District torques between new, experimental fabrications in historically relevant industries and dynamic interactions among nonprofits, private commercial enterprises, and educational institutions. More specifically, textile production in Spartanburg has both a long history and continues to provide international industrial innovation. One bay within the warehouse complex could be dedicated to production of fiber-based tableware used and sold at the new Food Hub. Another space could be dedicated to hydroponic gardening and the culinary arts as a complementary focus to urban farming and earth-based gardening elsewhere in Northside. Music and woodworking are integral to social and community history; one bay could employ 3D printing technologies to design and manufacture products ranging from instruments to baseball bats, and from fences to skateboards. A hot glass studio could produce items for local, regional, and national distribution. Creative talent to help launch this undertaking would initially be found in Spartanburg's artist and artisan populations. Currently, several arts organizations are compiling a database of area professional artists, who would be consulted about their potential professional role in the execution and management of the District.

These are the creative intersections of artistic and commercial benefit for the neighborhood. Interdisciplinary, or cross-sector art and design entrepreneurial enterprises, unite new workforce skills, traditional ingenuity, and jobs for those seeking permanent and/or part-time work. Apprenticeships and skill-based training would provide contemporarily relevant workforce talent, including hands-on experience in research and development, developing cognitive strengths, learning team building operations, fluency in computer literacy, and appreciation for objects well-made and of beauty. Over time, the District warehouses could become a go-to site for custom work and for those who seek to engage the hands and minds of a creative workforce who can produce aesthetically functional objects. In the short-term, individual material work bays would make artistic thinking and imagination real by providing hands-on understandings via fabrication and production processes, and a source of invention and pride in creativity.

CHART of ARTISTIC - SOCIAL - ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

There are short-term (ST) projects that the Plan identifies to sustain the positive momentum generated from the recent charrettes. To continue development and execution of the Arts Plan recommendations, there are long-term (LT) initiatives that can only be undertaken once additional redevelopment funding is secured. Please see attached grid.

ORGANIZATIONAL ALLIANCES and PARTNERSHIPS

The Arts Plan recognizes that organizational collaborations are more successful when goals are understood to be long-term and mutually beneficial. The Plan has therefore identified two types of affiliations : short-term project alliances and sustainable program partnerships.

In the short-term, quantified as the first three years, Northside needs to rely on the strength and arts expertise of the Arts Partnership of Greater Spartanburg, City of Spartanburg Public Works and Park and Recreation Departments, and Wofford College arts faculty and students because these larger organizations have the capacity to both pilot and manage innovative arts initiatives. Pilot projects are an excellent means to test possible longer term partnerships with both arts and non-arts organizations. To this end, it is advised to also engage area corporations with relevant interests and employees qualified to assist.

In the long-term, quantified as years four through seven, it is important for Northside to create an appropriate organizational arts infrastructure through which to express its aesthetic preferences and to possibly initiate and direct arts efforts. There are two approaches to this model. The first could be to create a three to five person Northside Arts Committee to serve as a working group under the NDC. Membership should be qualified by either practicing

professional artists, artisans, and designers or those with experience in the arts, including visiting artists-in-residence at HubBub. An alternative would be to appoint qualified arts professionals who live in Northside to join an existing arts organization that has responsibility for arts administration in the community. Developing and sustaining professional capacity is a critical component of every cultural arts organization; those representing Northside would learn valuable skills from this formal association. If the community decided to form its own Arts Committee, then it should consider an annual meeting to review the status of current goals, invite appropriate organizations to join them, identify future projects and programs.

Funding for the arts is always a critical variable in vibrant communities. Equitable arrangements need to be made for priorities between competing demands and professional staff are necessary for successful management of every arts program. It is suggested that Northside leadership begin the process of meeting with art and civic leaders to assess fit and evaluate mutual objectives while never underestimating the power of a great idea to unite unlikely partners.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Programs and agencies charged with aesthetic interventions, site specific placement of artworks, monitoring non-permissional works of art, and permitting for festivals and other public gatherings, should be structured so as to be transparent in decision-making. Their work needs to recognize the roles of the public and the art professionals in every project regardless of whether publicly or privately funded. The public always benefits when these representatives collaborate well with municipal staff and private civic leadership, and consensus in deliberations is achieved among constituent interests.

Funding to guide arts planning and redevelopment in Northside can be sourced from a variety of local, regional, and national public and private entities. A review of City ordinances and fees would reveal additional support from targeted infrastructure and capital improvement project budgets.

The creation of a zoning overlay or district requires approvals from municipal government.