


WORK SESSION

ITEM NO. 8



MEMO

DATE: April 14, 2011
TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council
FROM: Karl Eberhard, AIA 
Community Design and Redevelopment Program Manager
RE: Update: Beautification and Public Art Commission
Arts Stimulus Proposal

At a work session on April 26, 2011, Bruce Aiken, Chair of the Beautification and Public Art Commission, will provide the City Council with an update on the proposed Arts Stimulus program. The Commission and staff seek City Council feedback and direction on the ideas generated and for purposes of determining the path for moving forward.

Background/History:

At the October 5, 2010 City Council meeting, Mayor Sara Presler and artist Bruce Aiken presented an idea to the Council regarding an "Artist in Residence Program". The proposal presented was simply a sketch and the Council referred the matter to the Beautification and Public Art Commission for further exploration and for a recommendation of specific actions (or no action).

The original sketch proposal was presented as a local arts stimulus program, like a Civil Conservation Corps for Art. The program, as proposed, would have paid artists \$3,000 per month for three to six months, and might have included murals, sculptural work, and similar expressions. If there were five artists paid \$3,000 per month, the total cost would have been \$90,000 for six months. It was suggested that such an investment would have a "multiplier effect" – have more impact on the community than the municipal investment.

With this as starting point, the Beautification and Public Art Commission has discussed the idea at their regular meetings for the last five months, at their recent retreat, and with various community and arts community leaders. Among other factors, the Commission conceptually considered the idea in the context of appropriate governmental action, public benefit, demonstrated need, how broad the impact will be, the anticipated return on investment, the whole City budget, and program priorities. The results of the Commission's conceptual discussions are quite different than the original sketch and are as follows:

Key Considerations:

Realizing that the original stimulus sketch would have a short-term impact on a limited number of people, and with limited returns, the Commission discussed and determined that stimulating the arts industry could be accomplished through some immediate activity and some additional activity over the next year or so, but also identified a desire for a more long term, but more sustainable solution.

For short-term projects, the Commission discussed that the already approved Beautification in Action Grant Program, if more heavily promoted, could provide some immediate work for artists but still ensure that the community gain is realized. To facilitate this program as an arts stimulus, the Commissioners committed to, and have greatly accelerated, their personal promotion of the program.

In addition, the Commission had been working on their new five-year planning effort that already included some small projects intended to be accomplished immediately. These included updating and re-publishing the Flagstaff Public Art Map (similar to the FUTS Map), the development of a Flagstaff public art web page, and a photographic project called "Then and Now". The Then and Now project is an essay wherein new photographs would be taken at the same location as historic photographs and then mounted in a comparison format. The works could be a travelling display or a permanent display, but could also be used in a variety of City marketing materials. To accelerate these, the Commission has been leading the development of "scope of work" documents so that the work of their supporting staff has been very efficient and accomplished quickly.

Also a part of the new Public Art Five-year Plan, the Commission determined that four projects that were planned over the next year or so would really be "intermediate-term stimulus" projects. One of these is the installation of the three already planned sculptural pieces in the FUTS/Route 66 Preservation Project in East Flagstaff. The development of an East Flagstaff Gateway has been a long standing community goal recognized by the Commission. While the broader development has been a part of the Beautification Five-year Plan for some time, the Commission included the dimensional art component in the Public Art Five-year Plan. To round out the list, the Commission has again accelerated the process by surveying the community for public arts needs and opportunities. They identified a community mural opportunity on Phoenix Avenue as well as a need for a "rendezvous" sculpture in the south part of downtown. The Rendezvous Sculpture is envisioned to be a significant and formal piece, like the Gandy Dancer in north Downtown, and a landmark wherein people could meet, share time with friends, and enhance the redevelopment that took place this last summer.

While these goals are immediate and readily achievable, the Commission was also interested in a broader and sustainable, long term means to assist the arts industry. Again, looking to standing community discussions, the Commission took up the idea of developing an "arts incubator", similar to the Torpedo Factory Art Center in Alexandria, Virginia. The facility was the result of a partnership between the City and the arts community wherein the abandoned factory was converted to studio, gallery, and workshop space. Today, the



Torpedo Factory Art Center is home to over 160 professional artists who work, exhibit, and sell their art. Along with over 1,000 cooperative gallery members and some 2,000 art students, the Torpedo Factory Art Center draws artists from across the region and attracts approximately 400,000 visitors annually from around the world. These visitors spend \$15.4M in Alexandria. One study noted that visitors to the Torpedo Factory who were motivated to come to Alexandria solely for the purpose of visiting the art center numbered 163,000 or 19.9%.

The Torpedo Factory Art Center is governed by a 20-member Board of Directors and has eight staff members (38% of the budget). The City provided start-up funding and long-term project financing, as well as ongoing support that includes subsidized rent and utilities, and property tax relief. Facilities maintenance and other functions provided by the City are included as a part of the lease agreement.

Community Benefits and Considerations:

Being a part of the City's overall public art program, the benefits of the proposed short-term and intermediate-term stimulus projects fall under the established general recognition that public art enhances the overall quality of life and the community image. In addition to contributing to the economic vitality and thus the sustainability of Flagstaff, the City's Public Art Program is foundational to the City Council goal of "Diversity of arts, culture, and educational opportunities."

Without further development of the business model, it is difficult to scientifically project the benefit that an arts incubator could bring to the community. However, we know that five data points used to measure the desirability of cities include unemployment, crime, income growth, the cost of living, and artistic and cultural opportunities. Currently, Flagstaff Cultural Partners is preparing an economic impact analysis for the Flagstaff area, but this effort will not be complete for some time. In the meanwhile, we can look at some national data and studies, as well as anecdotal information.

The Americans for the Arts has prepared "Arts & Economic Prosperity III", a study of the nonprofit arts and culture industry's impact on the nation's economy. Notably not included in this study is spending by individual artists and the for-profit arts and culture sector. The study indicates that the arts industry generates nearly \$30 billion in revenue to local, state, and federal governments every year. By comparison, the three levels of government collectively spend less than \$4 billion annually to support arts and culture - a spectacular 7:1 return on investment. As cities around the world are competing to attract new businesses, as well as our brightest young professionals, international studies show that the winners will be those communities that offer an abundance of arts and culture opportunities.

Locally, First Friday Art Walk is an event example of the impact of arts attractions. While it draws approximately 3,000 visitors to seventeen registered galleries, the event also has twenty registered other businesses including retail stores, restaurants, and one hotel. It is widely believed that many unregistered galleries and businesses are notably benefitting from the event as well. Imagine this kind of impact, that of an art center, being available all day and all week instead of simply on first Friday evenings.

Should we continue to pursue the arts incubator, before the idea is finalized, we expect to be able to calibrate the potential impacts based on the pending economic impact study for Flagstaff.

Community Involvement:

As noted, the Commission has discussed these concepts with constituents within the community and at their regular public meetings, but broad outreach has not been conducted yet, primarily because it was considered premature without City Council feedback and direction on the basic ideas. That having been said, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff Cultural Partners, and the Artists Coalition of Flagstaff have expressed high levels of interest in partnering with the City in the development and operations of an arts incubator.

Financial Implications:

As noted, the final concept of an arts stimulus program was divided into short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals. The short-term and intermediate stimulus projects are a part of the Commission's new Public Art Five-year Plan and can be readily funded through the existing revenues of the Arts & Science fund and the Art in Public Places account.

The Arts & Science fund comes from 7.5% of the BBB Tax, approximately \$390,000 annually, with approximately \$350,000 currently dedicated to Flagstaff Cultural Partners to provide arts leadership in the community and to fund grants to various arts and science agencies in the Flagstaff area.

Obviously, creating an arts incubator would require a financial dedication composed of three basic parts including start-up capital, financing, and ongoing operations. The portion of this that might be sought from the City depends greatly on the development of community partnerships, grants, and the business model of the facility.