

Armory Arts District Study Group 6-9-10 Meeting Notes

In attendance: Phyllis Nathanson-Nathanson Design, Yvonne Seggerman-Executive Director of The Gamm and Armory Arts, Chance Kelly-Blackstone Pawtucket LLC, Tony Estrella-Artistic Director of The Gamm, Don Keel-Development Counsel, Leon Boghossian III-Gamm and Armory Arts board member, John Haidemenos-JMW principal, Jennifer Kilsey-Pawtucket Planning & Redevelopment, Thomas Mann-Executive Director of Pawtucket Foundation, Sam Babbitt-Armory Arts Board Chair and Gamm board member and Derek Collamati-Armory Arts Development Director

Introductions

- Chance explained his interest in Pawtucket. He was introduced to Pawtucket by Mark House, VP/Principal Scientist at Resource Controls. He and partners owns two properties between Tolman High School and the river and is trying to change from industrial to arts-related commercial use. 2 startups have approached him. **Yvonne asked Chance to put together a one page description of the properties, goals, etc. And to envision how the building is best occupied at full volume.**

1. Minutes

- Following introductions, Leon moved to accept last meeting's notes, Tony seconded and meeting notes were approved.
- Derek brought up-to-speed on current funding opportunities, including the recent letter of inquiry submission to Ford Foundation/LINC's "Space for Change" program (a two-year program with a maximum of \$100,000 in funding), a \$275,000 Save America's Treasures submission (with letters of support from Senator Whitehouse and Senator Reed- The Armory received \$250,000 in SAT funding in 2004) and a \$10,000 NEA Challenge America Fast Track Application. The Armory currently also has a \$476,000 federal appropriations request with Rep. Kennedy and Senators Reed and Whitehouse. Next capital request will be to the Kresge Foundation's new Institutional Capitalization program. Also looking into the NEA's "Our Town" program which funds the development of arts districts.

2. Boundaries

- Boundaries of the Armory Arts District discussed (Jennifer Kilsey working on a map). Broadway to the East, River to the West, Riverfront Lofts to the South, Inclusive of Berger recyclables and Classic Display to the North. Jennifer is also working on a full inventory of the properties/available space in the district.

3. Properties

- Phyllis spoke about the Nathanson's real estate across from the Armory. After five years of negotiations, they just closed on the sale of one of their properties to Chris Ladd's architectural firm. The sale will permit the development of "**The Design Exchange**" with the Nathansons retaining the first floor (possible location for retail, a coffee house etc.) Development of the Design Exchange should be finished by March of 2011. **Yvonne asked Phyllis to put together a one-page description of Design Exchange development and what the floors will look like in her "perfect world".**

- According to Chance, goal of the group should be to development a comprehensive 24-hour plan for the District's development
- Key issue: will the next mayor of Pawtucket embrace the arts as an economic driver? Can the city come up with funding?
- Phyllis noted that Morris would like to be involved in the group's work. Also recommended getting Louis Yip involved (and his partner, Sonny?).
- With the JMW School vacating the building, The Gamm is looking to strengthen its relationship with Tolman High School and other Pawtucket schools. Yvonne and Thomas plan to schedule a meeting with the new school superintendent (once announced) to expand/bolster The Gamm's educational partnerships within the city and bring him or her up to speed regarding the Armory Arts District. In Pawtucket, The Gamm currently works with JMW, Tolman, Shea, Goff, Jenks and Slater. Next year education coordinator Steve Kidd is also looking to establish partnerships with local elementary schools (Curvin, Curtis, Fallon and Varieur). Tony and John said that they would attempt to maintain the relationship between The Gamm and JMW.
- Yvonne noted that the newspaper was wrong in the amount of rent that was offered for the renewal of JMW, that the offer was \$163,000, not \$265,000 as reported in the Providence Journal. Armory Arts decided it was not of any value to try to correct this error in the press. A letter is going from the Armory board to the school committee to acknowledge the school committee vote of May 26. Thomas expressed disappointment in the move and was surprised at the one-sided handling of the public forum, given his involvement and his board's involvement over the past month.
- According to Thomas, 3 or 4 buildings within the district are becoming available. Also noted that there is a marketing initiative that is part of the 2020 plan and we **need to make the work of this group a key element**. He also mentioned the 6/22 Pawtucket Downtown Design Plan Meeting, discussing improvements to city traffic flow and linkages that will attract people to Pawtucket.
- Will need to better identify the Armory arts district (signage, banners etc.)
- Thomas recommended a 4-tier strategy for the district:
 - 1) Funding strategy- for Armory Arts and other properties
 - 2) Marketing
 - 3) Infrastructure-there are currently 3 major initiatives going on
 - 4) Land use

Remaining questions/concerns:

- How do we implement the plan?
- Other businesses are vacating: Classic Display, Mirror Image, not a good sign.
- No way to enforce vision
- Fountain Street Plan-becoming a one way (heading north)
- Laminating company currently looking into Mirror Image space, what is the building zoned for?

Next meeting scheduled for Wednesday, July 14th at 1pm.