



Ambassador Theater, 1935

AMBASSADOR THEATER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

Baltimore, Maryland

Winter 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Artspace would like to thank the residents of Forest Park and Howard Park Neighborhoods, the artists/arts organization focus group participants, and young leaders who offered their voices and insight during Artspace’s community engagement visits. This would not have been possible without the support of Mark Sissman of Healthy Neighborhoods Inc., Lawrence Cager of Creative Capital, Cheryl Goodman of Dance Baltimore, and Mayor Young along with his Department Heads and their staff. The individuals they assembled offered

invaluable insight, gracious hospitality, and important feedback throughout this listening and community conversation process. It was a pleasure to work with such a committed group. We would also like to thank our youth leadership participants: Jordin Blanding, Arena Players and Polytechnic Institute - Junior; Janiah Fields Arena Players and Polytechnic Institute - Junior; Remeirrez Johnson Baltimore School of Design-Senior, Architectural Major.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i>	3
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Artspace Baltimore Tours</i>	6
<i>Community Feedback</i>	9
<i>Artists and Arts Organization Feedback</i>	14
<i>Comments of Note</i>	16
<i>Youth Leadership Feedback</i>	18
<i>Recommendations</i>	19
<i>Next Steps</i>	20

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We’ve got to support our artists and celebrate their work, and do our part to ensure that the American creative spirit that has defined us from the very beginning will thrive for generations to come.”

President Barack Obama

In the spring of 2018 Artspace was invited to Baltimore by the Mayor and several local leaders from the surrounding neighborhoods to assess the Ambassador Theater’s potential for redevelopment into an arts and cultural community center. Later that summer the building was stabilized by the city and placed into receivership. Artspace bought the Ambassador at public auction in the spring of 2019 and has since been working with the surrounding community and artists of varying disciplines from across the city to create a vision and develop a space plan that fulfills the dreams of the community to restore the Ambassador Theater so that it can become a hub for creativity and positive energy on Liberty Heights Avenue. In August of 2019 Artspace began a series of discussions with neighborhood leaders and artists to better understand their wishes for what the Ambassador could be and to begin sharpening the focus. The findings from those discussions make up the body of this report and will serve as a guide for Artspace moving forward.

Artspace Projects is a nonprofit real estate developer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, whose mission is to create, foster, and preserve affordable and sustainable space for artists and arts organizations. Artspace currently owns and operates 52 properties around the nation. That portfolio is comprised mostly of affordable residential units that support the live/work needs of artists. However, Artspace also controls just over one-half million square feet of affordable mixed-use and stand-alone commercial properties that support creative businesses and other like-minded nonprofits.

The first step in Artspace’s development process begins with understanding how an affordable arts development advances in a community based on their own unique needs, available assets for development, local leadership willing to help advance the agenda, and financial resources to help complete a project. Artspace toured several existing cultural assets as part of the discussions held in August 2019 to better understand what already existed and to learn more about what was working and what wasn’t; two models in particular deserve more study and understanding for potential modeling – The Eubie Blake Cultural Center and The Creative Alliance.

Further neighborhood investment, supporting a cultural community, and enhancing healthy lifestyles all ranked high when the neighborhood and community leaders were polled about what their broader community goals were. Residents from the surrounding neighborhoods took the opportunity to also highlight non-arts related investments that were lacking in this part of the city that they hoped could be added during or after the development of the Ambassador is completed.

INTRODUCTION

The Mayor and the City of Baltimore in partnership with Healthy Neighborhoods, Inc. invited Artspace to partner on acquiring the Ambassador Theater on Liberty Heights Avenue in Northwest Baltimore. Artspace is a national nonprofit real estate developer of affordable space for the arts, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Artspace acquired the historic theater for \$100,001 at Baltimore City Auction (\$1 over asking price) with the vision for creating a new arts and cultural community hub in the Howard Park and Forest Park neighborhoods.

The dream to restore the Ambassador Theater has been long in the making. Early community advocacy for the adaptive reuse of the theater -- an Art Deco cultural icon -- captured the attention of the Mayor and the Commissioner of Housing and Community Development, spurring them into action. They first placed the building into receivership and stabilized it from further disrepair; and then engaged Artspace to lead the redevelopment. Artspace's goal to restore the Ambassador Theater as an arts and cultural hub is informed by the vision that community members and civic leaders established early on, in service of the Northwest Baltimore region. That vision also meets Artspace's nonprofit mission to create, foster, and preserve affordable and sustainable space for artists and arts organizations.

Artspace owns and operates more than 50 arts centers around the nation, including Northeast locations in Maryland at Mount Rainier and Silver Spring, as well as in Washington, DC. Baltimore and the Ambassador Theater acquisition was an easy "yes" for Artspace, who understands the need for affordable space amongst the region's artist communities and the potential for positive change a project like this could bring to an area of Baltimore filled with so much promise. Further, Artspace had been engaged in Baltimore previously, hired as expert consultants and advisors on artist live/work housing by the Surnda Foundation in New York City. Artspace visited Baltimore in 2006 and again in 2007 completing a report on findings for Station North. Several relationships that formed during those visits helped pave the way for many of the arts-related developments that dot Station North.

The first step in Artspace's development process begins with understanding how an affordable arts development project can move forward within the context of a community's unique needs, assets, leaders, and resources. Central to this step are the Community Engagement Visits, in which Artspace visits the community to listen, connect with local stakeholders, tour similar style properties, and share information about how these projects come together. With this approach, Artspace works to encourage community dialogue and build grassroots support for the creation of affordable space for the arts sector, in this case in the Ambassador Theater.

The Ambassador Theater Community Engagement Visits took place August 15-16 and 20-21, 2019. Artspace met stakeholders, potential funding partners, visited current community assets, hosted three community meetings, and invited area youth to join us for a focused dialogue over dinner. Artspace also administered a creative space questionnaire in order to understand what type of space



Ambassador Theater, 1956.

potential users want to rent at the Ambassador Theater. Artspace was represented by a cross-departmental team for this work including: Stacey Mickelson, Vice President -- National Advancement; Aneesha Marwah -- Project Manager, Consulting and Strategic Partnerships Department; Tio Aiken -- Vice President, Communications; and, Jeremy Staab -- Rafala Green Fellow & Project Manager, Properties. Others on the team included Lawrence Cager -- Creative Capital, LLC; and Cheryl Goodman -- Founder/Director, Dance Baltimore.

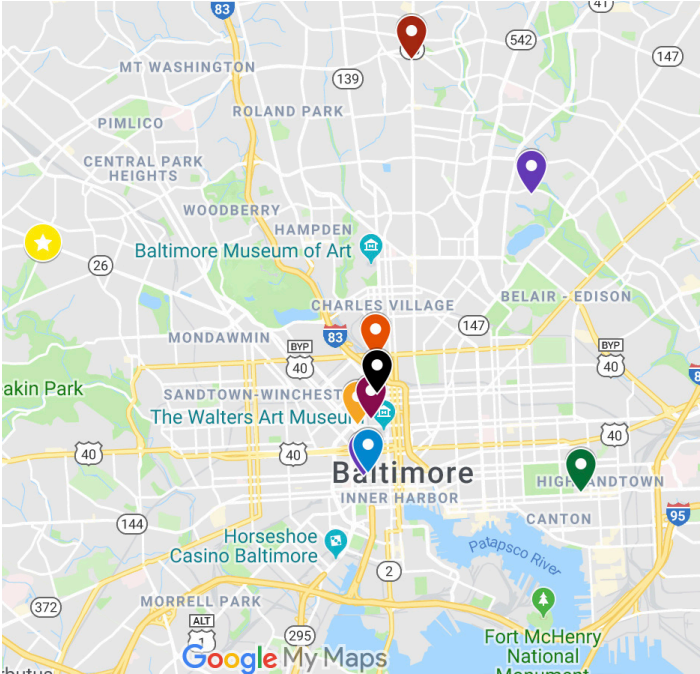
The feedback from the community meetings, results of the questionnaire, and understanding of the community result in the following Community Engagement Report. Artspace's space recommendations and next steps are detailed on pages 20-21.



Above: The Ambassador Theater today.

ARTSPACE BALTIMORE TOURS

In order to understand the landscape of current theater and community spaces in Baltimore, Artspace relied on the expertise of Cheryl Goodman, Director of Dance Baltimore to plan venue tours and conversations with artistic directors across the city. Artspace visited the following spaces:



The Senator Theatre



Carl J. Murphy Fine Arts Center | Morgan State University

The Senator Theatre
5904 York Rd.

Carl J. Murphy Fine Arts Center
Morgan State University | 2201 Argonne Dr.

Creative Alliance
3134 Eastern Ave.

Hippodrome Theater
12 N Eutaw St.

Everyman Theatre
315 W Fayette St.

Fred Lazarus IV Center
MICA | 131 W North Ave.

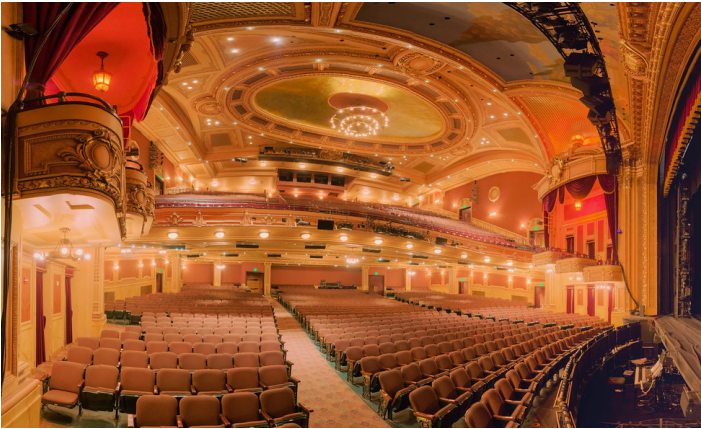
Eubie Blake Cultural Center
847 N Howard St.

Theatre Project
45 W Preston St.

Arena Players
801 McCulloh St.



Creative Alliance



Hippodrome Theater



Everyman Theatre



Fred Lazarus IV Center | MICA



Eubie Blake Cultural Center



Theatre Project



Arena Players

Each space was unique, programmed differently, catered to different constituencies, and had many lessons for Artspace to learn about how to be successful in Baltimore. Artspace gathered valuable information about various funding and operating models and the current capital campaigns happening locally around other arts and cultural facilities, and performance spaces.

Of the many factors that were mentioned, two stand out. Parking, or the lack of it, was the main point made at every venue. Parking concerns for the Ambassador were also mentioned in our focus groups and was among the first hurdles Artspace identified with city leaders when touring the site a year ago. As we move forward in planning uses for this site parking is something we will have to keep in mind. The other, a deep commitment to and connection with the community was paramount. Creative Alliance has a Community Arts Liaison position dedicated to community outreach and programming in conjunction with the community. Based on the success of that effort, we think it will be important to consider a similar role at the Ambassador.

Two spaces in particular seem to reflect the direction and spirit of what the Ambassador could be. They are the Eubie Blake Cultural Center in the Mount Vernon Neighborhood and Creative Alliance's space in the Highland North Neighborhood in East Baltimore.



Artspace toured Creative Alliance, left, and the Eubie Blake Cultural Center, right. These two spaces reflect the possibilities of the Ambassador.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Artspace, with the assistance of Lawrence Cager and Mark Sissman convened forty community leaders and neighborhood stakeholders at the Forest Park Senior Center on August 15, 2019. This was an important first conversation to have with local residents, leaders, and neighbors in the local community. Attendees served on neighborhood association boards and owned nearby businesses, and were in general excited about the prospects for a new development in the community along Liberty Heights Avenue. Artspace values the input and vision of the neighborhood residents near any of our projects - past, present, or future - as they are impacted most by the decisions we make.

Healthy Neighborhoods Inc. and Creative Capital explained to those gathered why they've engaged Artspace and the need to create an arts and cultural destination in Northwest Baltimore. Everyone was in agreement that with the newly opened ShopRite and 21st Century School: Calvin Rodwell Elementary/Middle School, the time seems right to finally reactivate the Ambassador Theater along the Liberty Heights Corridor. The Ambassador Theater closed as a movie theater in 1968 but saw new life off and on as a roller skating rink, cosmetology and beauty school, and a church. The theater has been lifeless for nearly twenty years. In 2012 the building caught fire and the interior was completely destroyed making it an eyesore along Liberty Heights Avenue.

ALIGNMENT WITH BROADER COMMUNITY GOALS

Artspace's best projects are those that make a significant difference in the communities they serve, not only immediately but over time. During community meetings, Artspace outlines the mission-driven goals that are central to every Artspace development. Participants shared their ideas about broader community goals and how a new arts facility can help accomplish them. Meeting participants identified three priority community goals from a list of twelve that could be addressed by a mixed-use arts facility. Overwhelmingly the top three were:

- **Neighborhood Investment (14 votes)**
- **Supporting a Cultural Community (13 votes)**
- **Enhancing Healthy Lifestyles (10 votes)**

Other community goals that ranked in the mid-range were **sustaining creative businesses and nonprofits, activating vacant lots, maintaining affordability, and strengthening commercial corridors**. Conversations with stakeholders and input from the community also emphasized space for youth and families as an important community goal.

Several people commented that the community is missing "a place to have fun, a space to celebrate community." Neighbors also expressed interest in seeing empty residential properties activated. Mark Sissman mentioned that this is a multi-tiered approach. Investment in the Ambassador should be viewed as the first catalyst that will attract future interest in the community's vacant residential parcels.

Baltimore Community Foundation Program Officer, Billie Malcolm, mentioned that in their 2022 Strategic Plan they've committed a minimum of \$250,000 to be spent on community investment opportunities in both Howard Park and Forest Park, recognizing they've both long been overlooked. The meeting included small group table discussions of about ten participants and an Artspace facilitator at each to more deeply understand the community's space needs, perception of the arts community, the barriers and opportunities to development, and general concerns.

What 3 complementary goals are a top priority for you?

- 
- Address Affordable Housing Needs
 - Maintaining Affordability
 - Historic Preservation
 - Activating Vacant Lots
 - Neighborhood Investment
 - Supporting a Cultural Community
 - Transit Oriented Development
 - Sustaining Creative Businesses and Nonprofits
 - Anchoring an Arts District
 - Enhancing Healthy Lifestyles
 - Promoting Tourism
 - Strengthening Commercial Corridors
 - Bridging Geographic and Cultural Communities

SPACE NEEDS

Community members were presented with the types of spaces Artspace creates in its portfolio and were asked to identify as a small group what spaces are lacking in the area in their own words. The following is a list of those responses categorized by type of space.

Commercial and Retail Space

- A coffee spot with a bakery and outdoor seating
- A daycare center
- Café
- Creative supply store
- Office supply store
- Shared office space
- Cafes or eating establishment
- Something to support preshow bites or drinks
- Restaurant space
- Full service bar
- Pre-show dinner spot
- Dog/Pet supply or grooming store
- Fitness center
- Barber Shop
- Beauty Shop
- Clinic
- Meeting Spot

Commercial and Retail Space

- Art gallery and exhibition space
- A place for art, for youth and family
- Gallery to showcase local art

Live/Work Housing

- Live/work housing for black artists

Performance Space

- A venue that provides live entertainment
- A black box theater, but one with a more professional aesthetic for both artists and the audience
- A youth and family space (concert hall, dance recitals to have semi-annual presentations)
- Multi-function performance space
- Dance space for rehearsals

Flex/Event Space

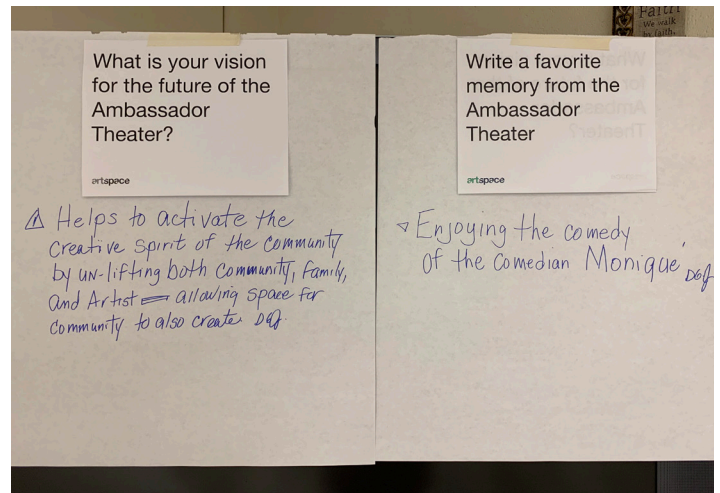
- Community meeting space
- A space for young people
- Event venue for 150 people
- Flexible space for conferences

Nonprofit Organization & Working Studios

- Recording studio to teach editing and technology associated with music/video production
- Training Center
- Social change space to serve as a model for and inspiration to other communities across Baltimore, and the nation, proving that good people in good communities can turn bad things around
- Space for community legal aid
- Dedicated space for families
- Flexible classroom (youth education/dance & exercise classes)
- Real estate education office

Exterior

- Well-lit lobby marquee sign
- Under-awning lighting to promote feelings of safety and liveliness
- Parking
- Purposeful collaborative efforts in the area and leveraging the neighboring school and talent
- Somewhere walkable
- Safe space
- Somewhere comfortable for people from all backgrounds



Community Leaders' Boards

PERCEPTION OF THE LOCAL ARTS COMMUNITY

Attendees and neighbors in small groups were asked how they perceive the local arts community in Baltimore and more specifically in Forest Park/Howard Park. In their own words, this is what Artspace transcribed.

- The artists in the community do not have a presence, they are not seen
- There are artists but the majority of them work outside of the community or receive recognition outside of the community
- There is a lack of platform, venues, space for artists to contribute to the community
- Rich but needs support (financially and systems-wise in the area)
- No spaces to cultivate arts activity and arts community
- A lot of young people (30 somethings or younger) who want their voices heard but need a platform for their art
- Creativity is bubbling over in the youth and they are looking for ways/ places to engage and express it
- "The kids are ready"
- Nowhere to go for artists
- Black arts community has been excluded
- Black Arts District on Pennsylvania Avenue a good start
- The perception is good and that things are vibrant broadly in Baltimore, not in Forest Park/Howard Park neighborhoods

OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPMENT

Artspace asked the attendees to explain the business climate in the immediate area, to help us better understand the perceived opportunities and challenges around the Ambassador Theater. The responses helped Artspace better understand what are the general concerns about this specific development as well.

Opportunities

- Corridor ready for redevelopment
- Busy street in terms of car traffic
- New ShopRite Grocery store
- 21st Century School opening right next door
- Families have the income to support new businesses
- Nearby Golf Course brings visitors
- Well-recognized public schools nearby - Forest Park High School
- Retirees with disposable income
- Increase social interaction not only in the building and on the sidewalk out front but throughout the Liberty Heights Corridor
- Hope that the Ambassador redevelopment will bring foot traffic back as a way to address crime and other negative elements that have invaded this particular commercial node (notably the gas station and the liquor store)
- Reclaim the street(s) and their community
- Feel that this is time for an arts & cultural venue in the community, just as several others have in theirs
- There is no existing platform that brings true positive attention to the Forest Park and Howard Park Neighborhoods - this could be that missing thing
- Opportunity for connectivity – this arts development can create points of connectivity throughout the city among the different community groups (churches, community associations, schools, etc.,)

Challenges

- The unsavory characters that hang out at the neighboring BP Gas Station
- Liberty Heights Ave. Commercial Corridor has been troubled
- 4G Liquors
- Pass through area for traffic
- Gentrification: Seeing what has happened in DC with gentrification in the community and is cautious about development. Strong belief that development needs to reflect the community and its needs and vision
- Parking - street parking would be infeasible for big events
- Will it be a center for performing or visual arts, how to balance that need
- A Performance Center/Theater would cause congestion in the neighborhood
- Important for it not to be just for artists but to elevate the whole community
- Be careful not to make this space too isolating and for only a few
- Lack of public transportation, especially for youth
- Financial barriers to utilizing the space
- Sustainable business model, Mrs. Grubbs of Contemporary Jazz Inc mentioned that the space will need to balance community accessibility vs. a sustainable bottom line, as the property still needs to have a way to pay the bills
- Someone suggested or if the community might be apart of the approval process in vetting the final organizations considered to lease

LOCAL SUPPORT

Artspace asked attendees if they would support these types of spaces as a visitor? patron? funder? community leader? developer? owner/operator? The following is a compilation of those responses from the small group exercise.

- Attendees definitely saw themselves as patrons and could see themselves as volunteers supporting not only their own favorite groups/activities in the space but others that may not have the kind of following that some more well known organizations in Forest Park/Howard Park might enjoy.
- If the space is non-intimidating it would be well supported; whoever runs it (Artspace or other entities in a shared role) they should strive to make it inviting to all - whether you know anything about the Ambassador and its programming or not people should feel welcome to come and explore the arts.
- If there is community alignment in the purpose of the space it will be well supported. David Caldwell, Outreach & Strategic Partnership Director for the nearby Calvin Rodwell Elementary & Middle School said it depends on the following – “do they have the community’s best interest at heart? It depends on the organization leasing / operating the space.”

ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS FEEDBACK

Artspace with the assistance of local consultant Cheryl Goodman, Director of Dance Baltimore, convened 30 individual artists in the evening of August 20 and 15 arts organizations in the afternoon on August 21. Hearing from the artist and creative community is an important early step in the Artspace process. Understanding the physical space needs of these community members helps Artspace prioritize what spaces should be included in any eventual building.

The assembled guests were given a short presentation on the types of space that Artspace creates around the country and given a short survey to fill out about their short-term and long-term space needs. Many of the artists present said they were based outside of West Baltimore and those based in West Baltimore were affiliated with Baltimore City Public Schools or the Department of Recreation.

WORDS OR PHRASES THAT DESCRIBE THE ARTS SCENE IN NORTHWEST BALTIMORE:

Sparse

Non-existent

Divided

Lack of interest

Lack of resources

Inaccessible

Absent

Underrepresentation

Inequitable access to platforms/resources

Division between formal vs informal

Artists and Arts Organizations Focus Group participants were similarly asked what they saw as the opportunities and challenges to creating space such as this in **Forest Park/Howard Park**. Below is a compilation of those responses.

Opportunities

- Magnet
- Focal point for the community
- Collaborative Curation Model
- Community Conversation
- Membership Models
- All ages spot
- A space for people of different abilities
- Space for black folk to “make it happen”
- Venue desert
- DoveCote - new coffee shop/music concept that is minority-owned and should be explored as a potential partner/tenant
- Live/work housing for families

Challenges

- Parking
- BP Gas Station Patrons/Drug Dealers
- Cost of renting space
- Lack of desire or exposure
- Properly curating the space
- Safety
- Liquor store patrons and the dynamic on the block
- Lack of foot traffic in the area
- Lack of inviting businesses
- Lack of finances
- Lack of feeling safe
- Subsequent investment in the surrounding business community
- Displacement/gentrification in the Forest Park/Howard Park communities

ARTISTS AND ARTS ORGANIZATIONS SPACE NEEDS

- Recording studio
- Performing space
- Practice space
- Rehearsal space - dance/sprung floor
- Rehearsal space - music
- Space for young people
- Small black box theater
- Technology-equipped space
- Good sound quality
- Pop-up retail space for various artists
- Outdoor space
- Family-friendly movie theater

COMMENTS OF NOTE



Community Leaders Meeting

Ivy Fox, a Baltimore native, who is a dancer with a successful career on Broadway, and has traveled the world said, ***“I love Baltimore. I’m hurt by Baltimore. We should be much further along.”***

Visual artist, Larry “Poncho” Brown said, ***“...Arts Districts have never benefited people like me.”***

Photographer Amy Davis, who has researched Baltimore’s 72 theaters and photographed them for her book, said that the Ambassador was the most beautiful art deco theater in Baltimore. She is excited about the renovation of the Ambassador, pronouncing it as, ***“iconic for the whole community.”***

Renee Sweetwine, of the Baltimore Jazz Alliance cautioned that, ***“costly space could be a detriment to jazz musicians and local musicians.”*** She urged Artspace to think about keeping the costs affordable to musicians especially if there will be studio and recording space included in the center.

Musician Rodney Kelly began a discussion about **generational differences in cultural tastes, along with the role historic segregation played in the city's cultural scene.** The West Baltimore native remembered performing at the Ambassador before it became a beauty school.

Kibibi Ajanku, founder of the Sankofa Dance Theater said she was interested in making sure that, **“the community is not marginalized, is honored, heard and responded to in an equitable fashion.”**

Visual artist Clare Elliot added that Baltimore is a city of relationships and suggested that Artspace be aware of that as they continue their research, and that establishing trust with the city's residents would be very important. **“Baltimore either punches you in the stomach or welcomes you with open arms.”**

“Develop an arts presenting organization housed in the space so that artists can be presented rather than rent the space, which can be cost prohibitive.” - Alice Howes, Dancer

Maria Broom, a local actress, storyteller, dancer, and educator at the Baltimore School for the Arts believes that, **“if you build it, they will come.”** She also added, **“I am so glad this Artspace is being developed in this northwest quadrant of the city. It will be unique and I believe very well received and attended. Bless you very much!”**

“Keep it as an Artspace not a Recreation Center. Rehearsal Spaces for different art forms is needed. Blackbox theater that can be converted into a dance studio/performance space.” - Torens Johnson, Dancer

“Baltimore is a hyper segregated city which needs revitalization. Would love to see a strong fundraising model which would ensure the theater to remain open. Money allocated by the city under ‘crime prevention’ budgets can inject money into this area of the city. This needs to be a protected budget that cannot be cut by future mayors.” - Liz Miller, Artist/Educator

YOUTH LEADERSHIP FEEDBACK

Artspace met with three young leaders in high school over dinner during our visit to Baltimore.

Those leaders were Jordin Blanding, Janiah Fields, and Remeirrez Johnson. Their insightful comments helped our team better understand the community from a young person's perspective. Jordin and Janiah are involved in the camps and classes at Arena Players and Remeirrez attends the Baltimore School of Design as a future architecture major.

All three discussed how the issues of safety are a pervasive problem in Baltimore. Fear of violence and drugs have led youth to be fearful of being outside and of gathering at different places. They mentioned Hotskates, a local skating rink where youth once gathered, that had to be shuttered due to an increase of violent incidents both inside and outside of the venue.

Artscape and AFRAM were the two major outdoor events mentioned they are comfortable attending. Arena Players was highlighted as a safe space where youth have been able to gather together and develop their creativity as well as life skills. All expressed a need for more safe spaces for positive activities for youth.

Jordin lives in the Forest Park neighborhood and shared her safety concerns by asset mapping negative influences in her community. She cited the conversion of large former mansions into group homes (for sexual offenders, or halfway homes for drug addicts) as the main contributor to her discomfort while walking around her community.

She talked about feeling unsafe, even waiting at the bus stop near her home. Although she expressed concerns around her personal safety, she weighed her experiences with other neighborhoods in West Baltimore, "the neighborhood is not too bad, but not great."

When asked where they go for movies or nights out with their friends the youth leaders mentioned the Baltimore County suburbs - either Towson, White Marsh, or Columbia as places where they would choose to hang out rather than in Baltimore City.

All three also discussed their plans for the future and a desire to leave the city, by them and their peers, citing a lack of opportunity and general access to resources that would lead to future individual economic stability. Although all three youth leaders discussed their desire to leave the city for opportunity, they mentioned feeling a sense of obligation to return home after college and "help their city be and do better".



Above: Artspace focus group facilitators in the graffiti alley at Station North.

ARTIST LIVE/WORK HOUSING

Six of the survey respondents mentioned they would be interested in live/work artist housing in the neighborhood. It is worth noting that this is potentially a part of future phases in the Forest Park/Howard Park neighborhoods.

Artspace defines live/work housing as residential space where artists can live and create in the same space. Artspace live/work units meet standard residential codes and are somewhat larger (150 to 200 square feet) than a typical dwelling unit. The units include artist-friendly design features including durable surfaces, large windows, high ceilings, wide corridors, and have community gathering spaces. They are funded primarily using the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and are for individuals and their families in the 60% of AMI range or below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A few community members mentioned interest in renting a meeting room or similar space on a flexible basis as well as business opportunities outside of the artistic field, such as training/real estate office space. A future project can include spaces beyond the arts that help bring the community into the space, depending if there are interested tenants.

Below is a list suggested by the focus group attendees that may be interested in space in the Ambassador Theater. Nearby schools Carver Tech and Augusta Fell Savage Institute were suggested as a good place to talk to youth who are in the neighborhood. Clare Elliott mentioned she has many other names and can be reached directly for further conversation.

DoveCote Coffee Shop

NLife

Bill Pedro

bmorejazz@aol.com

Ian Raskin

iraskin@gmail.com

Ron Miles

rjychickwebb@gmail.com

Laura Sligh

lsligh@mica.edu

Impact Hub

Ballet After Dark

The Living Well

Leaders of a Beautiful Struggle (LBS)

Winston Philip

winstonphilip@me.com

Young Audiences

Marshall Clarke

Access Art

Slangston Hughes

Arts Director for Dewmore Baltimore

Olo Butterfly

SPACE RECOMMENDATIONS

The feedback from the creative space questionnaire was helpful in determining what type of spaces are most needed by the community. Flexible space that can be used for rehearsals, classrooms, and meetings seems to be of the greatest interest. There is also interest in dance focused spaces for rehearsals and classes, meaning free-span space with high ceilings and a sprung floor.

More specific spaces such as a performance space or a black box theater would need to be programmed and operated by a local organization and is unfeasible for Artspace to develop without a local partner. It is worth noting that several performance artists asked that if a black box theater were to be considered then could that space be more of a “dressed-up” black box complete with amenities such as a curtain, wing space, and even a stage, if possible, to help professionalize the experience for both the performer and the audience. Many of the respondents to the questionnaire and the focus group participants mentioned the space they use currently is either available at no cost or through in-kind donations. The financial barriers associated with renting space should be considered. Several mentioned the lack of affordability in using other spaces across the city even though they are sometimes generously subsidized.

It was also mentioned by many members at the community focus group that having a cafe or restaurant with outdoor seating would be a welcome addition to the neighborhood. Anecdotally, there is currently no sit-down cafe or restaurant within a fifteen-minute drive from the Ambassador Theater. The neighbors are hungry for this type of space and have the income to support it. A space in general to gather, that is safe, and where you can meet your friends is needed in the Forest Park/Howard Park Neighborhoods. Finding a tenant that can operate this space or someone

to operate an incubator/pop-up kitchen concept could be a solution.

Other spaces that are being considered but deserve a bit more thought and financial modeling to understand if they are feasible include technology-filled rooms to support new forms of art in the areas of lighting design, film production/editing, and music-mixing. Also being considered are music practice/rehearsal rooms and even artist live/work units built on a second story inside the vast interior of the Ambassador. Conversely, this space, or some part of it, could be used as artist-in-residency space to support artists who are visiting Baltimore for short or long periods of time as part of dance, music, or theater programs across the community or even visiting faculty with Coppin or Morgan State Universities.

NEXT STEPS

Through this process Artspace was better able to understand the hopes and needs of the community that lie in the Ambassador Theater’s reuse. Artspace acknowledges that having a long-term partner, or a consortium of artistic partners, who can master lease and operate the space will be necessary for its success in the community. Because so many groups who visited with us shared that they enjoy space for free or are provided it at a deep discount we think it is worth considering a “Launch Fund” for the center to help subsidize the Ambassador during the first five to seven years of operations to remain affordable for these small and medium-sized organizations and still operate “in the black”.

There are many organizations present in Baltimore who are hoping for the success of this arts center and that can be great resources, including: Dance Baltimore, Creative Alliance, and Calvin

Rodwell Elementary/Middle School, but as of yet no clear operator and partner has been found. More time spent in Baltimore over the summer of 2020 and into 2021 will be necessary so that other potential anchor tenants can be identified. This important next step will advance alongside the efforts to further develop the space program and hone the design layout of the interior of the Ambassador.

Artspace recognizes the need to activate this underserved neighborhood of Baltimore and will continue to pursue the necessary funding to enable this development to come to fruition. In early January the Pimlico Community Development Authority (PCDA) earmarked roughly \$288,000 in Local Impact Aid for the project and in early March the Maryland General Assembly authorized \$250,000 in state bonds to advance the planning and design efforts of the Ambassador redevelopment; the state funds do require a one-to-one private funding match before it can be accessed. A larger philanthropic and fundraising plan is already in motion and it is hoped that the match will be secured before the next legislative session where Artspace hopes to return to secure a larger bond appropriation for capital improvements.

Lastly, in order to ensure the success of the Ambassador Theater project's long-term Artspace strongly recommends the addition of affordable artist live/work space, on a scale of 50 units or more, either adjacent to or nearby the Ambassador. Having artists living and working in the immediate vicinity will not only help cement the identity of the place as cultural destination in the Northwest corner of Baltimore, but it will add to the vibrancy and vitality of the Liberty Heights Corridor by adding positive pedestrian and patron activity in an area already identified by residents as needing more street safety and positive

elements generally.

In conclusion, the addition of the Ambassador Theater in Baltimore to the Artspace portfolio is a source of great pride for the organization. The task of redeveloping the Ambassador into an arts and cultural community center that is both reflective of and embraced by the local community is a task taken seriously. Artspace looks forward to the coming months and years of partnership and artistic excellence that will come in the Ambassador's "Second Act".



AMERICA'S LEADER IN ARTIST-LED COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

Artspace is a nonprofit organization that uses the tools of real estate development to create affordable places where artists can live and work. Artspace consistently develops these projects in ways that support stable, healthy communities, anchored in existing assets. Because Artspace owns each of the projects it develops, they are able to ensure that the spaces remain affordable and accessible to artists in perpetuity. With 50+ projects developed over the last three decades, Artspace has supported artist-led community transformation, representing a \$653 million investment in America's arts infrastructure. While embracing the value the arts bring to individual lives, Artspace has championed the once-radical idea that both artists living with financial hardship, and chronically underfunded arts organizations, can leverage fundamental social change. With headquarters in Minneapolis and offices in Denver, New York, Seattle, and Washington D.C., Artspace is America's leading developer of arts facilities; and has served as a consultant to hundreds of communities and arts organizations nationwide.

WWW.ARTSPACE.ORG