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Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts

Case for Support



Project Summary

Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts is a sustainable, mixed-use, community arts project in downtown Michigan City, Indiana. Now in predevelopment, the project will transform the vacant Warren Building into an affordable live/work facility containing 44 units of space for low income artists and their families, as well as ground level community arts and gallery space, in the nationally-designated Franklin Street Historic District of downtown Michigan City.

Project Funding

Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts is a \$13.7 million project. Of this sum, less than 10%, or approximately \$1 million will come from private sources. The majority of funding will come through an allocation of Low Income Housing Tax Credits via the Indiana Housing & Finance Agency, which is committed and expected to generate nearly \$9 million in private equity. Other funding will include public sources such as city funds, state funds, historic preservation funds, as well as a private mortgage on the property.

While representing a modest portion of the total budget, private philanthropic dollars are essential to make the leap from "affordable housing" to "affordable live/work spaces for artist families and creative businesses" that will include special features such as larger living spaces to accommodate art-making, common galleries, and space for community businesses and organizations.

Project Timing

The project is underway and currently in predevelopment. We are aiming for a project closing by late 2014. Construction will begin immediately after closing and last for approximately one year. Tenant lease-up will occur immediately after construction is completed; the project is expected to be fully operational by early 2016.



Project History

The Michigan City Preservation and Education Foundation, an organization whose mission is to promote public improvement projects to preserve the historic character of downtown, and the Michigan City Redevelopment Commission are the driving force behind the project, working with Artspace to plan and develop the Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts facility. There is a clear desire on the part of the Foundation and other project partners to support the growing Uptown Arts District and local arts community by providing permanently affordable space for artists. It is the belief of project partners and other cultural leaders that creating space for a community of artists will be a catalyst for continued downtown development, bring vibrancy and activity to the street, and increase the number of individuals and families living and working downtown.

Artspace has site control of the proposed project property, the iconic Warren Building at 717 Franklin Street. The six-story former office building dates from the late 1920s. Centrally located midway between the public library and the South Shore Line station, it is the tallest building in the North End. It is a substantial structure with concrete floors and posts throughout, and it has high ceilings and large windows. It is a very good candidate in terms of the physical qualities most artists tend to regard as important for live/work space. The Warren Building is in the heart of the North End and transforming it into a vibrant arts facility will complement other efforts within the North End community development plan to develop the Franklin Street corridor as an historic arts district with a "Mainstreet" theme.

Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts is led by Artspace Projects, the nation's leading nonprofit developer for the arts, in collaboration with the Michigan City Preservation and Education Foundation. Other key community partners include the Michigan City Redevelopment Commission, Michigan City Chamber of Commerce, and the City of Michigan City.

Summary of Survey Results

An artist market survey conducted in 2009 revealed a clear demand for affordable live/work artist housing in Michigan City.

Of respondents:

- > 89 artists expressed interest in relocating to a live/work project in Michigan City
- > 129 artists expressed interest in renting studio or work space
- > 40% percent of the artists interested in live/work space currently reside in Michigan City
- > 60% have never lived in Michigan City, which represents an opportunity for the City both to attract new artists to the community and to serve those who have moved away and hope to return
- > All of the project's 44 live/work units will be affordable to artist residents making 60% of the Area Median Income or less



Project Goals

1. Provide Essential Affordable Housing to the Local Arts Community

Finding and retaining affordable space is an age-old problem for artists; many artists are simply unable to rent studio/work space in addition to living space. Artspace's live/work projects make it possible for artists to function effectively and profitably as proprietors of their own small businesses. Our projects make it possible for artists to become long-term contributing residents of their neighborhoods and local economies. The Uptown Artspace Lofts will meet the local arts community's need for a central place where artists can find opportunities to live, work, and exhibit artwork.

2. Provide Affordable Space for Arts Organizations and Arts-friendly Businesses

The project will create community arts and gallery space along Franklin Street, to be used by building residents as well as other community groups. Potential uses for the ground level spaces include community art classes, art exhibitions, small performances, and gathering and event space for local organizations.

3. Help Revitalize Downtown Michigan City Through the Arts

An Artspace project in the Franklin Street Historic District of downtown Michigan City has the potential to become a local and regional arts destination, and part of an arts district cluster of cultural enterprises attracting residents and visitors. The public will be able to attend open-studio events at Artspace Uptown Artist Lofts, exhibitions, and performances. The project will be a year-round attraction that will enhance Michigan City's

reputation as a cultural community. The vibrancy that the presence of artists and arts groups bring to a given neighborhood can be harnessed as a tool of economic redevelopment. For example, two Artspace projects, the Northern Warehouse Artists' Cooperative and the Tilsner Artists' Cooperative, were the original catalysts for the renaissance of downtown St. Paul's now-thriving Lowertown neighborhood. After 22 years these two buildings continue to provide affordable space for artists and creative businesses in a neighborhood where market rate forces prevail.

4. Reuse an Abandoned Building within an Historic District

The project will convert a vacant building in the heart of the Franklin Street Historic District into a new arts facility, supporting arts-related jobs, generating new visitor traffic to the downtown area and helping expand the growing arts economy in the North End. The project will pay property taxes – although Artspace itself is a nonprofit organization our projects are not – and will employ the services of local contractors.

5. Create a Long-Term, Financially Stable and Sustainable Community Asset

Because Artspace projects are as much about trust and understanding as bricks and mortar, we are committed to substantive community engagement and capacity building. Our projects require a deep investment of organizational resources and take a minimum of 3–5 years to complete. While this may be longer than a for-profit equivalent, it is balanced by decades of impact after opening.

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Building better communities through the arts

Finding and retaining affordable space is an age-old problem for artists — painters, sculptors, dancers, and others who require an abundance of well-lit space in which to work. Many artists gravitate to old warehouses and other industrial buildings, but their very presence often acts as a catalyst, setting in motion a process of gentrification that drives rents and forces artists out. This is precisely what happened in Minneapolis' historic Warehouse District in the 1970s and led to the creation of Artpace in 1979.

Established to serve as an advocate for artists' space needs, Artpace effectively fulfilled that mission for nearly a decade. By the late 1980s, however, it was clear that the problem required a more proactive approach, and Artpace made the leap from advocate to developer. Today we own and operate more than 35 projects in 21 cities from coast to coast. Collectively, our projects provide more than two million square feet of space for artists and arts activities. Artpace is widely recognized as the nation's leading developer for the arts.

In addition to direct benefits to our host communities, Artpace has served the nation by pioneering a new model of arts-centric development. Our projects pay taxes, operate in the black, and require no on-going philanthropic support. In other words, they fundamentally challenge many assumptions about the position of the arts in our society.

By unleashing the arts to drive community revitalization goals, the Artpace model has leveraged several hundred million dollars of public investment in the arts with a significant Return on Investment that includes job creation, cultural preservation, community engagement, and safer, more livable communities.

While a breakthrough came when Artpace made the leap from advocate to developer, in many ways we have retained our roots in arts advocacy. We have worked in communities large and small in nearly every state to help civic leaders realize opportunities to build better communities through the arts.

How To Support Artpace Uptown Artist Lofts

If you are interested in helping make the Artpace Uptown Artist Lofts project possible, please contact:

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