

ArtsAlliance

**Arts Alliance
Board of Directors**

Chair
Lynne Friman
Envisions Design

Vice Chair
Debra Polich
Artrain

Treasurer
Roxana Overdier
Weidmayer, Schneider, &
Raham, P.C.

Secretary
David Esau
Cornerstone Designs

Past Chair
Melissa Milton-Pung
Washtenaw County Government

Members
Greta Brunschwiler
Leslie Science &
Nature Center

Donald Harrison
Ann Arbor Film Festival

Mary Kerr
Ann Arbor Area Convention and
Visitors Bureau

Leslie Sobel
Milan Art Center

President
Susan Froelich

To: Mayor Hieftje and Ann Arbor City Council
From: Susan Froelich, President, and David Esau, Board Member, Arts Alliance
Re: 415 W. Washington
Date: April 4, 2011

We would like to start by expressing our strong and sincere appreciation of the Ann Arbor City Council's support for arts and culture, by involving the Arts Alliance in the proposed redevelopment of the 415 W. Washington site. Arts space issues have been a significant concern of the Arts Alliance from our founding, and it is exciting to have the opportunity to address this issue in a meaningful way.

It has been a pleasure working on Mayor Hieftje's task force along with City representatives and the Allen Creek Greenway Conservancy. The task force has been a productive partnership, and we are pleased to provide this report of the status of our efforts to date. Through the task force, we have gathered input on many aspects of the redevelopment, including regarding historic preservation and Historic District Commission approvals; storm water issues and possibilities; parks design; and the City approvals process.

The task force has also had discussions about the possible layouts of site and building, including which aspects of the building to save. The general feeling of the Arts Alliance, based on our research to date, is that the community has space needs that could potentially support redevelopment of the entire existing building (other than the unenclosed sheds at the southeast corner of the site). We would prefer to work with that as our goal, unless funding or other considerations require that the project be scaled back.

We obtained as-built drawings and CAD files of the existing building from Rueter Associates Architects, who worked with Peter Allen & Associates on their earlier proposal for the site, and we greatly appreciate their contribution to our efforts.

The Arts Alliance also received funding from the Michigan Nonprofit Association (funded by the Kresge and Ford Foundations) and the Cultural Alliance for Southeastern Michigan which supported several important steps:

- We held eight focus groups between mid-April and early June 2010, with each focusing on a different area of the arts community, and one being open to the general public. The groups were well attended, with enthusiastic participation

and strong support for the concept of a community arts center in downtown Ann Arbor. From the focus groups, we gathered extensive information about the types of spaces needed, and the character desired for the completed facility.

- We visited several similar facilities around the state, from Detroit to St. Joseph, and are excited to report that the concept seems to be do-able and is in high demand by artists wherever it has been tried.
- We arranged to have several possible layouts prepared, as a sort of test-fit to determine the possibilities of what could go in the existing building, by Cornerstone Design Inc. We will continue to refine the layouts, but it appears to offer space for many types of activities, and to allow a flexible layout that will accommodate both market demand and future changes in that demand.
- We presented the results of our work to date at a well-attended public meeting at the NEW Center in September 2010. Many of the attendees had participated in the earlier focus groups. We described what we had heard from the focus groups, and where we saw it going in terms of the building development; the report was very well received by those in attendance.

We made initial inquiries with a number of consultants about a variety of next steps, and submitted two grant proposals to fund the next stages of the work, which unfortunately were not funded. (National Endowment for the Arts and). An anonymous donor has made a generous contribution to support the work of a grant writer, Allison Walacavage. Ms. Walacavage will write 4-5 grants over the next few months.

The following are identified as the next stages of work to be accomplished:

- Additional studies of the existing building, including more detailed as-built measurements, investigation of environmental hazards, structural review, a historic preservation.
- Topographic survey of the site which would serve as the basis for future site planning.
- Preliminary selection and layout of structural, mechanical, and electrical systems.
- A business plan must be developed for the facility. We have done some preliminary estimates that suggest it could be self-supporting, assuming construction was funded by grants and donations, but really need to refine these with updated and more detailed information.
- Study the feasibility of future fund raising efforts.

The main goal of these next steps would be to allow us to obtain preliminary estimates of construction costs to support further fund raising, and to determine the overall feasibility of developing and operating the facility. We could then look at determining an appropriate operating structure, and work out a more formal agreement with the City for

the redevelopment and future operations. We look forward to moving forward with this work as funding becomes available.

In summary, the existing building at 415 W. Washington offers an exciting opportunity to provide a magnet to attract, serve, and retain artists and cultural groups in Ann Arbor. We believe it will also be a draw for visitors to Ann Arbor's downtown, and the combination with the proposed Greenway has excited the imaginations of many regional artists. Based on our work to date, the redevelopment of 415 W. Washington seems feasible and worthy of continuing efforts at due diligence.

Thank you again for your support and for this opportunity to report on our progress.