ART INCUBATORS AND MAKERSPACES: An Application In Benton Harbor, Michigan

Introduction

Client
Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC)

The SWMPC mission is "to promote a sustainable, high quality of life through the facilitation of sound planning and decision making." They are currently located at 370 W. Main Street Suite 130 in Benton Harbor, Michigan. The main points of contact throughout the course of this project have been K. John Egelhaaf, Executive Director of SWMPC and Ryan Soucy, Associate Planning and SWMPC.

Project
An assessment of Benton Harbor’s economy and the feasibility of establishing a hybrid of both an art incubator and makerspace. In assessing the feasibility of an art incubator, makerspace, or MASS, the team:

• Researched cases and reviewed literature;
• Assessed primary users of the space via a socioeconomic profile, creative occupational data, and community outreach;
• Provided recommendations for how the space should develop over several phases based on aggregated information;
• Developed a strategy to implement the space;
• Drafted a financial plan including possible funding sources;
• Outlined an organization to oversee the day-to-day activities of the space upon completion;

Location of Benton Harbor

Benton Harbor is located in southwest Michigan on the shore of Lake Michigan, approximately 100 miles northeast of Chicago, Illinois, via Interstate 94, and 123 miles southwest of Michigan’s capital city of Lansing. Benton Harbor is located in the northern portion of Berrien County, which borders the Counties of Cass and Van Buren – together the three counties make up the Tri-County Region. Benton Harbor spans 368 square miles and Benton Harbor has a total land area of 4.68 square miles.

Socioeconomic Profile

Comparison of Benton Harbor to the Tri-County Region and the State of Michigan

Conclusions

Population composed primarily of Black citizens
Households are experiencing low income levels
Low levels of education attainment
Young population

Definitions

Art Incubator
- Affordable spaces
- Use of tools that artists might not have been able to access independently
- Collaboration opportunities
- Help artists efforts to start an art-related business

MakeArt ShareSpace (M.A.S.S)
- Consists of elements of both an art incubator and a makerspace including educational opportunities, collaboration, and shared equipment.
- Greater emphasis on education and public involvement

Makerspace
- Helps those interested in science, technology, engineering, and crafts
- Nurtures person to person interaction and collaboration
- Provides common tools and technological equipment

Arts District
- Operations aimed to promote economic development and cultural activity
- High concentrations of art organizations, art-based businesses, individual artists, ancillary merchants, public spaces, and public art

Case Studies

Detroit Creative Corridor Center (DC3), Detroit, MI
- Common demographic variables
- Space shows potential growth opportunities

ART 634, Jackson, MI
- High poverty level
- Open creativity
- Artists have branched out into community

North Carolina Arts Incubator (NCAI), Siler City, NC
- Helped foster art community in Siler City
- Similar population sizes

Arlington Arts Center (AAC), Arlington, VA
- Utilized minimal funding
- Revitalization of an old space
- Live/Work

Recommendations

- Formalize the Arts District
- Determine costs of MASS
- Acquire funding through the form of grants
- Form partnerships with a local arts association, college, or community anchor

- Renovate the building at 200 Paw Paw for a MASS
- Involve the community during the planning and establishment of the MASS
- Engage the community through ongoing educational opportunities, events, and exhibits

Acknowledgments

Presented by: 2014 Practicum Team MASS: Ben Fraser, David Hendrixon, Conor Ott, Binyu Wang, Eric Wedesky, Lindsey Westin

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