



Cultural Overlay District Advisory Committee

MEETING SUMMARY, February 6, 2009

Committee members present: Randy Engstrom, Fen Hsiao, Matthew Kwatinetz, Fidelma McGinn, Jim Reinhardsen, Michael Seiwerath, Robert Sondheim, Paige Weinheimer.

City of Seattle attendees: Chris Godwin (City Council central staff), Rebecca Herzfeld (City Council central staff), Dennis Meier (Department of Planning and Development).

Guest: Doug Ito, SMR Architects

Consultant staff: Kjristine Lund, Dennis Sellin

1. Introductory remarks and opening discussion

The meeting began at 11:00 am. The January 8 meeting summary was approved by consensus.

Kjristine Lund opened the discussion with two questions to committee members:

- What is CODAC going to advocate for? Is it a replacement structure to compensate for the loss of the Odd Fellows building?
- What do we mean when we talk about a “district”? Is it geographic to a specific area, or is it citywide designation?

A committee member responded by saying that the important questions to ask are: What is the toolkit that we are developing? Is that easier to do within a geographic boundary, or on a project-by-project basis?

Also, how do citizens self-organize to create a district? How does an organization gain the authority to make such a request?

Another committee member stated that a pilot project is important to test strategies and tactics. From a real estate perspective, the incentives are critical, but are difficult to attain. Value can be added by creating scarcity: being inside the district must have more additional value than being outside.

A city staff member stated that the timeframe issue is an important consideration: some things can be accomplished more quickly than others. Creating a district is a long-term commitment.

What are the tactics? What can be done in the short term in order to get a seat at the table?

Another committee member stated that the initial organizing around this issue was about how to tie in with the neighborhood: how do we enhance the community that has evolved? We

are trying to make systemic change happen, and not just in the arts. Therefore, I would like to see CODAC narrow its geographic scope. I think the existing boundaries are too large. The smaller it is, the more effective it can be, and the easier to measure results. This gives us leeway to advocate. The Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce believes the district should be Broadway. It might also include Twelfth Avenue.

Another committee member responded by saying that the opportunity is there to work within the neighborhood plan to create a new district, but that it would be a long-term proposal. However, neither do we want to manifest a single project, because that is not going to truly solve the problem.

Another committee member stated that if CODAC becomes too narrowly focused, then the model becomes impossible to replicate because it is too idiosyncratic.

A committee member stated that what CODAC can do is to organize an infrastructure, and supply a panoply of tools. Then it becomes a form of assistance within the neighborhood plan. Some CODAC members have met with City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods staff, and they are willing to work with CODAC on neighborhood planning.

2. Subcommittee discussions

Partnerships and Projects:

The subcommittee began its discussion with a review of the draft letter requested at the previous meeting. Thus began a discussion of the purpose of the letter, and its role as part of an overall outreach strategy.

The outreach discussion covered the beginnings of an outline of a strategy, including the message, and expected or desired outcomes.

Message: To encourage and retain space for arts and culture on Capitol Hill/First Hill.

Outcomes: Broad support for CODAC, yet specific. Types of support are political, financial, collaborative, and community.

Examples would include people who own or control the use of public or private property; sources of capital; nexuses of other projects, nexuses of needs; general support from the public, and knowledge of the opposition.

It was suggested that CODAC should pursue the “lowest hanging fruit” for potential partnerships, among which could be counted Capitol Hill Housing (CHH) and its proposed 12th Avenue corridor projects.

The discussion became more specific: what, exactly would you say in a letter or conversation with a specific entity, such as CHH, to gain support?

- We are developing incentives that would make a partnership with an organization mutually beneficial.
- We would like to make potential partners aware of the key components of what CODAC wants and needs.
- Collaboration is necessary in order to leverage capital.
- CODAC is looking at a specific piece of property.

- CODAC is interested in participating in existing initiatives, and would like to know of initiatives that are underway that we should be part of.
- Invite feedback: structure the conversation for easy feedback.
- We would like organizations to feel a vested interest in CODAC's success: how can CODAC's process help them?
- What tools does the organization have that would make a project 'pencil out' (for either a non-profit or for-profit organization)?
- Why does this use add value?
- We would like to keep potential partners informed of our progress, in order to continue this conversation.

Further discussion was around information that could be helpful:

- The economic value of the arts, at the most local level available.

This would enable CODAC to make its case by saying, "The financial value of this initiative is as follows," and then list up to five bullet points. Continue by stating, "But there is a gap, which could be filled by the following incentives," then go on to list those.

From the above questions, are there any agencies or organizations that could help CODAC to answer three of them? These "three-fer" organizations are the first ones that we should approach.

The subcommittee members identified organizations that they are aware of who could respond to the above questions, and each subcommittee member volunteered to contact several of them, as follows:

Fidelma: Seattle City of Music, Seattle Central Community College, City of Kirkland, Seattle Rotary Club

Jim: Cornish College, Seattle Housing Authority, University of Washington College of the Built Environment, University of Washington Runstad Center for Real Estate Studies

Michael: Capitol Hill Housing, Sound Transit, Seattle University, Washington Low Income Housing

Paige: 4Culture, Arts Leadership Lab, Washington Bus, City of Seattle Office Of Arts and Culture, Mako Fitts, Seattle University professor of sociology

Randy: University of Washington Evans School.

A brochure or some other 'leave-behind' must be developed, which the consultant will be responsible for.

Incentives and Financing

Doug Ito, architect with SMR architects, which designed the Youngstown Cultural Center, and Tashiro Kaplan, and Hiawatha, both of which are Artspace USA projects, talked to the subcommittee about what meaningful incentives could make an arts and culture-related project financially viable.

The subcommittee also discussed next steps, such as a charrette or a focus group, to explore hurdles, and needs to create and save cultural space, and to identify tools to help.

Other items that were discussed include district boundary criteria, and a nomination process. The notion of “arts and culture” was discussed as being directly related to the culture of each particular community.

In reporting back to the full committee, the discussion turned to the necessity of a financial model. In any model for an arts and culture-related capital project, there are going to be financial gaps, including the costs of the required green factor, land, and parking. As part of the financial model, incentives need to be developed that could fill those gaps to make the project viable.

Michael Seiwerath will share an example from CHH that can be examined prior to the next meeting, and possibly discussed at the next meeting.

3. Next steps

The next meeting will be held on February 27.