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Facilities

Facilities can mean opportunity. They can symbolize the rebirth and redevelopment of neighborhoods or an entire city downtown area. They can represent the spiritual and physical meeting place for a community. They can be the focal point for increased and concrete economic values of a business community. They can mean opportunities for local artists, arts organizations, information and performance exchange, and exhibits. They can create hope, and more than that, ongoing support for artists. They can be the places where all people in a community feel good about coming together. The sum is really greater than any of its parts.

Arts councils have looked at the needs for cultural facilities in their communities since the beginning. Some, over the last 30-odd years, have been integral to the development of arts centers and/or facilities. Some have been instrumental in helping to raise private or public funds in behalf of purchase, renovation, or construction. Some have been tenants, and some have been owners and managers. A smaller number are responsible for year-round programming and management. Some, and more in the future, will see the relationship of the arts facility to the total image of the city.

In response to a request from HUD, an *Analysis of State and Local Government-Supported Cultural Facilities and Resources* was done in 1978 by the U.S. Conference of Mayors and NACAA. Even though the study was done too quickly to be thorough (involving only 11 percent of the

Conference of Mayors membership and ten experienced community arts consultants), it showed the task of determining the number, nature, and use of publicly owned facilities in the arts to be monumental. Neither the arts nor the municipal officials had reliable data; original research would be needed in many cities. The research was further complicated by the difficulty of defining "arts and cultural activities," "arts attendance," and "parks attendance," and of determining the "arts attendance" in a multipurpose facility. The comprehensive study that would attempt to answer these questions still awaits undertaking. However, the *Analysis* did show that

community arts agencies and local government have, however, become closely related in most communities in recent years, and the relationship is expected to become much closer in the future. Cities need arts agencies to help keep the "art" in arts activities; arts agencies need the cities for financial survival.

Many community arts agencies remain completely independent of local government, but most are seeking support from their local officials, and there is a clear trend toward increased cooperation.¹

Except in a few stellar situations, arts councils have not embraced total philosophies that look at the arts in relationship to the whole city, physically and spiritually. In Winston-Salem, where there is a long history of the Arts Council's involvement,

officials are optimistic that the arts can help the city even more by attracting investment and stimulating economic renewal. The city's commitment to the construction of a culture block has already brought promises from corporations to refurbish businesses and hotels. Investors recognize that theaters, galleries, and other types of performing space mean good business.²

This concept goes beyond that of individual buildings or complexes and includes studies such as the one focusing on the design and feasibility of the establishment of a Performing Arts District in San Antonio through the reuse of historically significant theater buildings.

In large urban centers, arts centers have often been built with public funds and are publicly operated. In medium to small communities, however, most arts facilities are privately owned and operated by nonprofit community organizations. Local governments often channel federal funds from EDA, CETA, and other agencies into them, but they remain essentially private operations. However, there is a trend toward more public financing and ownership of arts centers. Arts groups are finding that private contributions are not sufficient to cover inflated capital and operating costs.

There was an overall opinion by those surveyed that unless arts facilities were adapted appropriately, new construction was preferable. All too often adaptation of facilities for the arts is "like trying to fit a regulation football field into a 90-yard lot. It comes close but it doesn't make it."³

The location of the council itself may have some relationship to its image in the community. This was expressed by the media in Cleveland, regarding the housing of the council in the Old Arcade, Cleveland's premier landmark. The tenancy of Community Programs in the Arts and Sciences (COMPAS) at Landmarks Center in St. Paul is seen as symbolic of historic pride.

The Winston-Salem Arts Council, for instance, maintains the Hanes Community Center, which includes office space for member groups, a gallery, a theater, and an orchestra rehearsal room. In Greensboro, North Carolina, the Sternberger Artists' Center was a gift to the Arts Council from the Sigmund Sternberger Foundation; the home was converted to individual artists' studios. The Arts Council itself occupies the old Greensboro *News* Building left vacant in 1976. The building was purchased and is maintained by the city but is used by the United Arts Council and its seven funded members. There are six rehearsal studios, eight classrooms, office space, a printshop, a conference room, three large workshops, and four public galleries.

In both cities, the councils have been involved as well with the renovation of spaces for the arts. In Greensboro, the space is the Carolina Theater; in Winston-Salem, the project is Winston Square, focusing on the renovation of several contiguous buildings and open spaces in the center of town, expanding Hanes Center, and constructing a concert shell, all of which will assist the major professional arts institutions as well as community groups. Another Carolina Theater in Winston-Salem is also being made into the Roger L. Stevens Performing Arts Center.

Initially the endeavors of the St. Paul-Ramsey Arts and Science Council included the promotion of cultural activities and fundraising for the Arts and Science Center, which became the home of the Council and some of its agencies. Although the Council has a coordinator role, has developed some centralized services, and acts as a cultural advocate, the management of that facility has been a part of its function.

Four United Arts Fund agencies are housed in St. Paul's Landmark Center, the old Federal Courts Building, saved from the wrecking ball weeks before its scheduled demolition (the council itself subsequently moved to Landmark Center). The Landmark Center is the newest member of the United Arts Fund, and the Council has been instrumental in assisting it to gain its new life. The 1981 program projection included a full schedule of arts events, some sponsored by the four tenants.

In Fredonia, Kansas, the Fredonia Arts Council, Inc., was given a

hand-hewn stone nineteenth-century building; in Riverhead, New York, the East End Arts and Humanities Council uses the parlor of its headquarters, a historic downtown house, as a gallery.

Facilities, by the nature of their ownership and management structure, can cause an arts council to seem privately or publicly oriented. One must look carefully at the ownership-management structure, which can be complex, to understand the arts council's role.

About 12 united arts fund councils manage arts facilities. But major programming responsibilities and decisions are usually made by the resident groups.

At times, funding drives for organizations housed in arts centers or complexes are organized as one. Examples of this include the Atlanta Arts Alliance, which raises money to operate the Atlanta Memorial Arts Center and its organizations—the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art, the Alliance Theater, the Atlanta Children's Theater, and the Atlanta College of Art. The Arts Alliance raises less than 15 percent of the total operating costs, the balance of which are covered by admissions, memberships, divisional special fundraising events, and income from endowment and government grants.⁴

In some cases, the council is more than manager and landlord; it is the major programmer. One significant example is the Cultural Resources Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County, Inc. The development of the Civic Center and its operation and programs, which the Council manages for the county and city, is well documented in the book *Olympus on Main Street*, by its director, Joseph Golden.⁵ The Council has been in existence since 1966, the Civic Center since the mid-1970s. The council, which is private, has a management contract with the county, which owns the building, to staff, program, and promote the Center—a three-theater complex that houses many of the community's arts groups. Thus the Council has become integral to the arts programming of the city and county. It is responsible for filling time and seats, and, in very concrete ways, for the health of the arts in that area.

This multiple character makes the Cultural Resources Council unique among arts organizations, for it performs three roles: that of an arts council, a theater manager, and a presenting organization. Its roles are developed along several lines: professional programs, community support services, and community education programs. In concrete terms, those programs, which bring about 300,000 annually to public events, range from performances of professional companies like the New York City Ballet, to a 13-event program of music, dance, and theater styled for the smaller 463-seat Carrier Theater. This theater has been used for a jazz festival; a high school drama festival; programs such as *Jacques Brel* and *Albee Directs Albee*; live Youtheater; and special series films.

In one recent year, the Civic Center theaters and related spaces were used 1,417 times (3.87 times per day) for concerts, plays, films, meetings, workshops, lectures, graduations, and other events. Two major activities of the Cultural Resources Council occur outside the Civic Center – the Festival of Nations, an annual event held at the 8,000-seat Onondaga County War Memorial, and “On My Own Time,” a program for visual artists in business and industry, which culminates in an exhibit and reception at the Everson Museum of Art.

“Essential to all programs is a good public image developed by strong institutional promotion, effective marketing devices, and ongoing audience development activity that attempts to reach a broad base of community residents,” the Center reports. The philosophy is “to bring the best young solo artists, theater companies, and dance companies into the community, and additionally, to provide a wide range of styles, attitude, and talents,” and “[to supply] young audiences . . . with the best programming available.”⁶ There is programmatic backup for the philosophies expressed.

The Cultural Resources Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County provides services for the general public (such as calendars and directories); services to the arts community (such as mailing lists of about 30,000 and a resource library); and services to special audiences, such as the program in cooperation with Welcome Wagon, or Passport to the Arts – a subsidized ticket program for the disadvantaged and children from city and county schools and agencies. In addition, through the cooperation of the Syracuse and Onondaga County Youth Bureau, children from 40 agencies have been introduced to the arts.

The community programming service is one geared to “growth.”

Growth as seen in increased participation by agencies/institutions/businesses/individuals involved in the programming; greater acceptance by the local community and media of events as they happened at the Center or elsewhere; greater recognition of the programs by those outside the community; and finally, and perhaps most important, the positive impact of the arts on personal growth.⁷

Clearly, the Cultural Resources Council has links to all segments of the community it serves, as it manages and programs for audiences from 39 counties and 184 communities in New York State.

In San Francisco, there are now four neighborhood buildings owned by the San Francisco Arts Commission. The agency, hit by the impact of Proposition 13 and the demise of CETA, has been further taxed by problems of bringing the buildings up to code and dealing with maintenance and supplies. Basically seen as a trade-off for the city's attention to the major institutions, the neighborhoods were excited by the idea of centers

where the arts would be housed, and practical matters were overlooked. "There should have been a total inspection and analysis," everyone agrees. The centers have never really had enough to operate on. The present directors of the community cultural centers have been working to develop "Friends of" groups to provide support and raise funds for operating the centers. This effort would be coordinated centrally, and the hope is that they will develop into real citizen advocacy and support groups.

Facility management contracts must be carefully conceived, with well-developed budgets and realistic projections. Unfortunately, situations like the one in San Francisco are echoed in many cities where there are recreation centers. Most arts councils have not been involved in ownership or facility management, but city budgets notoriously leave the operation, maintenance, and programming needs far underbudgeted. Therefore, money is rarely available to program the facility to capacity, and the situation becomes very frustrating for the people in the neighborhoods and for those who could assist with the managing and teaching there. Some arts councils have tried to fill some of these neighborhood programming needs with monies from other sources.

The arts councils have been important in some cities in helping old spaces come to new uses for the arts—beginning with schools, storefronts, and single-theater renovation—and in conducting facility studies. A few coordinating groups have been involved in the fundraising for and managing of major arts centers, such as Atlanta's Memorial Arts Center. Community arts councils may more often run smaller ones, where there are needs for art classes, rehearsals, and performing opportunities.

Some of the attention to arts centers also emerges from revitalization of old significant structures in the downtown areas, as mentioned in connection with several North Carolina cities, or the construction of new buildings in many American cities. While peripheral to these developments in many cities, councils have been very involved in others, such as Louisville, Kentucky, where the council has served in an advisory capacity.

The arts council's commitment to the spirit of downtown renaissance can be reflected in small yet significant ways. In Cortland County, New York, the Arts Council, as part of its message, includes the fact that it has made a conscious decision about locating itself downtown in an abandoned historic building. It was involved in assessing reuses of the building, and in the five years that it has been there, the first floors, at least, in the other buildings have become reoccupied on the downtown strip. In Riverhead, New York, not only has the development of a downtown center brought people to it who have participated in all parts of its development, even in laying out its garden; but the center has been a catalyst for changing people's attitudes and thus for revitalizing the whole city.

In Atlanta, three former school buildings near the central business

district are now being used by various cultural organizations, with the encouragement and support of the city's Department of Cultural Affairs: the Atlanta Neighborhood Arts Center, Inc., which serves as a strong arts and cultural outreach facility for the community; the Spring Street School, now the home of the Atlanta Ballet, the Vagabond Marionettes, and the Georgia Lyric Opera Company; and the Forest Avenue Consortium, a multidisciplinary association of alternative arts organizations.

In Atlanta, the preservation activities of the Department of Cultural Affairs have been a priority, with many restoration efforts. Technical assistance is available as well, putting representatives of the private sector in touch with owners of historic properties and providing advice on construction standards, architectural design standards, tax benefits, and funding sources.

Some councils have been key in bringing in Challenge Grants and planning monies from the National Endowment for the Arts; monies from such sources as the Department of the Interior (Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, and Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program); HUD and EDA (Urban Development Action Grant, or UDAG); and Community Development Block Grants, for development and redevelopment in some of these instances.

In recent times, the concept of revitalization has been intimately related to the total city image, to spiritual renewal, and to the arts as a vehicle of that message. The impetus for the revitalization of Galveston, for example, came in large part from the Galveston County Cultural Arts Council. Founded much as all other councils have been — to create an environment where the arts could thrive — the Cultural Arts Council set out to make itself more representative and interested in the common goal of making the city more livable. The story of the economic and cultural renaissance of the city is the story of the Council's work, as it sought planning and programming money to make things happen. This included not only supervising study teams of experts, figuring out ways in which viable buildings could be purchased and resold, and overseeing commitments to restore the facades and interiors of buildings along the Strand district, but also finally creating an "Action Plan for the Strand." As Pamela Baldwin notes, "The resulting plan demonstrates an unusually broad sensitivity not only to the Strand's aesthetic value and potential, but also to important economic, practical and social concerns."⁸

The Galveston County Cultural Arts Council was thus instrumental in restoring for both nonprofit and commercial use a significant area of the city. They stayed with this priority through most of a decade, and it has paid off. The Cultural Arts Council, by applying for well-researched grants to accomplish different stages of development planning and by working with the community's private sector, including foundations and

corporations, was a catalyst for action that represented the “best of Galveston — the living spirit that has endured depression, neglect, and destruction and emerged as the soul of a truly livable city of the late twentieth century.”⁹ It was not always easy going, as anyone involved in such a long-range and complex activity will report; but they tried to bring in the best expertise, the backup for preservationist views, and the contemporary ideas that would make the project viable. The spirit of renaissance grew far beyond the original concepts, and a city was “caught up” with the help of the programmed arts — living, performing, and exhibiting.

The Galveston story is a story of “the right people,” but also of using the small amounts of money from such sources as the Architectural and Environmental Arts program of the National Endowment for the Arts as well. Support from the Endowment enabled a group like this to think through its project before launching it, and also made it easier for the group to raise money from other sources, once it had had a chance to show its seriousness of purpose.¹⁰

The Endowment grants focused on opening doors — on the wide range of possibilities for conservation and revitalization; or, specifically, on neighborhood housing and structural rehabilitation and design; or on seeing the potential of transforming a deteriorating downtown into a vital one, perhaps by starting with the restoration and rehabilitation of an old building, which would effect the motivation to do more.¹¹

Only arts councils that saw the broader implications of these programs ever became involved in these grants. The mainstream of city life includes the arts, but arts councils in too many cases have avoided the mainstream. Even the many exceptions — such as Galveston; Winston-Salem; Charlotte; Durham; Atlanta; Minneapolis; Birmingham; Escondido, California; Phoenix; New Haven; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Westchester County, New York; or Troy, New York — have ranged widely in their involvement beyond the study of a project’s feasibility. Some studies have never been extended to the implementation stages.

In the 1980s, the arts groups will be looking for ways to deepen the alliances beginning to develop over these broader ideas. Local governments (the cities’ economic development agencies), commercial developers, and arts groups will team to form such entities as cultural districts, which can be “anything from the Federated Arts Council’s tentative first steps to restore a Masonic Temple community arts program in Richmond, Virginia. . . . to the \$1 billion-plus Bunker Hill project in Los Angeles.”¹²

A key component of a major five-year (1980–85) program sponsored by Partners for Livable Places, called the Economics of Amenity program, is a network of pilot cities that have committed themselves to improving the quality of life in their communities, and that will enter the program with assistance from nonpublic funds and a local advisory group. Topics of the program include “Tourism and Conservation,” “Public Sector Design

Quality,” “Cultural Planning,” “Open-Space Management,” “Profit by Design,” and “Natural and Scenic Resources.” The program is able, through this nonprofit coalition of organizations and individuals interested in improving the quality of life through enhancement of the built environment, to extend the work that can be done with limited Endowment dollars.

Partners for Livable Places is a national resource center for information on every aspect of the built environment. In their work they emphasize the process of partnership, the importance of local initiative, and the value of cooperative learning between public and private sectors for cost-efficient use of resources.

While many reasons might be given for which cities were chosen as pilots, one of the most cogent might be the interest of the public and private sectors in the areas under investigation.

While some of the cities chosen have involved their arts councils in the work at hand, only one arts council — the Federated Arts Council of Richmond, Inc. — has been an initiator of such activities. And yet these are the very aspects of city life that might most concern community councils. The Federated Arts Council (a publicly designated private council) is working with Partners for Livable Places in coordinating the local projects, which include various departments of local government, the business community, and citizens’ groups. This work has focused in two ways: on a comprehensive facilities plan for the city of Richmond to result in an arts district, and an initiative in economic development for the city of Richmond, known as Richmond Renaissance. The latter has involved the development of coordinated black and white leadership to address economic issues including cultural amenities. Initial monies, \$1.25 million in community development funds matched by the same in private dollars, will be used to organize the activities.

The fact is that “the economic vitality of a community is closely linked to the quality of local amenities,” says Partners for Livable Places, citing two recent studies that show “that the physical, cultural, social, and natural environments in which Americans live and work exert a complex influence on their prosperity.” While cultural and built-environment groups have been saying this for a long time, there has been skepticism about the financial return.

Partners believes that amenity is a hard issue for a hard time . . . but that in a time of inflation, a weakened economy, and government cutbacks, it is more necessary than ever before to create healthy communities that people not only live in, but can believe in as well.¹³

Thus, while various arts councils have been involved in everything from managing a small building for the arts to overseeing a “cultural plan for a community,” their real power in the future may be tied to how closely

they will be involved in the cultural planning. For this hits at the heart of the ways in which the arts of the community are identified as important by those who live there. This takes a level of sophistication few have reached, for it calls upon public administration skills and the ability to know the important aesthetic factors. Few persons or councils have been able to span both needs.

NOTES

1. U.S. Conference of Mayors and National Assembly of Community Arts Agencies, *Analysis of State and Local Government-Supported Cultural Facilities and Resources* (Washington, D.C.: Authors, 1978), pp. 4-9.
2. "The Economics of Amenity Program," *Economics of Amenity News*, (December 1, 1980), p. 16.
3. U.S. Conference of Mayors and NACAA, *Analysis*, p. 12.
4. Atlanta Memorial Arts Center (brochure, 1978).
5. Joseph Golden, *Olympus on Main Street* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980).
6. Cultural Resources Council of Syracuse and Onondaga County, Inc., *Annual Report* (July 1, 1978-June 30, 1979), p. 7.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
8. Pamela Baldwin, *How Small Grants Make a Difference* (Washington, D.C.: Partners for Livable Places, 1980), p. 51.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
10. National Endowment for the Arts, *Downtowns: Reinvestment by Design* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1976-77), preface.
11. *Ibid.*, introduction.
12. George Clack, "Footlight Districts" *Cultural Post*, (January/February 1982), p. 1.
13. "The Economics of Amenity Program," pp. 1-2.