

# City of Cambridge

**PUBLIC FACILITIES, ART AND  
CELEBRATIONS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

*Councillor Brian Murphy, Chair  
Councillor Anthony D. Galluccio  
Councillor Kenneth E. Reeves*

In City Council January 13, 2003

The Public Facilities, Art and Celebrations Committee held a public meeting on December 11, 2002, beginning at 6:05 P.M. in order to continue the discussion of the impact of state budget cuts on city arts programs, the status of the report on developing a Cambridge Art survey and possible tools for the city to develop artists' living and work space.

Present at the hearing were Councillor Brian Murphy, Chair of the Committee, Vice-Mayor Henrietta Davis, and D. Margaret Drury, City Clerk. Also present were Darcy Jameson, Director of Housing, Community Development Department (CDD), Cassandra Arnoud, housing planner, CDD, Charles Sullivan, Executive Director, Cambridge Historical Commission, Jason Weeks, Executive Director, Cambridge Arts Council, Jane Beal, Director of Community Arts, Arts Council, Jim Peters, 23 Cottage St., Cambridge, member, Cambridge Arts Council and Public Arts Council, KD Mernin, 14 Rice St., Chair, North Cambridge Artists Association, Sheila Hazen, 402 Rindge Ave., #14A, Raquel Forcio, 237 Franklin Street #5F, Mark Pettengill, 21 Shepard St., #42, Treasurer, Curious Minds, Joan Brigham, 45 Mt. Pleasant St., Lydia Vickers/Mark White, 45 Cherry St., Area 4 Coalition, Joshua Meyer, 55 Magazine St. #31, Blair Lent, 17 Tudor Street, Monica Raymond, 59 Brookline St. and Bobby Vilinsky, 4 Putnam Gardens #34.

Councillor Murphy convened the hearing and explained the purpose. He invited Jason Weeks, Executive Director of the Cambridge Arts Council (CAC), to address the first item on the agenda, the impact of state budget cuts on arts programs in Cambridge. Mr. Weeks said that the biggest impact of the large cuts to the state funding for the arts is on the grant program run by CAC, in which grants are awarded to individual artists. CAC has voted to recommend 22 excellent projects for funding this year. That number represents a drop by 15 in the number of grants awarded over the past two years. He also informed the committee that CAC did an informal survey of the artist community as to whether they preferred more, smaller grants or fewer larger grants, and the clear preference was for more, smaller grants.

The discussion then moved to the next topic. Councillor Murphy asked Mr. Weeks about the status of the Boston Redevelopment Authority's (BRA) survey of the living and working space needs of Boston and Cambridge artists. Mr. Weeks reported that the BRA has finished collecting the data and is now reviewing it. As of now, the plans call for publication of the report in January; however, the January projection may

be somewhat unrealistic in light of delays to date. Councillor Murphy asked if anyone present had received a survey, and three people indicated that they had.

Councillor Murphy then turned to the issue of what the City of Cambridge can do to aid the creation of more affordable living and working space for artists. He invited Ms. Jameson to begin the discussion. Ms. Jameson said that the housing staff at CDD looked at the question of what opportunities are available for artists in Cambridge. Affordable artist housing can be one of two quite different categories: (1) affordable housing occupied by an artist, or (2) affordable live/work space.

CDD looked at what other cities have done in this area, beginning with the fundamental question of why cities like Cambridge are interested in supporting artist housing. In general, cities are concerned because artist communities benefit the entire community with the increased cultural concern and activities and the increased vibrancy to city life. In addition, artists' income often falls among the lower income levels and thus artist residents are at greater risk of displacement in times of high rents. In addition, some cities, like Providence are interested in the economic development potential of using construction of artist live/work space as a start to revitalizing old industrial areas.

With regard to the incentives cities use to assist the development of artist live/work space, some cities have donated public buildings or facilitated the donation of private buildings, especially large old industrial buildings. Other cities have created artist districts that facilitate the creation of artist communities. Providence is a good example of the latter approach.

Ms. Jameson also described some of the obstacles that other cities have encountered in their efforts to assist in the creation of artist live/work space. The primary obstacles are zoning and building codes. Cambridge has fewer zoning obstacles than many other cities. The recently enacted Citywide Rezoning Ordinance allows residential use in every zoning district. The same ordinance made conversion from industrial/commercial uses to residential uses easier. Arts and crafts studios are an allowed use in all zoning districts, and the zoning in all residential districts allows up to 25% of the residence to be used for such a studio.

The second major obstacle to affordable artist live/work space pertains to financing. Affordable rents for lower income residents require some sort of subsidy. Funding for such subsidies is already difficult to obtain, especially in light of the extremely high land and building costs in Cambridge, and in the current economic uncertainty, will likely become even harder to find. The Affordable Housing Trust, a major source of funding for affordable housing in Cambridge, focuses on permanent family housing.

Ms. Jameson concluded with a summary of steps that the city can take to make sure that the affordable housing that the city creates is available to artists. CDD can work with CAC to develop and implement an aggressive outreach strategy to be sure that artists know about the affordable housing that is available. CDD can increase its

outreach to artists' organizations. For example, CDD would be happy to meet with the CAC staff and board to provide opportunities for technical assistance to artists who want to work on projects to develop artists live/work space. In addition, as CDD works with developers and housing providers, the staff is always looking for new opportunities for providing affordable housing, and will certainly contact CAC and other appropriate outreach sources if an appropriate opportunity for artist live/work space appears.

Councillor Murphy then invited questions and comments.

Vice Mayor Davis noted that the inclusionary zoning ordinance currently requires developers to build affordable units that are just like all of the market rate units that are being constructed in the building. Perhaps it would be worth looking at amending the zoning to allow more flexibility, for example to allow the inclusion of affordable artist live/work space or larger family units. Ms. Jameson responded that since 1998, the inclusionary zoning ordinance has been hugely successful – 124 units have been built. A major reason for the success is that CDD has tried very hard to respect the developers' designs. Any change to that would increase developers' resistance to the ordinance. Vice Mayor Davis explained that she is suggesting a modification in the law to allow the developers the flexibility to make such changes if they so desire, not a requirement that they build a particular type of unit.

Vice Mayor Davis requested that Ms. Jameson provide the committee with information as to the breakdown of the number of bedrooms in the inclusionary units built to date.

Joan Brigham asked whether there is any possibility of the city owning artist workspace and renting it to artists at affordable rents. KD Mernin emphasized that there is a great need for such space.

Councillor Murphy said that there is a great need for affordable versions of all three kinds of artists' space: living space, working space and live/work space. He asked Ms. Jameson whether the Affordable Housing Trust has discussed this issue. Ms. Jameson replied that the Trust would certainly be willing to discuss the issue, although it has not done so. The Trust's focus has been on family housing.

Councillor Murphy said that there is a need to look at a variety of tools to make progress in this area. For example, the fact that artists actually become an amenity to make an interesting community leads to the question of whether there are opportunities at North Point. Mr. Weeks said that the question is a good one. The most successful models he has seen for incorporating affordable artist space in a community are models in which artists are planned into the development from the very beginning.

Councillor Murphy asked Ms. Jameson if there has been consideration of setting aside some of the affordable housing as artists' housing. Many artists fall within the income guidelines of 80% or less of median income. Ms. Jameson responded that the affordable housing community has had a great deal of discussion over the years about setting aside units for particular groups. However, the prevailing philosophy has been to

try to build a variety of housing, such a family housing, assisted living units, etc. but to keep the housing open to all groups to promote variety and diversity.

Ms. Mernin observed that one issue with using affordable housing space being developed for the general population is that artists have special needs. Generally artists cannot afford separate workspace, so whatever living space they have becomes their workspace as well, and their work may involve chemicals, machinery, and other features that are not particularly appealing to residential neighbors.

David Bass stated that he supports the concept of setting aside space for artists. He received the BRA survey but did not answer it because nothing on the survey addressed him and his needs. Mr. Bass also noted that a big question would be the question of who is an artist.

Councillor Murphy agreed. He said that he looks at the definition of artist broadly; however, as particulars come up, there must be discussion. A writer is less likely to have a hard time with close neighbors than a metal sculptor of large pieces or a painter.

Ms. Brigham said that some churches have large spaces that could be ideal rental space for artists. Councillor Murphy said that the city has looked at municipal uses for spaces like St Mary's.

Vice Mayor Davis said that on Essex Street, studio space was recently constructed out of former cement garages that became half a dozen studios and a shop. It would be worth finding out what made this project successful.

Councillor Murphy agreed that it would be a good idea to contact the owner and do a case study on this project. Ms. Brigham said that there are several small places in Cambridge that could be developed in a similar fashion. Councillor Murphy observed that the recent fall in the cost of rental space means that this is a good time to look into this kind of opportunity.

Charles Sullivan agreed that it would be a good idea to take a closer look at the Essex Street studios; he believes that the owner of the property just decided to turn the garages into studio space.

Mr. Bass suggested looking into the possibilities of using school space. North Cambridge High School has rented space to various artistic groups over the years.

Lydia Vickers suggested looking at the building at 238 Broadway, a building that the city already owns. That building would make an excellent site for artist space.

Monica Raymond suggested combining artist space with open space, perhaps by construction of rooftop gardens as open space. Ms. Raymond also said that it is

important to see the artist space as space that will also have a public access component, like the CCTV studios, with classes and video opportunities for members of the public.

Vice Mayor Davis said that RSTA is interested in connecting the public to the workshop space in their building. She also said that vacant school buildings can be good sites for artist space and that Cambridge may have some vacant schools in the future.

Councillor Murphy noted the recent studies demonstrating the relation of bohemian and artistic components to the success of the city in attracting and keeping stable populations. Mr. Weeks said that he has had two meetings with CDD economic development staff on potential collaboration around these issues. For example, they discussed possibilities for collaboration on promotional tools.

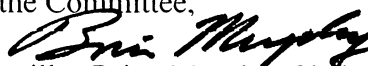
Vice Mayor Davis observed that Central Square has the atmosphere of the beginning of an arts district. She added that it is important to plan for affordable housing, open space and artist space in a respectful, collaborative way, so that they and their advocates are not in competition.

Councillor Murphy then summarized the tasks for the city to move forward on the issue of supporting living and working space for artists as follows:

- More targeted outreach to artists and artist organizations with regard to opportunities for affordable housing.
- A realistic but objective examination of whether some amendments to inclusionary and/or incentive zoning provisions could enable creation of artist live/work space for artists who meet the income eligibility criteria.
- Examination and report on the feasibility of city-owned space to be rented out to artists for studios, perhaps with provisions for some public access, public arts benefit.
- Case study on the Essex Street conversion of garages to studio space.
- Report on ways to create incentives for loft space development, including methods used by other communities such as Madison, Wisconsin.
- Report on what the School Department is doing to support artists in Cambridge and what additional steps are possible. For example, are there artist in residence programs at the elementary school that provide work space for the artist in residence?
- Look at whether there are opportunities to use the city's web site to increase support for artists, for example, creating a link from the CAC site to the CDD affordable housing information.

Councillor Murphy thanked all of those present for their participation and announced that the next meeting would be scheduled as soon as the BRA survey is available. The meeting was adjourned at 7:18 P.M.

For the Committee,

  
Councillor Brian Murphy, Chair

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**Committee Report #2**

Committee Report from Councillor Brian Murphy, Chair of the Public Facilities, Art and Celebrations Committee, for a meeting held on December 11, 2002 to continue the discussion of the impact of state budget cuts on city arts programs, the status of the report on developing a Cambridge Art survey and possible tools for the city to develop artists' living and work space.

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**REPORT ACCEPTED.  
PLACED ON FILE.**