

The City of Lawrence and the Lawrence Arts Center

Lawrence Arts Commons

June 7, 2012

The Lawrence Arts Center, a long-standing public-private partnership with the City of Lawrence, seeks to enhance the City's cultural, educational, and economic vibrancy through creation of an Arts Commons space on the property directly south of the Arts Center. That property is currently owned by the Salvation Army.

This Arts Commons is intended to serve as a public arts space, managed and curated by the Arts Center, featuring a park-like setting and perhaps a built structure. We believe the outdoor space can serve as a venue for public art exhibitions, theatrical productions, music, film, and art-making activities. This green space will also afford the children attending the Arts Center's arts-based preschool and other educational programs the opportunity to work and play outside. A building, paid for and constructed by the Arts Center through a capital campaign, could help define the public green space and add much-needed classroom, preschool, studio, and exhibition space.

As a completed project, the Arts Commons would not only help the Arts Center continue to fulfill its mission to bring the best in arts education, performance, and exhibition to the people of Lawrence and Douglas County, it would also expand the Arts Center's ability to enhance the cultural and economic vitality of Downtown, our East Lawrence Neighborhood, the County, and even the region. We know that people are attracted to live and work in Lawrence for a variety of reasons, and we at the Arts Center welcome our role as an important part of the fabric of our community. We expect that the Arts Commons will help make Lawrence an even more wonderful place to live, work, learn, and play.

As we move through the steps to a fully-realized Arts Commons, we plan a process whereby we design and create an innovative urban oasis that draws people to our City and its Downtown, that provides a creative space in the midst of welcome growth and vitality in our Downtown, and cultivates the energizing and restorative properties that the natural environment and the creative arts are uniquely suited to provide.

Process.

The first steps in this process will be for the City to acquire the property from the Salvation Army, and when the Salvation Army has moved, clear the current structure, and turn the property into a usable open green space.

From an administrative standpoint, and in order to establish the role of the Arts Center as the manager and curator of the Arts Commons space, we propose that the City lease the property to the Arts Center, in much the same way that the City leases the current facility at 940 New Hampshire to the Arts Center. Any structural improvements constructed on the Arts Commons space will be driven by the mission of the Arts Center and accomplished at the expense of the Arts Center. For example, if we elect to construct risers for an amphitheater, a performance stage, a defined play area for the preschool, a structure for exhibition or studio space, or any other structural improvements, those would be constructed at Arts Center expense. We propose a lease agreement for the outdoor space and built structure modeled after our current 940 New Hampshire lease.

Once an agreement has been reached between the City of Lawrence and the Arts Center, we will begin a design process based on the Arts Center's mission and program needs. We will follow City design approval processes and conduct the capital campaign necessary to making the approved design a reality. The Arts Center plans to begin immediate use of the area as a green space for arts activities, after the current building is razed and grass is planted and while the design process and our capital campaign are ongoing.

The combination of public and private support for the Lawrence Arts Center is integral to our success and makes Lawrence a model for the nation. We see great promise in this opportunity and look forward to working with the City of Lawrence to make the Lawrence Arts Commons a reality.