

Bobbie Walthall

To: Diane Stoddard
Subject: RE: Cultural Arts District

From: Dave Loewenstein [mailto:dloewenstein@hotmail.com]
Sent: Tuesday, February 05, 2013 12:49 PM
To: schummfoods@gmail.com
Cc: Diane Stoddard; Diane Stoddard
Subject: Cultural Arts District

February 5, 2013

To Mayor Bob Schumm,

Having read that the Lawrence Cultural Arts Commission voted to recommend designating East Lawrence and adjoining areas a "Cultural Arts District," I wanted to share with you my concerns about moving on this too quickly.

At the LCAC meeting on February 3rd, I said that it appears that this designation is being made with little or no research into its potential consequences for the neighborhood. At the meeting, commissioners themselves questioned:

What defines a cultural arts district?

How will this designation affect East Lawrence residents, especially property taxes for low to middle income homeowners? (LCAC Commissioner John Hachmeister mentioned at the meeting that as the Crossroads in Kansas City was being developed, gallery owner Jim Leedy's property taxes rose 45% in one year.)

Is there a model city/neighborhood that has created a similar district that Lawrence can look at and evaluate?

Important questions, but none of them were answered, even though there has been much written about arts and gentrification in neighborhoods across the country. I have included links to articles on this topic at the bottom of this letter.

Below are excerpts from Llana Stanger's article "The Gentrification Game: Are Artists Pawns or Players in the Gentrification of Low-Income Urban Neighborhoods?" published by the New York Foundation for the Arts.

"At the center of the issue is money. Artists seeking bigger spaces for lower rents are often the first "gentrifiers" of neglected urban neighborhoods. Research by the NEA has linked the proportion of artists in the urban labor force with the rate of downtown gentrification across a range of US cities."

"every artist needs cheap space-and plenty of it. So artists move to poor areas. And those areas begin to change. According to Ley, when artists move to poor inner city neighborhoods property prices inflate six to tenfold within a decade."

"Ironically, artists who seek out poor areas for an "anti-establishment" aesthetic become accomplices in the gentrification game and end up bringing the bourgeois culture they fled to their new neighborhoods.

"Nick Mottern, a carpenter interviewed by the "New York Times," said, "If I would have known that this grand artist scheme was to create a layer on top of the African-American community that was already living here, I wouldn't have participated."

And in the article "Gentrification and the Arts" by Alison Konecki, Sylvia Robinson, Executive Director of Emergence Community Arts Collective said, in reference to a Washington, DC neighborhood, "You can't just truck in resources. You have to learn to work with the neighborhood, the culture that's there."

I appreciate the drive to enhance Lawrence's cultural community and I support it, but it must be done carefully and with great attention paid to the consequences development can have on our residential neighborhoods. We must look to the examples of other communities and evaluate their experiences before we make sweeping designations.

Please do not rush this. First, do the research, ask the tough questions, form a task force, and most of all be responsible to the residents of Lawrence's neighborhoods by including them in the process. Then, if it makes sense, consider making a 'District.'

Sincerely,
Dave Loewenstein
740 Rhode Island, #1
Lawrence, KS 66044

Sources

The Gentrification Game
<http://www.nyfa.org/level4.asp?id=176&fid=1&sid=51&tid=169>

Blame the Bohemians: The Gentrification of Bushwick Brooklyn
<http://www.artwrit.com/article/blame-the-bohemians-the-gentrification-of-bushwick-brooklyn/>

Gentrification: Artists and Yuppies Working Together
<http://www.riverwestcurrents.org/2002/July/000036.html>

Our Town; City's Artists Are Its Pride, And A Pain
<http://www.nytimes.com/1999/05/23/nyregion/our-towns-city-s-artists-are-its-pride-and-a-pain.html>

Gentrification and the Arts
<http://emergingsf.org/?p=860>

The Fine Art of Gentrification
http://www.abcnorio.org/about/history/fine_art.html