Providing space for artists benefits community

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an organization that works with underrepresented artists to create space that allows them to continue their practice. Public Functionary currently occupies multiple studios and exhibits space in the building and has evolving needs, Bishop said.

Artspace also has met with the Northeast Minneapolis Arts District board, said Josh Blanc, a Northeast artist, resident and Arts District board chair. “They gave us the opportunity to weigh in, and they embraced us. I have yet to see a negative concept … they’re doing ecological things, they’re doing thoughtful planning, and they’re including a lot of people that are marginalized, people who don’t always even get an opportunity."

Blanc reflected on how artists who started out in the district have developed over the years into mid-career and full-career artists with evolving space needs. Sometimes lack of space can lose experienced artists and valuable mentors to leave the community, he said. “So now they will be offering opportunities for those artists to move to the next level, and there’s space for them.”

Artspace’s specialization means that they know what artists’ needs are, such as good lighting, electrical power for equipment like kilns and welders, and flex workspace, somewhat like the Arts District advocated for, Blanc said. “They have an execution record that shows that they understand what they’re up against.”

Stormwater showcase

The passage between the two buildings slated for the live/work spaces will be transformed into Stormwater Street, a system of roof drains, native plant beds, and trenches that collect and control the rate of flow of stormwater, essentially filtering and pretreating it before it reaches storm drains. Open trenches along the street will carry the water away from the site and to the drains. “It’s right there for people to see and enjoy and get that connection of … how stormwater is managed,” said Ali Bebeau. “It seems like they’re doing ecological things, they’re doing thoughtful planning, and they’re including a lot of people that are marginalized, people who don’t always even get an opportunity.”

Bebeau designed the site to become “Lake Van Buren” as Handberg calls it, referring to one of the streets that runs through the site.

Community connections

Other improvements to the site, which is bounded by railroad tracks and accessed by turning a series of corners, will open the Northrup King space to the surrounding neighborhood. “We have very much turned our lens outward a little bit … We’ve been trying to spend a lot of time thinking about how this campus fits into the larger Northeast Minneapolis Arts District area,” said Handberg.

On the northwest corner of the property, opening an existing gate onto 18th Avenue Northeast near Monroe Street will make it easier to get to the nearby Solar Arts and Casket Arts buildings. Adding a bike lane and a pedestrian way along the railroad tracks will provide easy passage from Central Avenue to the various buildings on the campus and to the gate on 18th, Handberg explained.

The physical connections are not the only ways the community will benefit from providing space for artists, said Brenda Kayzar, of Urban Design Consulting. Kayzar is a Northeast resident and economic development consultant who specializes in the creative sector. Kayzar, a former board member of the Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association, puts into context how the presence of artists in the Northrup King Building — and elsewhere in Northeast — connects to the local economy. When the building was converted into studio, gallery, and retail spaces, she said, “you have … 350 small businesses, all these entrepreneurs, that are producing something. They go out, and they shop, they go have lunch, they go buy coffee, they go buy supplies and then … they also think about living in the area. They become residents.”

Waiting and seeing

“I think it’s very positive,” said Loreta Bebeau. “It seems like they’re making this a showcase project.” She said that she is not overly worried about the future of her studio, but nonetheless, “Everybody is just watching, listening.”

That’s true for Jack Pavlik. He has concerns that the residential space might result in “quiet hours” and affect his ability to work with metal and woodworking equipment during off-hours. He said that when he inquired about this when the plans were presented to Northrup King tenants, Artspace said that hasn’t been a problem at their other properties.

“Artspace gave a supportive response to my concern, and that was appreciated, but we won’t know until we have live-in tenants in the building,” he said.

Full disclosure: Northeasterner reporter/photographer Karen Kraco co-manages a studio/gallery in the Northrup King Building.