

Thursday, Sept. 3, 2015

Artspace study finds critical need of affordable live/work housing for creative sector in River North Denver

DENVER - Affordable space for the creative sector is needed throughout Denver and the need is especially critical in the River North (RiNo) area, according to a feasibility study conducted by Artspace – the nation’s leading developer of arts facilities – and commissioned by Denver Arts & Venues with support from the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative, JP Morgan Chase and The Denver Foundation.

The study is the first major study of the space needs for Denver area artists and creative businesses since 2008. A survey conducted as part of the study identified a need for up to 90 live/work units of workforce housing – residences that contain added space for studios – for artists and their families as well as a strong demand for artist studios, creative studios and community space.

The yearlong study included stakeholder focus groups, stakeholder interviews, community visioning sessions, preliminary site analysis and modeling of a potential project. A potential project would provide the needed 90 affordable live/work units for the creative sector with a mix of efficiencies, one, two and three bedroom units. The concept also includes ground floor commercial space for the creative sector, including working studios, retail/exhibition/office space with a blend of long term, short term and occasional use rentals along with community space.

“RiNo has the market for a very large project,” said Artspace Senior Vice President of Consulting and Strategic Partnerships Wendy Holmes. “If developed by Artspace, it would be the second largest project in Artspace’s portfolio of 38 projects around the country.”

The study found that more than 1,000 individual creative people identified a need for affordable work and/or living space in Denver; multiple sites in RiNo could be attained for the purpose of creating a long-term stronghold of affordable space for the creative sector; and that the pending November vote for the RiNo Business Improvement District (BID) and General Improvement District (GID) will be critical for the future of this area to be a more sustainable art and creative district.

RiNo is at a tipping point according to Holmes, in that affordable spaces for artists and other creatives are rapidly disappearing. The popularity of the RiNo district has made real estate more valuable, and that trend in turn has meant higher prices that many artists cannot afford.

Quantifying the need

Year after year, the City and County of Denver continues to have a vibrant and competitive creative economy – locally, regionally and nationally. Denver is home to more than 3,200 arts-related businesses that provide approximately 30,400 creative jobs.

Artspace has been working throughout Colorado in recent years. Artspace Loveland Lofts, the first phase of Artspace’s initial Colorado project, is in operation. The second phase of the Loveland project, the renovation of the adjacent historic Loveland Feed and Grain as a creative sector incubator, is in predevelopment. Artspace is also in early predevelopment on a mixed-use affordable project in Lakewood. Additionally, Artspace is a lead partner in the newly launched *Space to Create, Colorado*, a state-led initiative developing up to nine affordable arts projects in rural Colorado communities.

“It’s a pivotal time to create sustainable opportunities to preserve and create affordable spaces for Denver’s creative sector which contributes to the economic vibrancy within the neighborhoods,” said Lisa Gedgudas with Denver Arts & Venues. “Artists and creative businesses are becoming displaced by rapid development, population growth, rising rent and low inventory.”

According to Gedgaudas, Denver’s fast growing population of creative businesses, organizations and entrepreneurs will continue to migrate outside the city limits without a plan to preserve affordability. The creation and timing of permanently affordable space – working and living – is urgently needed if neighborhoods like RiNo continue to be a place for established and emerging creative businesses and entrepreneurs.

In releasing its findings, Artspace recommended the establishment of a working partnership between Artspace and the City and County of Denver to identify predevelopment sources to build the 90 units of permanently affordable live/work workforce housing for individual artists and their families in the RiNo area.

“We hope to identify predevelopment funding in 2015 and to secure a site in the RiNo Arts District for a mixed use affordable artist housing project,” added Holmes.

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About Denver Arts & Venues

Denver Arts & Venues’ mission is to amplify Denver’s quality of life and economic vitality through premier public venues, arts and entertainment opportunities. Arts & Venues is the City and County of Denver agency responsible for operating some of the region’s most renowned facilities, including Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre, the Denver Performing Arts Complex, Colorado Convention Center, Denver Coliseum and McNichols Civic Center Building. Arts & Venues also oversees the Denver Public Art Program, Create Denver, SCFD Tier III granting process, Arts Education Fund and other entertainment and cultural events such as the Five Points Jazz Festival, Urban Arts Fund, P.S. You Are Here and implementation of IMAGINE 2020: Denver’s Cultural Plan. www.ArtsandVenues.com

About Artspace

Artspace is the nation’s leader in artist-led community transformation, with more than 37 projects in operation across the country and another dozen in development, representing a unique, \$600 million investment in America’s arts infrastructure. With headquarters in Minneapolis and offices in Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, Seattle and Washington D.C., Artspace is America’s leading developer of arts facilities and has served as a consultant to hundreds of communities and arts organizations nationwide. To date we have completed nearly 2,000 affordable live/work units for artists and their families as well as more than a million square feet of non-residential space for artists and arts organizations. Additional information is available at www.artspace.org.

About the North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative

The North Denver Cornerstone Collaborative (NDCC) is an initiative of Mayor Michael B. Hancock to strategically align six redevelopment projects in Globeville Elyria, Swansea and RiNo. These six projects create unprecedented opportunities to rebuild a connected community and energize a gateway to downtown Denver. The NDCC ensures integrated planning and deliberate connections among converging projects are taking place. Projects include Neighborhood Plans for Globeville and Elyria Swansea, National Western Center, Brighton Boulevard Corridor Redevelopment, River North and the investment in the South Platte River, Reconstruction of I-70 East and RTD’s East, Gold and North Metro Lines. Additional information can be found at www.denvergov.org/NDCC.