

Carrboro's Our Town Proposal Narrative 2014

The arts in Carrboro are part of our history, and today, an important part of who we are. This is our time and our future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY - BOARD OF ALDERMEN REVIEW

The *Our Town Narrative 2014* is draft-in-progress prepared by The Art Center and other local partners for review by the Carrboro Board of Aldermen at their regular meeting on November 19, 2013.

In this draft proposal, The ArtsCenter and the Town of Carrboro, as the designated lead partners, request \$50,000 from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support a two-phased \$115,100 cultural district planning project for Carrboro.

The proposed project would create the Carrboro Arts and Creativity District. Its design and implementation, informed by a participatory planning project that will engage diverse constituencies of local residents, small businesses, non-profit organizations, and public agencies.

Its overarching goals are two-fold: 1) To nurture and sustain the robust creative economy that has emerged over recent years in Carrboro, including arts-based organizations and firms as well as businesses that are not necessarily thought of as "artistic" but nonetheless produce creative products or services; and 2) to expand art-making and arts appreciation opportunities for Carrboro residents and visitors.

Across all of these activities, the proposed Carrboro Arts and Creativity District will build upon the multiple, interrelated opportunities afforded by our town's well-documented creative assets, our ongoing commitment to building and sustaining a vibrant local economy, and our the civic brand to be selected soon.

The proposal is especially timely given the rapid pace of development currently ongoing in Carrboro, including the recent opening of the downtown Hampton Inn and Suites Hotel, the proposed relocation of the Arts Center, and the re-opening of the PTA Thrift Shop, among others.

At the November 19 meeting of the Carrboro Board of Alderman, the core planning team developing this proposal seeks the allocation of \$25,000 from the Town as a match for the more than \$30,000 already pledged from the project's implementation partners.

The final proposal will be submitted to the NEA's Our Town program on or before January 14, 2014. If approved by the NEA, the monies so allocated will fund the second phase of the planning process, which would begin on or after September 1, 2014. As outlined in the draft proposal, however, the first phase of the planning project, with support from the Town and the implementation partners, will begin as early as January 2014.

The draft offered here represents a detailed blueprint for the proposed planning process, fully describing both phases and the project deliverables. It is expected, however, that the core team will continue to hone and polish the current draft—in particular to make a compelling, persuasive case in support of the timely opportunity for undertaking such a planning process here in Carrboro—before the final version is submitted to the NEA in early 2014.

Attachment A: Details of the Project Narrative

a) Major Project Activities The Arts Center and the Town of Carrboro request \$50,000 support for a \$115,100 cultural district planning project that will sustain its creative economy and expand access to the arts for its citizens. Since The Arts Center began in 1974, Carrboro has quadrupled in population, transforming itself from a cotton mill town of 5,100 into a densely populated small city cited as one of the top arts towns in the USA by John Villani in his 2005 book, *The 100 Best Art Towns in America*. The Town supports the arts, arts-based businesses, two galleries, and several arts festivals. The challenge for Carrboro and its cultural industry is to maintain, in the face of change, the conditions that led to its strength here. Its natural cultural district has grown organically; due more to a theme first articulated in the 1983 “Downtown Carrboro: Potential and Strategies” report, than a specific plan. With downtown Carrboro now experiencing its greatest change since the Carr Mill Mall renovation 35 years ago; this is a vital opportunity to create a clearly articulated, community-embraced plan for its arts and creativity district. Such creative placemaking will encompass creative asset mapping, creative industry cluster/hub development, public art, community engagement design activities, as well as affordable work, living, and exhibition spaces for artists and creative businesses. These actions are consistent with Carrboro plans including the Local Living Economy Task Force Recommendations and the Regional Technology Strategies (RTS) study, *Creating Carrboro’s Economic Future*. They speak to the powerful sense of community and buying locally in Carrboro.

Downtown Carrboro and its arts economy face challenges that include: 1) a new shopping development planned on the western edge of town and a 2013 super Wal-Mart four miles south of downtown; 2) the redevelopment of the south side of the 200-300 blocks of East Main Street that includes The ArtsCenter, Cats Cradle, WCOM community radio, and the first hotel in Carrboro; 3) uneven distribution of business acumen and access to services within the local creative economy; and 4) housing, work space, and living costs that make it difficult for creative industry workers to live or work here. Carrboro can identify its arts vision, plan its cultural district, and more effectively use its creative economy for economic development to create a new model for sustaining community cultural development. The Carrboro Cultural and Entertainment District will extend westward along both sides of East Main Street from the Chapel Hill town limits. It will encompass the central business district on both sides of Weaver and West Main Streets and the Town Commons before reaching its western terminus just west of Town Hall. The District will include The ArtsCenter, WCOM, Cat’s Cradle, DSI Comedy Theatre, Kalisher, The Art Therapy Institute, Weaver Street Market, galleries, restaurants, bars, and coffee shops, Carr Mill Mall, music stores, and the Town-owned Century Center.

b) Goals and impacts on community livability, including serving as a model. Many creative placemaking efforts focus on economic revitalization using cultural assets. This project addresses how to maintain a successful creative economy as the town evolves. The Carrboro Arts & Creativity District will explore critical models in 1) maintaining and enhancing a strong creative economy in the face of significant change and gentrification, including building new infrastructure for the creative economy; 2) refining a natural cultural district into a distinct, planned cultural district; and 3) fostering collaboration

among governmental agencies, non-profits, businesses, and artists. Specific outputs will include developing systems to support the incubation, growth, and sustainability of creative businesses in Carrboro and enhancing the role of the arts within town government. A community vision will emerge from the process and guide planning for the district and the creative economy hub within it. It will foster creation, production, dissemination, and support of the arts and creative businesses. As outlined in section (e) below, the first year of Our Town-funded work will involve an iterative community process employing public and stakeholder meetings, surveys, existing town bodies, and focus groups. This is far more about community building, strengthening creative businesses and providing access to the arts than tourism.

Draft plans for the District will be ready at the start of the second year, during which the plan will be tested, evaluated, and vetted through public and stakeholder meetings. A completed plan will be submitted to the Carrboro Board of Aldermen for formal adoption and announcement during summer 2015. The comprehensive plan will link creativity to economic development, while affording all citizens of Carrboro increased opportunities to explore their creative impulses, building cultural and social capital. During the planning process, the land use and funding opportunities for a District will be examined. The plan will address such issues as nurturing the creative workforce, supporting arts based businesses, and creating a physical environment that facilitates a creative economy, i.e. streetscape enhancement, entranceway corridors, wayfinding aids, multi-modal transportation opportunities. A focus on community needs and vision will create cultural tourism.

c) Outcomes and measurement The Carrboro Arts & Creativity District will address the NEA goal of Livability: Strengthening Communities Through the Arts by strengthening its creative cluster/hub, fostering a more attractive, accessible downtown, improving access to the arts for all citizens, bringing different populations together through innovative cultural partnerships, maintaining a sense of identity through the arts, inventorying and creating public art and developing standards, making it affordable for artists, businesses, and non-profits to remain in the District, and engaging artists to teach and create public art. The project will advance a secondary NEA outcome of Engagement through community-based processes and a quadrilateral partnership of government, businesses, non-profits, and individuals. Creation and Learning will also result. The project will be quantitatively measured on: 1) achievement of deliverables; 2) establishment of baseline and annual metrics for evaluating livability and creative vitality using tools drawn from the CVI from WESTAF, QOL indicators, ArtPlace vibrancy indicators, and the creative population of the District; and 3) local economic impact of the arts.

d) Budget The Carrboro Board of Aldermen voted on November 19, 2013 to allocate \$25,000 toward the match. Partners have committed to \$38,100 worth of in-kind staff time. The Committee will seek additional cash commitments from foundation, public, and private sources. The current budget calls for a total \$115,100, two-year project.

e) Schedule of key dates including benchmarks and deliverables e) Schedule of key dates including benchmarks and deliverables Work for Carrboro's Downtown District plan began in fall 2012 with the formation of a planning committee consisting of Recreation and Parks Director Anita Jones-McNair and her staff members Rah Trost and Dennis Joines,

Community & Economic Development Director Annette Stone, and Julie Tomkovick and Executive Director Art Menius from The Arts Center. Public and stakeholder meetings occurred during December 2012 and a grant proposal for an Our Town project was submitted to NEA in January 2013. Although not successfully funded in 2013, The Town of Carrboro in partnership with the ArtsCenter has continued to move forward with Downtown District planning

Phase One of the Downtown District creative placemaking work will begin with \$15,000 from the Town of Carrboro, \$9,800 from Strowd-Roses Foundation, and \$1,500 from Orange County Arts Commission and \$2,100 in-kind from The ArtsCenter and Town of Carrboro. Between January and November of 2014 public engagement meetings will occur while data collection efforts will result in creative asset mapping. The creative asset mapping will include an inventory of creative enterprises, jobs, venues, events, organizations, and workspaces that exist in Downtown Carrboro. Surveys at public events such as Fourth of July, Carrboro Day, Carrboro Music Festival, Carrboro Film Festival, and West End Poetry Festival will allow for collecting data for economic impact reports and continued project planning. These and other data collection efforts will help to define current economic conditions within the Downtown District. Data will be presented at community meetings where participants will be asked to help vision a vibrant, active culture, arts, entertainment and creative ecosystem in Downtown Carrboro. These meetings will occur between January – March 2015 and information collected will be added to other data collected.

Our Town grant monies allocated in 2014 will be used to implement Phase Two of the Downtown Arts & Creativity District planning. This phase begins with the data collection, mapping, and community vision information collected in Phase One from which a draft plan will be developed. The draft plan may include mapping and recommendations for development (uses and/or building forms) in the downtown reflecting the community vision of growth and expansion within the district, and recommendations for visually unifying the Downtown Art & Creativity District and strengthening its identity as a “place” where culture, arts, entertainment and creativity thrive (i.e. urban design elements, wayfinding, multi-modal transportation infrastructure). The plan may address issues of affordability for a growing segment of craftsman/artisans that manufacture goods and provide services to the community. Opportunities for creative cluster/entrepreneurial hubs may be identified. Finally visions for innovation in public art projects and art engagement will be explored and possible implementation strategies will be tested.

A draft plan will be ready for presentation to partners, stakeholders and presented to the community beginning in June 2015. Feedback from these presentations will be incorporated into a final draft and design standards developed by September 2015. Action plans for implementation and possible funding sources will be developed and presented to the Board of Aldermen by January 2016. Pilot projects for public art and art engagement activities will be tested and results reported by June of 2016. Final plans for the Downtown District including recommendations and implementation statements, grant requirements met and final grant reporting completed by August 2016.

f) Partners and responsibilities Lead partner The ArtsCenter will administer the Our Town grant and provide project leadership, including \$10,000 in-kind staff time, supplies,

and facilities. The Town of Carrboro will provide \$25,000 in cash, \$12,600 in-kind staff time, and the support of town events and organizations. Research and planning, especially for enhancing and evaluating the creative economy cluster will be conducted by Stuart Rosenfeld. Szostak Design, an award winning local firm, will provide design services. Veteran community development specialist Robert Donnan of Saxapahaw, NC will facilitate public and stakeholder meetings and distill the results into summary reports. Szostak, Donnan, and Rosenfeld are committed to \$17,500 in-kind contributions. Involving artists as integral parts of the team is essential. Sacrificial Poets will lead efforts to connect with and learn from younger artists, especially in spoken word.

g) Target community The primary target community consists of the 20,168 citizens of Carrboro, whose quality of life will be maintained or enhanced through access to the arts and a local economy and tax base supported by creative businesses and artists. The project will build their awareness of all forms of community capital. The secondary target consists of residents of adjacent Chapel Hill, Orange County, and Chatham County, as well as cultural day trippers from the Triad, Durham, and Raleigh. Artists and businesses and nonprofits, both creative and otherwise, located in Carrboro or considering moving here are further targets.

h) Marketing plans The ArtsCenter, the Town, and other partners will promote the project via press releases, PSAs, websites, advertising, personal appearances, posterage, and social media. Reports on progress will air at 6 PM Mondays on community radio station, WCOM. Carrboro.com will provide coverage. The Committee will report on its work to the Board of Aldermen. Proposed, draft, and final plans for the Cultural and Entertainment District will be made available. The Committee will reach out to local newspapers, WCHL and WUNC radio, and to WUNC-TV. The project will form a core component of Carrboro's ever stronger brand.

i) Documentation and evaluation WCOM and The Peoples Channel, cable access TV, will be invited to record public meetings. Reports and plans will be made available on the Internet to encourage community support and to permit others to learn from our work. A report on key learning will be an output. To evaluate the success of the project, RTS will create and disseminate a more accurate method for assessment of the impact of this and similar work.

j) Accessibility All new designs for the district will comply with ADA and exhibit sensitivity to creating public art and spaces that can be enjoyed by all. Increasing access to arts experiences for people of limited means and all significant demographic groups is a specific goal of the project. The Town of Carrboro has a progressive policy of non-discrimination.