

Creating an Arts & Entertainment District in Your Community (The City of Pawtucket Experience) – Herb Weiss, Economic & Cultural Affairs Officer

1. Gaining Political & Stakeholder Consensus

Determine if the State or County has a designated arts district program in place. If no, contact your Mayor or Town Manager and get them to support your efforts to create a local arts district. Organize community meeting, inviting local and state officials, to gather input public input and galvanize support for this initiative.

2. Creating Your Vision and Road Map

Hire an expert to work closely with local government to develop an arts vision plan or “Road Map” to how to create an arts district for your artist community and to develop programs & services for these individuals.

3. Local Government’s Role

The Mayor or Town Manager must support the creation of an Arts District for the policy to succeed. A City official, who works with local businesses, can be designated as an Arts Advocate to work with both artists and art groups. The philosophy behind your community’s economic development efforts becomes, artist are considered small businesses. Consider making the core philosophy of the community’s arts policy is that artists are considered small businesses and should be treated as such. This is key to revitalizing the City through the arts.

4. Officially Creating local Arts & Entertainment District

To institutionalize the City’s arts policy, request the Mayor, Town Manager or Town Administrator, to include a goal in the community’s comprehensive plan, “Continue to promote (your community) Pawtucket as an artist-friendly community and a tourist destination,” in its Economic Development section of its Comprehensive Plan as well as in all later updates. This written goal ensures that the proper policies are established and expanded upon over time as desirable goals for the City.

5. Selling Points to Artists and Creative Sector Companies

Make sure that the top elected officials support the creation of the Arts & Entertainment District. Identify State Tax incentives available. Promote the local and affordability of property to attract artists. Send message out that you have an artist friendly government.

6. Arts Advocate Rolls Out the Red Carpet

Appoint a “Contact Person” to serve as an advocate for both incoming businesses and the existing artist community. This person is a pipeline of information, sharing knowledge about city, state and federal tax incentives, available properties for lease or for sale for studios and live-work lofts, and City and State grants available to support artist programming.

A Community’s Arts Advocate should have an "open door policy," no appointments are necessary. Artists seem to appreciate this attitude. This official must also work closely with developers to revitalize mills into artist lofts and studios or to assist them through the City’s regulatory paperwork.

7. Talk the Talk in Supporting the Arts

Create a grant program to bring artist Programming to your community and to provide operational costs to art groups. Create loan programs, liquor licenses, and provide in-kind services to support the growth of restaurants, galleries and assists art groups. Create weekly opportunities to assist artists and developers go through the local regulatory process.

8. Finally, Document Your Successes...

Identify and document your achievements. Your successes can be used in marketing collateral, during presentations, and given to local press to promote how your newly implemented Arts & Entertainment District has impacted positively on your community.

