

# Arts-Based Neighborhood Revitalization

**Engaging Artists & Creative Entrepreneurs to Identify Policy Recommendations to Support Arts-Based Revitalization in South Downtown, Atlanta**

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## INTRODUCTION

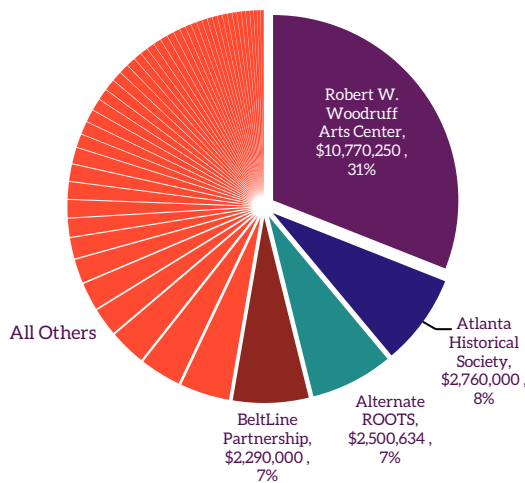
Although the concept of placemaking has existed for decades, since the work of William H. White & Jane Jacobs, in 2010, when the National Endowment for the Arts released its Creative Placemaking report, cities & towns the nation over began discussing the role that arts & culture play in the comprehensive planning realm. Planners & economic development agencies began considering the impact that arts & culture have on local economies, & policy makers began considering how to create conditions that attract & retain artists & their work. These pursuits build on academic work that examines how arts instigate neighborhood change, affect local social capital, & communicate to various audiences. While the conversation around arts & culture often results in a discussion of funds, or the lack thereof, Creative Placemaking as a concept seeks to engage with the appreciative qualities of the arts & cultural realm in cities—what artists have to offer the cities & neighborhoods in which they work & why cities ought to support them (Markussen & Gadwa, 2010).

The pages that follow will touch on the complexity & scarcity of funding for the arts, explore the impact of arts on local economies & the health of arts & culture industries in Atlanta & Georgia, & begin to examine why measuring economic impacts can challenge & undermine attempts to build support for arts & cultural practice into comprehensive planning efforts. Later, we will expound on the effects of arts & artists on neighborhoods, the value of artistic practice to the private development sector, & the interlocked interests of cultural, built environment, & local government sector. Connecting the literature on arts & neighborhood change with a conception of local development interests will set up a platform to position arts & culture public private partnerships as favorable mechanisms for spurring incremental, equitable, & authentic neighborhood revitalization.

Next, the paper will outline various approaches that cities interested in using arts & culture as a device for spurring economic development, covering land use & zoning options, tax benefits & other incentives, & the provision of alternative financing. The following section will connect those policy options to insights gained from qualitative research data gathered in South Downtown Atlanta, an informal arts district currently fighting for survival amidst rapid ownership changes in the neighborhood. By examining the major themes that arose from interviews & participant observation of various exercises, it became possible to begin matching policy alternatives to the stated perspectives, interests, challenges, & aspirations of the artists & cultural entrepreneurs currently practicing in South Downtown. Lastly, the paper will engage with current planning documents which cover the South Downtown area, using the qualitative data to locate opportunities for plan improvement, to challenge contradictions & gaps in the current planning framework, & to suggest alternatives for innovative partnerships that would cultivate the sort of generative arts & culture-based placemaking which lead to the positive social & built environment outcomes that planners seek.

## Navigating Complex Funding

### Top 50 Recipients of Grants from FC 1000 Foundations to Recipients in Georgia, for Arts and Culture, 2012



### Top 50 FC 1000 Foundations Awarding Grants to Recipients in Georgia, for Arts and Culture 2012

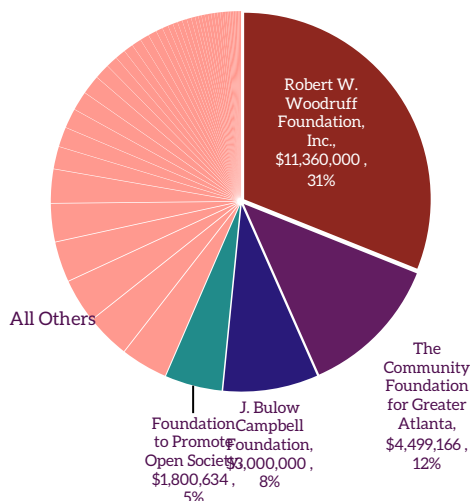


Figure 1. Foundation Center, 2017

Arts & cultural investment has been a recognized method of building cultural capital & spurring investment in neighborhoods for some time (Borup, 2006; Chapple & Jackson, 2010; Jackson & Herranz, 2006; Nowak, 2007; Stern & Seifert, 2010). Because of the wide array of program requirements, time tables, & scales of various sources of funding that support arts & culture, small arts organizations often cannot access them. Few resources to support arts-based community development exist in the Atlanta region, & most of those reside in area foundations that focus primarily on other areas of investment. Arts organizations in Atlanta need & want training to operate with the degree of professionalization & organizational capacity needed to compete for ever-shrinking funding pools. The state of funding from foundations in Atlanta is summarized in Figure 1—the most recent data available for public download is from 2012. Over half of the funds for arts awarded to organizations in Georgia went to just four organizations—all well-established organizations. For example, Alternate ROOTS, a 40-year-old Atlanta organization with the mission of providing “support [for] the creation & presentation of original art, in all its forms, which is rooted in a particular community of place, tradition or spirit” is one of the primary recipients, receiving \$2.5 million in 2012—7% of the total amount received in that year (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> This mission aligns precisely with those of many smaller arts-based community developers with small staff, less capacity, & a more customized approach to community development tailor-made for the specific community which hosts them.

For foundations giving awards specifically for arts & culture in the State of Georgia, the majority of foundation money comes from just four funders. This distribution of funders & grants means that large, high-capacity arts organizations have a better chance of securing funding from the larger arts funders, who receive so many requests each year that the degree of professionalism & technicality required to qualify for the funds

<sup>1</sup><https://alternateroots.org/about-us/>

remains out of reach for many smaller organizations. This explains why Woodruff Arts Center was the largest recipient of arts & culture grants in 2012 while the Woodruff Foundation was the largest grantor. Large institutions like this one can navigate the infrastructure of foundation funding with relative ease, because they are in fact a part of that infrastructure.

When we start to look at the size of the pie being divvied up among myriad competing arts & culture organizations at work in Georgia, we find that although the number of funders making grants for this purpose is rising modestly (Figure 2), the total value of funds given (Figure 3) & the number of recipients (Figure 4) have remained stagnant. Lackluster outlooks in the number of recipients & value of grants for the arts beg the question the question, How are Atlanta's foundations spending their money? The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, lauded for its high-touch investment strategy & commitment to the Atlanta region & its neighborhoods, gave just 12% of its 2015 grant budget to arts & culture, with the bulk of the funds going instead to education & health initiatives (Figure 5).

Where does that leave neighborhood-based arts organizations in Atlanta? Small scale, neighborhood-based arts organizations in South Downtown & other parts of Atlanta have put inestimable personal funds & sweat equity into communities of cultural expression & artistic experimentation, but these organizations need active support in the form of policy & other resources to thrive & expand. Even as funding for arts & culture-based placemaking in Georgia remains relatively small, the fact remains that investing in arts & cultural enterprise helps foster equitable & stable versions of neighborhood change, a claim which will be explored more in this paper. That said, city policymakers & planners must engage the conceptual & theoretical links between arts & cultural practice & neighborhood change to provide the justificatory element for increasing resources to these efforts.

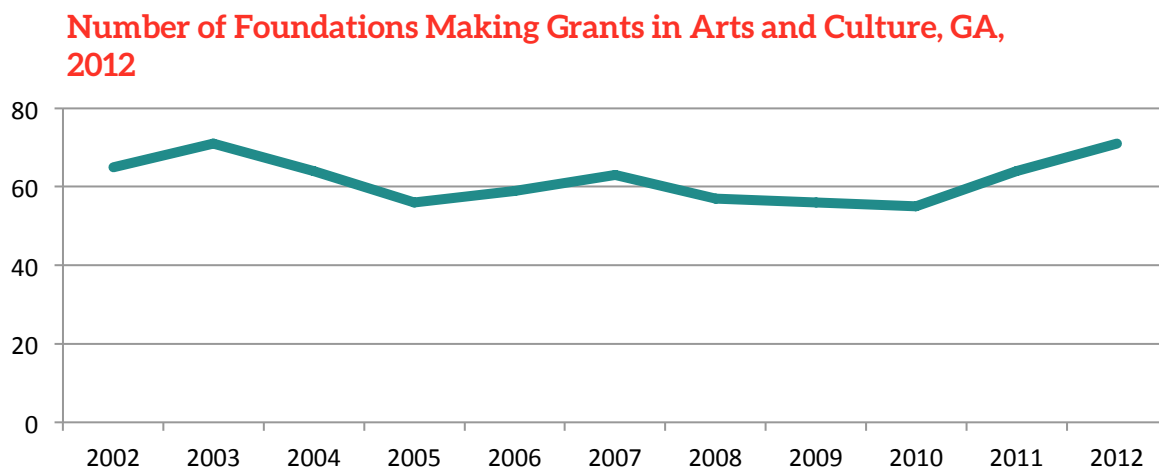


Figure 2. Foundation Center, 2017

### Value of Foundation Grants Given for Arts and Culture, GA 2012



Figure 3. Source: Foundation Center, 2017

### Number of Recipients of Foundation Grants in Arts and Culture, GA, 2012

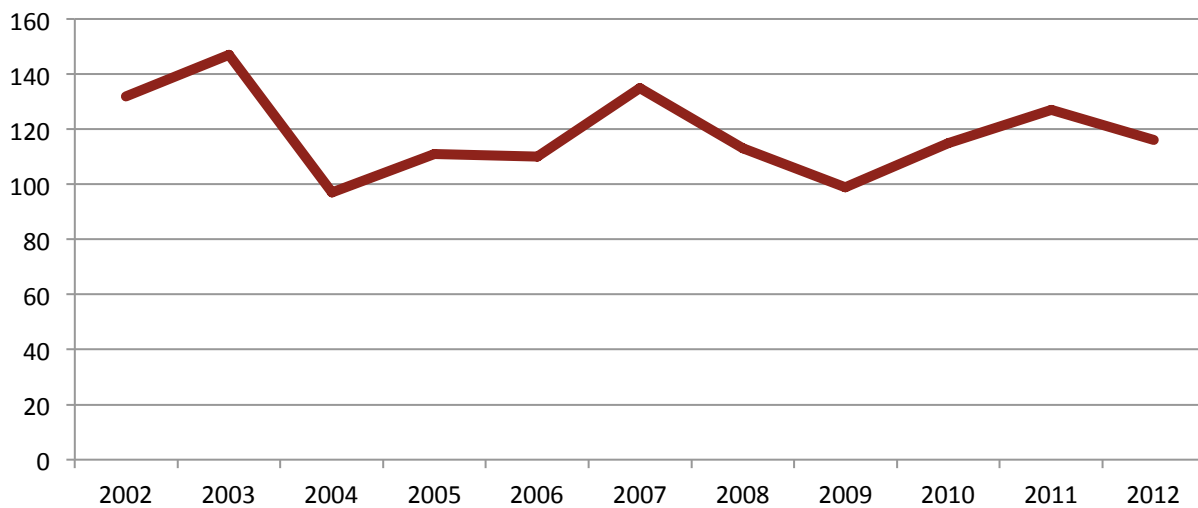


Figure 4. Source: Foundation Center 2017.

## Community Foundation, Grants by Issue Area, 2015

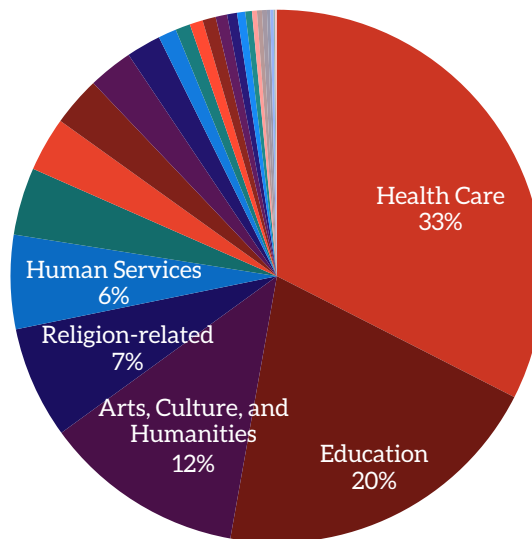


Figure 5.. Source: Community Foundation Annual Report, 2015

## Arts & Culture in the Economy of Atlanta & Georgia

Although growth in employment in arts, entertainment, & recreation fell sharply throughout the United States during the recession, including in the Atlanta Metro & peer metros, the industries have resumed growing at increasing rates (see Figure 4). Although growth slowed again in 2010-2011 (the most recent year for which data is available for download), Atlanta metro's percent growth in arts & entertainment employment continues to outpace that of Austin metro, Raleigh metro, & the United States. For more insight into arts industries in Georgia as compared to the country at large, we turn to location quotients. Employment location quotients allow a comparison of the concentration of employment in a particular industry in a state relative to the nation.

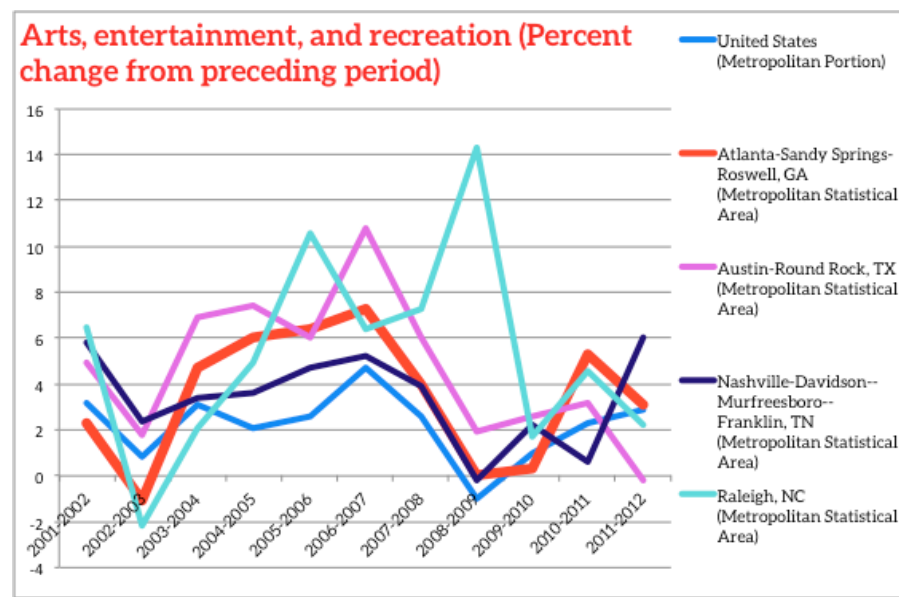


Figure 6. Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis

For example, a location quotient of 1.0 signifies an industry is as prominent in the state as it is in the country on average. A location quotient of 1.2 signifies an industry is 20% more concentrated in a state than in the country at large—meaning the state has a competitive advantage in this industry.



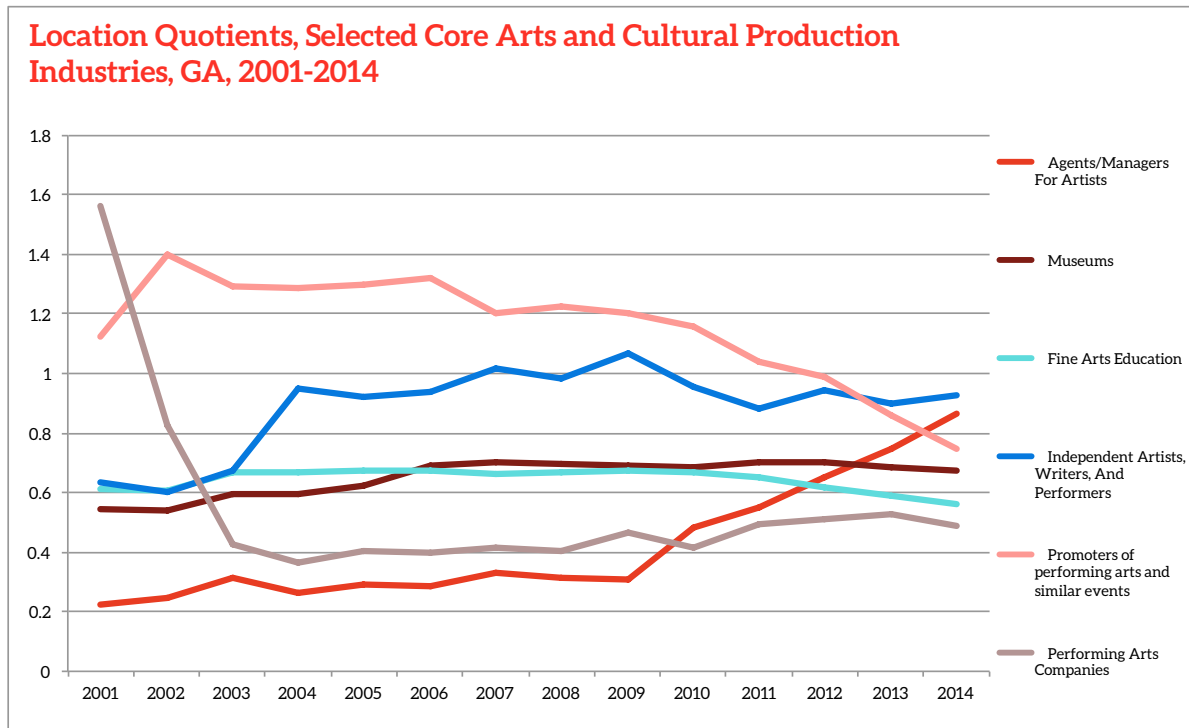


Figure 7. Source: Arts & Cultural Production Satellite Account at the Bureau of Economic Analysis (ACPSA)

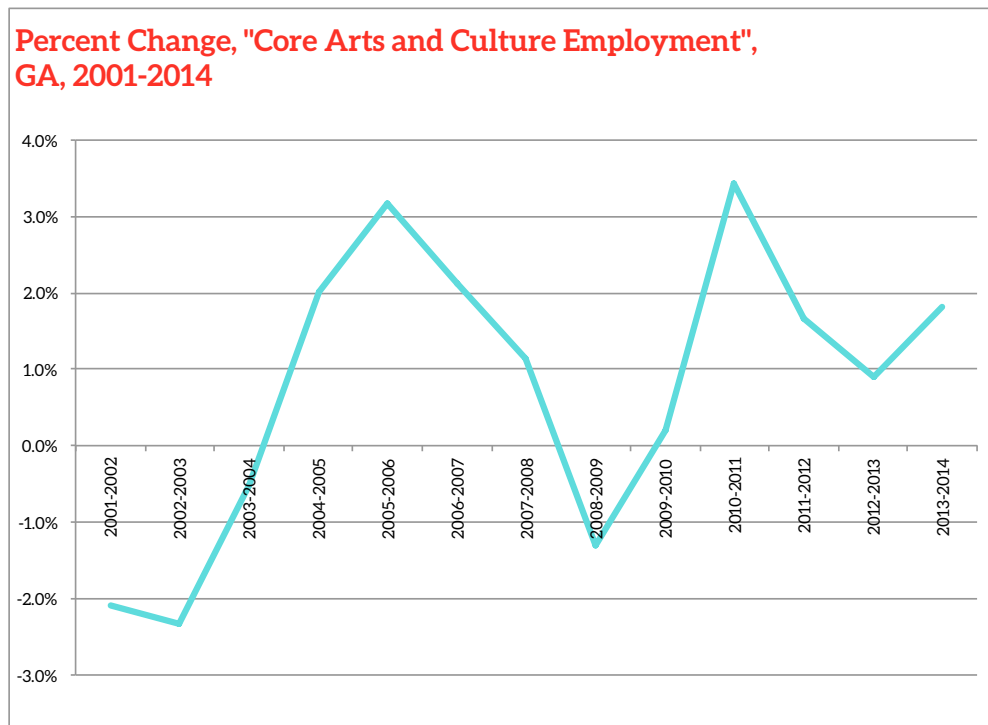


Figure 8. Source: Arts & Cultural Production Satellite Account at the Bureau of Economic Analysis (ACPSA)

Employment in Core Arts and Cultural Production Industries, year-over-year percent change, 2001-2014		2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014
Total Employment		-1.0%	-0.8%	1.6%	2.1%	2.1%	1.0%	-1.4%	-5.6%	-1.0%	1.0%	1.2%	1.7%	3.2%
Core Arts and Cultural Production		-2.1%	-2.3%	-0.5%	2.0%	3.2%	2.1%	1.1%	-1.3%	0.2%	3.4%	1.7%	0.9%	1.8%
Advertising		-7.2%	2.6%	2.9%	1.1%	6.2%	2.2%	1.2%	-8.9%	-1.3%	11.3%	1.1%	-2.5%	8.5%
Architectural Services		-3.7%	-2.8%	-4.3%	1.1%	9.5%	5.9%	-0.5%	-23.8%	-14.3%	-1.5%	-1.7%	5.7%	9.1%
Landscape Architectural Services		-13.3%	9.1%	-15.1%	-1.2%	13.7%	-6.7%	-13.8%	-33.3%	-7.0%	1.4%	-0.2%	7.6%	16.8%
Interior Design Services		-4.1%	0.2%	4.6%	10.0%	4.1%	5.2%	-5.2%	-17.2%	-9.7%	2.4%	6.6%	1.8%	15.6%
Industrial Design Services		4.5%	-7.7%	-41.4%	11.6%	2.4%	-7.0%	7.6%	-18.8%	-20.2%	71.1%	6.3%	20.5%	-1.1%
Graphic Design Services		-7.9%	0.1%	-4.1%	-0.4%	2.1%	5.4%	2.6%	-6.6%	-5.8%	4.6%	6.9%	3.1%	-2.9%
Computer Systems Design		-10.8%	-2.9%	2.2%	1.3%	1.2%	2.1%	2.3%	1.8%	3.4%	4.5%	5.0%	1.5%	0.9%
Photography and Photofinishing Services		-2.8%	-5.6%	-4.4%	-3.1%	1.0%	-8.7%	-6.5%	-14.2%	-10.4%	-2.9%	-7.1%	-5.8%	-5.0%
All Other Design Services		-5.7%	154.0%	-0.8%	-10.3%	-0.9%	-2.7%	-67.0%	-2.8%	8.6%	5.3%	7.5%	7.0%	2.2%
Fine Arts Education		5.2%	15.4%	6.7%	4.3%	4.1%	2.1%	4.0%	-1.0%	2.6%	1.7%	0.2%	2.9%	1.8%
Publishing		-7.2%	-3.9%	-2.8%	-0.4%	0.2%	0.7%	0.3%	-9.6%	-4.7%	0.1%	2.0%	1.3%	0.0%
Motion Pictures		18.4%	-17.1%	-5.4%	-1.5%	-1.9%	-0.3%	-0.9%	9.9%	-5.0%	2.7%	7.6%	14.1%	5.5%
Sound Recording		-32.9%	-5.5%	-0.2%	3.4%	-6.6%	-12.6%	-12.7%	-8.6%	-7.6%	4.7%	-1.5%	-3.8%	14.2%
Performing Arts Companies		-49.5%	-50.0%	-15.2%	8.8%	-2.7%	5.3%	-3.4%	6.9%	-13.3%	19.4%	2.2%	4.3%	-3.6%
Promoters of performing arts and similar events		32.8%	-5.9%	5.3%	4.2%	3.7%	-3.3%	3.3%	-2.0%	-3.0%	-7.3%	-3.9%	-4.5%	-4.1%
Agents/Managers For Artists		9.8%	24.8%	-14.3%	17.1%	3.6%	27.0%	-4.9%	-6.0%	54.7%	18.6%	21.2%	17.8%	23.6%
Independent Artists, Writers, And Performers		2.5%	21.2%	38.2%	-0.3%	9.1%	13.1%	-5.9%	-1.1%	-12.5%	-4.5%	9.7%	-1.3%	7.4%
Museums		-1.0%	9.6%	2.2%	6.8%	12.3%	5.8%	-0.1%	-4.7%	-1.6%	4.2%	2.1%	1.3%	3.3%

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Arts and Cultural Production Satellite Account, 2014

Table 1

Georgia employment location quotients for core arts & cultural industries—defined by the Arts & Cultural Production Satellite Account at the Bureau of Economic Analysis (ACPSA)—reveal that Georgia maintains modest competitiveness in key cultural production sectors, especially promoters of arts & cultural events, independent artists, writers & performers, & agents/managers of artists, although the state has a competitive advantage in none of these industries as of 2014, the most recent year for which data is available for download (Figure 5). Taking the entire ACPSA core of arts & cultural employment (Figure 6), we notice that Georgia has experienced mostly growth in the years between 2001 & 2014, with the rate of growth increasing most recently in 2012. Policymakers in Atlanta—the cultural, political, & economic capital of the state—should tease out & examine the causes slowing or falling growth in cultural employment. For instance, examining each core arts industry individually raises the following questions: Why has the strength of the arts & culture promotion industry slipped in the past 10 years? What disruption occurred in the performing arts industry between 2001 & 2003, during which time the location quotient for employment plummeted (Figure 5)? To remain competitive with peer cities, leaders in Atlanta need to design policies & programs to be responsive to industry conditions, & which promote the kinds of land use & development patterns which foster creative industries, which by Georgia Council for the Arts' estimation, have an economic impact of over \$60 billion in the state each year (Annual Report, 2016).

Although not all of the industries listed in Table 1 directly engage with the creation of fine arts, many cities have recognized that bolstering arts & cultural offerings in core city neighborhoods attracts firms that do business in other design fields. For example, looking industry-by-industry at core arts production in Table 1 shows design industries including architecture, landscape architecture, advertising, interior design, industrial design, & computer systems design in steady growth following the economic downturn in 2008-2009. These industries represent the type of firm which seeks alternative office space in vibrant, centrally located districts, & which has employees who seek to take up residence in walkable, culturally vital neighborhoods.

## **Connecting Arts Activity & Neighborhood Change**

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Given ongoing budgetary pressures at the state & federal levels, cities must figure out how to leverage tax dollars & sparse federal & state funding creatively with private funds to shape development. The advance of privatization & public-private agreements in urban policymaking has therefore coupled with the retreat of cities from providing social safety nets & major revitalization in struggling areas. Instead, planning & economic development arms have shifted to appealing to the creative class. Decision makers increasingly feel that cities should cater to the young, mobile workforce described by Richard Florida to unleash economic growth & compete in the global economy (2002). Hence, policymakers argue that because creative workers can move anywhere in search of the most desirable bundle of work-life amenities, policy conversations should focus on placemaking as smart economic development policy.

Although theory & practice around conceptions of place vary widely, for the purpose of this paper we will define place as the physical backdrop in which social interactions occur. In other words, places generate & contain meaning for the social groups that inhabit them (Devine-Wright 2009). To adjust to ever-changing global economic structures, cities appeal to young creative professionals in an effort to repopulate cores & grow tax bases. However, when policymakers rely on top down methods to accomplish these ends, organic, neighborhood-based placemaking efforts can be coopted by speculative real estate interests looking to cultivate amenities, not true places (Nicodemus 2013). In order to confront unstable & unwelcomed

neighborhood change—the sort that displaces residents, businesses, & indigenous arts practitioners from places—a reflective, participatory planning practice needs to be employed in conjunction with a comprehensive menu of policy & programs.

“We paid for new awnings because we wanted to. We are going to improve the street because we like to do it.” – Chris Yonkers, co-founder of Mammal Gallery, in 2017 interview

“In South Downtown Atlanta, we aren't coming into a vacuum. We are actually benefiting from the lack of power & voice of folks in South Downtown. It can be very disturbing.” – Grace Kim, board member, Eyedrum Gallery, in 2017 interview

In neighborhoods such as South Downtown that have struggled for decades with disinvestment, vacancy, & decline, cultural activity can catalyze a stable, gradual revitalization (Borup, 2006; Chapple & Jackson, 2010; Jackson & Herranz, 2006; Nowak, 2007; Stern & Seifert, 2010). The impetus for this gradual transformation often comes in the form of sweat equity—painting murals on walls, cleaning up trash, adding landscaping, & organizing inclusive, low-cost art shows & festivals. Artists engage in placemaking activities using minimal resources & a lot of creativity & flexibility. Arts activity tends to cultivate authentic places because, in the process of creating “arts experiences,” the artists passionate about this work end up generating “a quality of program which attracts a larger audience” (Grace Kim, interview, 2017). Furthermore, the colocation of arts activity has a multiplier effect. These efforts attract foot traffic; pedestrians looking to spend money on arts & cultural products, potential new residents, & investment interests take notice of the physical changes implemented by artists & tactile placemakers.

Despite the creativity & vitality brought to artists to neighborhoods, race, ethnicity, class, & other identity markers often divide stakeholders—building owners, residents, & visitors—around conceptions of arts-driven neighborhood transition. Specifically, differing interests arise around property value, traffic effects, parking, urban form, public art, & other issues that fall into the purview of planners (Markusen & Gadwa 2010). When divergent social groups begin occupying a space in the context of artistic practice, contestation & conflict sometimes takes shape around contrasting positionality. After all, because place provides the physical backdrop upon which social meaning-making occurs, dramatic & unexpected changes to that backdrop would constitute a threat to the social meanings that already exist there. That being said, artists often understand & take intentional steps to mitigate the unintentional effects of arts-based placemaking. With that in mind, planners should engage substantively with these questions, given the evidence to suggest that a diversity of arts & cultural offerings correlates with more stable, incremental growth in core neighborhoods (Grams & Warr 2003; Stern & Seifert 2007). In other words if longtime stakeholders retain partner status in revitalization & visioning processes, cultural placemaking can offer more manageable & appropriate versions of revitalization.

To talk about the entry of artists into a neighborhood spurring physical & social transitions, we must confront the issue of gentrification, “a process of inner-city transition where low property investment spurs a process of reinvestments & an accompanying shift in social demographics &

built form” (Mathews 2010, 660-661). The cleaning up & occupation of vacant buildings, the addition of programming which brings people from outside neighborhoods in, the displacement of unhoused individuals who occupy the sidewalks & stoops of surrounding buildings, the interjection of city funded cultural festivities, & the eventual entry of international capital—these comprise the ingredients of gentrification in many post industrial Downtown neighborhoods, including South Downtown Atlanta.

Although the term connotes aspects of violence, insensitivity, loss, & removal, not all gentrification has to result in these outcomes. Extant residents can & will bear significant increases in costs in exchange for subsequent increases in service provision & access to key amenities (Freeman 2006). Gentrification occurs differently in different places & at different rates. A broad process of property value increase & class remake in the central urban landscape is not in & of itself negative, so long as extant communities can capture & benefit from these shifts (Smith 1996). Be that as it may, large-scale development facilitated by local & state incentives untethered to community benefits often destabilizes neighborhoods due to the rate & scope of change (Smith 2006). Understanding these distinctions & taking care to foster the former in lieu of the latter is an important step for cities to take in changing the conversation about the nature of neighborhood change.

### Conditions that Support Arts Districts

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Informal arts districts such as South Downtown often arise in marginal spaces in or near downtowns of cities. Because artistic endeavors require improvisation & creativity, artists need open, flexible floor plans as much as they need authenticity, edginess, centrality, & affordability (Cole 1987, Lloyd 2002, Bain 2003, Ley 2003). Marginal downtown spaces provide these things; low cost, dilapidated, vacant industrial & commercial building stock—and the indifferent landlords that own them—offer all of the prerequisite features that facilitate artistic entrepreneurialism (Ley 2003). These prerequisites arise from the sense among artists that professional art & personal life bleed together, with projects & social activity rolling into each other & overlapping in dynamic, semi-planed, semi-formal ways. Artists need to be close to each other, at least socially if not physically, in order to benefit fully from the mutually supportive, communicative atmosphere often cultivated in spaces of experimental art. City decision makers can support these needs by giving flexibility in zoning & use in areas where artists choose to live & work (Bain 2006). According to artists interviewed in Atlanta, having multiple arts organizations in South Downtown allows for projects & collaborations to happen which no one would have the capacity to pull off individually.

It should come as no surprise that when arts venues open in urban spaces, the social & physical forms that characterize them are necessarily altered. The question is whether this change must necessarily be to the end of attracting tourists & creatives to the detriment of extant residents & small businesses (Eisinger, 2000; Grodach 2008; Peck 2005; Shaw & Sullivan 2011).

So far, the discussion has covered how **social** aspects of the artists themselves, **economic** aspects the neighborhood’s existing consumer & residential base, & **physical** aspects of the space itself all go toward explaining why South Downtown has emerged as an informal arts district. To encourage authentic, non-displacive, bottom-up placemaking, planners need to go to these spaces & speak with these stakeholders. This substantive engagement & empowerment will increase the chances that as outside capital enters the neighborhood, some of that value will be captured & recirculate by the folks who initiated the area’s rebirth to begin with.

## Artistic Practice & Social Capital

Artists have a unique ability to find & display hidden stories, amplify other voices, & imagine alternative futures (Belle 2011). They see themselves as natural communicators, able to create generative social processes & intentional environments by harnessing volunteer energies & passions to elevate their own voices, & the voices of others—women, trans\* people, people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, sex workers, & other marginalized voices. Robert Putnam defines social capital as the features—shared culture, lived experience, physical traits, social networks, recorded histories, etc.—which allow people to act together for common goals (2000). In districts such as South Downtown, artists who support each other's efforts to share personal & collective histories in intentional spaces provide access, insight, & compassion to people from across social groups. In the process of highlighting marginalized voices through artistic practice, artists bridge social capital by allowing groups with various levels of power & privilege to share in the experience of witnessing art. In addition, these stories, whether told through visual, audial, or other media, leave behind a residue; their telling changes the physical & social landscape of a place, & endows the audiences which bear witness with a small piece of the artists' lived experiences to take with them to their respective neighborhoods, social circles, & online platforms. Although no method exists to estimate the monetary value, employment impacts, or income generated from the social capital bridging processes that occur in informal spaces of artistic practice, planners & policy makers should appreciate & fiercely defend the value of these generative spaces, & formulate policy & programs to support them.

"Artists will find the medium & the language that is most accessible to themselves, & therefore to any & every audience." – Grace Kim, board member, Eyedrum Gallery, in 2017 interview

When communities receive investment in arts & cultural development, they receive so much more: an opportunity to boost social cohesion, confirm identities, and activate a broad coalition for political action & social critique. Few pursuits can put opposing ideas in dialogue, generate creative friction, & bring into view unknown possibilities like a community of artists (Thomas, Pate, & Ranson 2014). When people from different identity groups & class backgrounds gather around art, unexpected things happen—out of the surprise & disruption of provocative, experimental art emerges a space in which an inclusivity & intentionality can take root. The artists of South Downtown can attest to this—in those spaces of exploration, experimentation, & celebration, folks from any given quadrant of the Atlanta area can take part in this surprise & serve as agents in the formation of a different kind of community. This cultural vitality—described by Kim & Miyamoto as "creative discomfort"—should be sought & cultivated by cities which value authenticity in the revitalization downtown neighborhoods (2013).

If spaces of cultural production provide so much potential for creating & sustaining intentional community, why do we not have more of them? Why are they often fleeting? Much of this can be explained by the fragmentation of the arts & cultural sphere. Although artistic practice can bridge social groups for the purposes of creating & consuming art, competition across geographies, media, sectors, & identities makes it difficult for an arts community to locate a common, coherent policy agenda (Markusen & Gadwa 2010). Limited access to funding pits arts & creative enterprises against each other. Organizations of different sizes & missions must articulate their value by carving out specific niches of expertise—geographic focus, particular media, service to a specific group, specialized skillsets, profit/nonprofit status, etc. In this



context, a wide variety of interests emerge in terms of policy advocacy (Gray & Heilbrun 2000; Heilbrun & Gray 1993; Wyszomirski 1999). Despite these differences, individual organizations can strategically engage with developers & policymakers to shape visions for the streets & districts in which they work (Sherman 2016). City governments, economic development agencies, & foundations looking to bolster urban arts ecosystems should facilitate & promote this critical discussion.

## Private Sector Factors

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The built environment industry—which includes a cross section of designers, real estate professionals, software engineers, & others—profits from artistic & cultural practice in various ways. Developers often package cultural production & public art, which create sensory intrigue & design dynamism, as amenities designed to attract tenants; developers operating under the guise of placemaking hope to use creative programming to set their projects apart amidst a profluence of new luxury & high end dwellings. Because cities seek to cater to speculative development interests, programs & policies that ostensibly support artistic practice tend to place value added (to the project in the form of dollars per square foot) first & foremost in valuations of financial feasibility (Markusen & Gadwa 2010).

The cultural sector, largely complicit in this commodification, includes architecture, design, media, advertising, publishing, recording, film, TV, galleries, art fairs, online websites, theaters, music clubs, restaurants, & fine artists. On the other hand, these sectors engage & overlap with the built environment industry in various ways. Of this dynamic arises a complicated & possibly problematic effect. Where this circular logic merges with the pattern of deal making & concessions between cities & developers, we see a new triangle of interlocked interests (see the diagram below) which dominate cultural planning in the absence of broad, democratic cultural coalitions (Zukin 1982). Collaboration between cultural practitioners & real estate professionals can result in increased quality of programming & design, the cost of which can be passed on to tenants, who are increasingly employed in creative industries. Cities expand tax roles by expediting development processes & getting more new projects online in less time, gaining political support. Agreements with developers often include the ability to receive density bonuses, reduced parking requirements, or other benefits in exchange for enhancing pedestrian experience through landscaping or public arts programming. Artists & cultural professionals, on the other hand, benefit from increased exposure through city funded festivals & public arts contract. Artists also enjoy the increased revenues generated by rising appetites for arts & cultural goods. The interlocking of interests between the cultural sector, the real estate industry, & city government benefit everyone but the residents & organizations that make neighborhoods vital from the ground up (see Figure 9 for a concept map of this interest triangle). However, linking the benefits seen at the city scale of facilitated private development to the needs of the neighborhood-scale arts entrepreneurs & community developers has yet to be seen. As was mentioned above, fragmentation in the cultural sector precludes the formation of a unified policy platform on that end, while collusion & lack of organized opposition disincentive programming benefits agreements into new projects on the other end. Cities, tasked with representing & supporting efforts at the grassroots, can bridge this divide through enhanced cultural planning practices & public engagement programs.

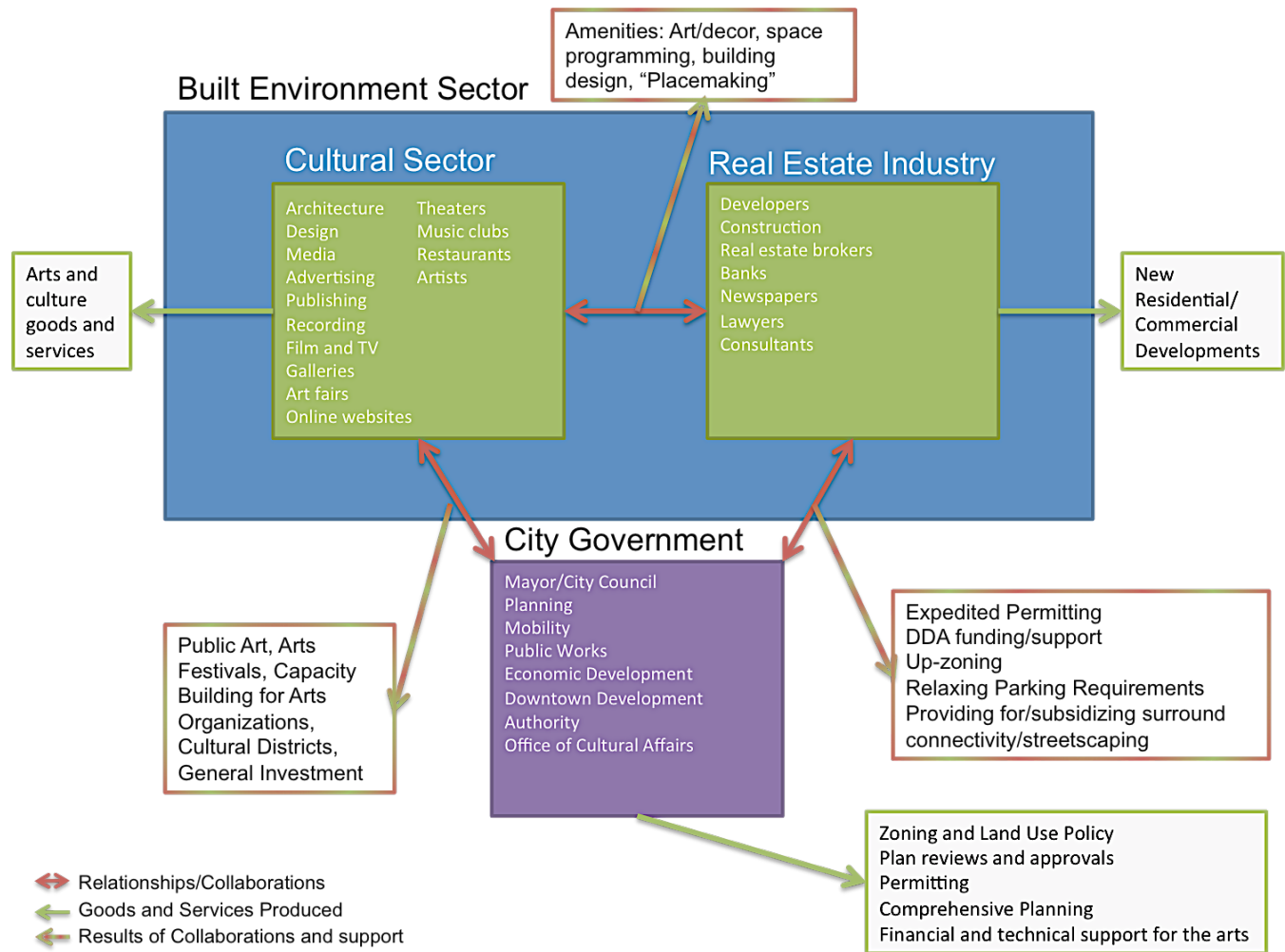


Figure 9. Concept map of the triangle of interlocked interests between the cultural sector, the real estate industry, & city government.

## Cities & Cultural Planning

Despite the critical role a vibrant arts & culture ecosystem can play in making a city competitive in attracting new business & residents, elected officials, planning entities, & economic development agencies too often ignore cultural planning efforts (Markusen & Gadwa 2010). Perhaps this results from sudden shifts in priorities & interests that unfold when governing regimes change. Maybe it is because the benefits of these planning efforts can be difficult to articulate in objective, measurable ways. Whatever the case may be, for strategic cultural planning efforts to take hold, arts & culture communities need an advocate with power in the planning & development mechanism, which they often do not have. Instead of focusing on how to implement bottom up cultural & economic revitalization, development authorities & planners choose instead to package spaces in terms of higher order consumption practices, which, although successful in spurring drastic socio-economic shifts & quick profits in neighborhoods, do not ensure stable, incremental & inclusive growth (Slater 2004).

As an alternative, cities should consider collaboration with arts organizations an opportunity to improve engagement & planning efforts, & make these interests key components in policies &



grant-making requirements (Sherman 2016). If cities choose to fund arts with the aim of establishing vital neighborhood-based cultural amenities, these arts communities can provide a bridge between private development & impacted neighborhoods. This relationship will, in turn, foster dialogue & trust-building that can positively impact the physical & social quality of a neighborhood.

## Tools for Cities to Support Arts Districts

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To begin forming more participatory, community-empowering strategies for arts & cultural vitality within the broader framework of neighborhood revitalization, policymakers should identify extant public assets, economic assets, available pools of civic & social capital, & the way that people & information move through urban districts to identify opportunities for cross-sectoral partnerships. These strategies should design for retained creative control for artists while encouraging collaboration through engagement & negotiated agreements (Nowak 2007). In fact, implementing a clear public planning process that involves arts & cultural voices can reduce costs & make space for innovation in engagement & policymaking. Cities ought take this opportunity as a call to action to facilitate arts & culture practitioners in flourishing within entrenched real estate development processes, & even to go far as to facilitate the establishment cultural districts in which creative entrepreneurialism can take root.

In Chicago, the Metropolitan Agency for Planning provides a toolkit on arts & cultural planning, which outlines sample definitions of arts & culture uses that could be built into special zoning districts (2014). Other options for supporting arts & culture placemaking could be plans which require that city-commissioned public art pieces be awarded to arts practitioners located in the targeted district (Markusen & Gadwa 2010).

Frost-Krumpf defines a cultural district as a recognizable mixed-use area that has a concentration of cultural facilities that anchor the district as it continues to attract new businesses & residents. Co-locating cultural amenities in a district allows them to benefit from the economy of scale principal—districts can attract a wider variety of foot traffic if they contain a variety of cultural offerings accessible on foot (1998). While cultural districts can offer stable tenure for arts & culture professionals & spur economic development, planning efforts need to design them such that they do not act as real estate booster efforts disguised as economic or community development efforts. In this scenario, the districts activities may result in disruptive displacement via the permeation speculative real estate (Kunzman 2004).

Cities can utilize policy & planning tools to establish & bolster cultural districts. These options include:

- Land use & zoning ordinances
- Dedicated taxes or development funds
- Tax tools & incentives
- Provision of alternative financing
- Facilitation of equitable development through various shared equity models
- Establishing a cultural district

In terms of land use & zoning, special overlays that permit live-work, commercial, & residential users in the same buildings would flexibility for arts organizations whose missions & operations can vary widely & evolve over time. To reduce costs further, cultural district overlays can include reduced or eliminated minimum parking requirements. Artist Overlay Districts, such as those established in the City of Lowell, Massachusetts, can provide density bonuses to developers who provide live-work space (City of Lowell 2004). Furthermore, developer agreements can enforce inclusionary housing, local hiring, & other community facilities in new developments of a certain size by coupling these requirements with flexible zoning, reduced fees, expedited permitting, & other items.

In terms of tax tools & incentives, cities can establish dedicated taxes, development funds, or cultural tax districts to fund grant programs, public arts centers, or provide the capital needed to support expanded arts & culture practice in defined geographies. The Arts & Planning Toolkit suggests a variety of tax tools & incentives to encourage development of arts & culture spaces (2016). These may include incentives for the developer to encourage adaptive reuse, sales tax credits or exemptions for arts & culture exports from a targeted district, property tax credits or exemptions for renovating buildings in designated cultural districts, income tax credits or exemptions directly to artists who live & work in a cultural district, & lastly, preservation tax credits for historic property renovations (Arts & Planning Toolkit 2016). Coupling tax exemptions or credits on

sale of buildings to social enterprises with stated community development missions can further encourage community development rooted in cultural & artistic production.

In Providence, Rhode Island, alternative financing & tax benefits were made available in particular arts districts, as well as sales & income tax benefits (Nowak 2007). These financing & tax benefits were coupled with city-provided technical support, to ensure that the artists organizations benefiting from the financial packages had the organizational capacity to sustain & grow programming through the term of the benefits.

Cities can also resort to a number of creative, alternative financing mechanisms to facilitate the stability & growth of arts districts. For instance, economic development entities can set aside special loan funds that offer below-market debt with low or zero interest, alternative amortization schedules, or longer terms (Arts & Planning Toolkit 2016). These funds can require recipients to engage in arts-based community development, neighborhood-serving programming, or free or discounted goods & services for area residents. Cities may also ask that recipients of this capital covenant to remain in particular site for a minimum amount of time. These funds may be structured as gap financing to pay for predevelopment feasibility studies &

other due diligence, building acquisition & improvements, or supporting operations (Nowak 2007). Additionally, public or private credit enhancement through debt insurance or other alternatives could strengthen organizations' appeals for market-rate debt. Another option would be to facilitate the pairing of community-oriented arts organizations with mission-driven, place-based equity partners such as extant nonprofits, foundations, or established arts institutions vested in the arts & culture pipeline. Special financing tools such as those mentioned above can be mobile, staying with the organization when it moves, or the financing can remain attached to the building itself in the form of a voucher for tax credits or an additional lien that stays on the title. The latter alternative may be difficult to design, given complications of sorting out lien priority, an issue which would create risk for extant lenders with liens on the property, or make it difficult for recipients to access additional conventional debt for improvements. Cities may consider facilitating the establishment of a special foundation or community land trust to retain ownership of a group of parcels & buildings in order to pass developmental creativity & control onto a publicly interested entity, without locking specific arts organizations into place (Sherman 2016). This flexibility may be important given the fluid, dynamic market for arts & culture exports. The aforementioned array of financing options for supporting arts districts could generate successful development of live-work buildings & venues wherein artists retain ownership of parcels & buildings, ensuring stable, incremental, & authentic revitalization in the target area (Markusen & Gadwa 2010).

## Measuring the Economic Impact of Arts & Culture

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Measuring the impact of arts & culture districts on a city's economy can prove challenging for a variety of reasons. For instance, before evaluation can take place, policymakers have to agree upon a set of norms & goals by which to evaluate outcomes. Even this preliminary step suffers a lack of solid theory-in-practice, as assumptions & uncertainties mire economic theories that seek to delineate the causal relationships between arts activity & overall economic growth (Markusen & Gadwa 2010). In addition, policymakers may run into a number of challenges in identifying & engaging the full gamut of stakeholders in the arts, given a predominating pattern of sub-par public participation in creative fields as well as in cultural planning efforts. Lastly, evaluating strategy effectiveness without standardized methods by which to compare across markets calls the validity of such evaluations into question.

### Barriers to Evaluation:

- Agreeing on a set of norms & goals by which to evaluate outcomes
- Lack of solid theory about arts based economic development
- Arts-based development theory mired in assumptions
- Challenges in identifying & understanding the full realm of stakeholders & funding structures,
- Pattern of insubstantial public participation in arts based economic development practice
- Lack of standardized methods by which to compare across locales & markets

Despite the challenges of evaluation, cities seeking evaluative guidance can find indicators of success in materials generated by the National Cultural Districts Exchange, which lists a variety of indicators to measure including presence of strategic partnerships across sectors, development of live-work space, authenticity of place identity, presence of strong anchor entities, regular special events which draw crowds & expand audiences, clear signage, a comprehensive marketing & promotions strategy, & a set of strong amenities (National Cultural Districts Exchange 2014). These evaluations must engage with a representative group of stakeholders & constituents to retain legitimacy given equity & efficiency mandates.

#### Cultural District Indicators of Success:

- Strategic partnerships
- Live/work spaces
- Authentic identity
- Anchor Institutions
- Special Events
- Clear Signage
- Marketing & promotions strategy
- Strong amenities

Policymakers exploring options in cultural planning may come under pressure from local legislators or electorates to conduct cost-benefit analysis of potential programs, an endeavor that proves difficult given lack of precedent with arts & culture initiatives (Markusen & Gadwa 2010). Typically, impact analyses total up money invested & spent in arts programming & estimate the resulting jobs, tax revenues, & total expenditures using largely arbitrary multipliers (Markusen & Gadwa 2010: 381). These faulty causal exercises overestimate investment impact by giving too much value to the investment in estimations of behavioral change; these estimates do little to separate the effect of the investment itself verses extenuating circumstances. These calculations must include some sort of cost comparison of programs & funds with the economic impact of having artists moving into & working in a neighborhood (Lloyd 2002; Lloyd & Clark 2001). This task can quickly become bogged down in assumptions & inferences that undermine study accuracy (Stewart 2008; Sterngold 2004; Seaman 2000). Some of the complicating factors in these analyses include the improper accounting for the exports base provided by arts, the factoring out of expenditures had they not been put toward arts (meaning support for the arts is not “new money” but a redirection of existing funding streams in many cases), the capital & operating support needed to subsidize nonprofits engaged in the arts, & the effects of these nonprofits on the tax base of a targeted arts district.

Although many issues arise when practitioners start trying to quantify & calculate the positive impacts of arts & cultural investments, this should not preclude an attempt to build certain considerations for evaluation arts & culture plans. Markussen & Gadwa outline a set of potential items (see the table below) to consider when forming the success of an arts/culture plan for a district or otherwise (2010).

**Articulation of expected economic, neighborhood, & cultural goals**

- Job creation
- Property valuation & occupancy rate
- Small business revenues
- Visual character of the neighborhood
- Enhanced cultural experiences that reach multiple constituencies
- Understanding possible negative effects on groups & neighborhoods

**Equity concerns demand that the planning body explicitly state**

- Delineating who the initiative intends to benefit
- Preparing for who may be harmed (& how they will be compensated) in the process
- Design an independently administered survey to look at what kinds of people are enjoying arts spaces/programs & where they are coming from in the region

**Efficiency concerns demand that the planning body explicitly state**

- The balance of benefits with costs
- Potential alternative uses of funds & staff time, were they not dedicated to this planning & program effort

(Markussen &amp; Gadwa 2010: 380)

## The Case of South Downtown Atlanta

Real estate can switch ownership at a rapid pace when sudden interest sparks in a central Downtown neighborhood long dismissed by planning & economic development efforts. In past decades, South Downtown Atlanta has undergone an array of challenges typical of marginalized downtown post-industrial neighborhoods: plummeting property values, persistent challenges with providing services & public safety given a large unhoused population, widespread vacancy precluding a vital & attractive built environment, & building owners who have no incentive or capital to make façade improvements & other enhancements necessary to retain the vitality of historic assets. All this changed when German investment firm Newport began showing interest in properties in South Downtown Atlanta. Folks with interest in the revitalization of the once-vibrant commercial district were excited to see change come in concert with the redevelopment of Underground Atlanta.

Drastic change & upgrading looms in South Downtown Atlanta; Newport has put several buildings under contract & made rapid progress in closings in the course of mere months. Atlanta's planning & economic development arms have an opportunity to consider ways to couple community empowerment & development for the artists in South Downtown—who have cultivated a vital creative ecosystem there & essentially stopped the bleeding in terms of property decline—with opportunities brought by a major injection of private capital.

Because all interested parties, including Newport, want to see a vibrant, mixed-use South Downtown with an intriguing & authentic mix of uses & an attractive, safe streetscape, decision-makers should consider how to engage with the artists who have been working towards achieving these goals in a semiformal way for the past several years. With careful, deliberative processes & substantive engagement, involved parties can design ways to couple benefits with concessions for the developer with the aim of providing the placemakers in South Downtown—who worry about displacement in the face of rising rents & changing ownership—a sense of security & ownership in the community they have so intentionally cultivated.

Virtually limitless options exist for working out some sort of public-private agreement between the city, developers in South Downtown, & the artists who work there. We can assume that any agreement will depend on buy-in from extant property owners & business owners, as well as from Newport. However, in order ensure equitable process & outcomes the City of Atlanta, or perhaps a local foundation engaged in placemaking, will need to assist the loose

“Until the art organizations, small business owners, residents & city officials work together to build a district plan that protects & fosters arts & culture, the long-term fate of South Downtown is up to the highest bidder,” Egan said in an interview with Creative Loafing

coalition of arts organizations in South Downtown in creating a unified vision statement & action plan, as well as work with Newport & other developers to understand areas in which city benefits can offset the cost of retaining below-market leases for the artists. The coordination & negotiation of these competing interests will need to happen under the guidance of an organization or third party facilitator that can mobilize & draw from networks of cultural capital, planning resources, & real estate expertise. Furthermore, to ensure an equitable deal, artists’ organizations in South Downtown need to have access in a timely fashion to development plans & proposals & details about the negotiations happening between developers & the City. Planning & economic development decision-makers in Atlanta can craft a framework for historic & cultural preservation if they show bold leadership & creativity in coupling subsidy & benefits for the developer with legally binding agreements to assist & support artists at work in South Downtown. Because an arts & culture hub in the core of Downtown Atlanta would have a positive, evolving, dynamic impact on ongoing revitalization efforts in Downtown at large, City policymakers should consider it in their interest to explore options around cultural preservation.

## Qualitative Methodology

To understand the situation in South Downtown, I collected the data below primarily through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, & articles in local news media, & documents from the City of Atlanta & Eastside TAD. I conducted from January to April 2017, while participant observation took place at weekly artists coalition meetings between October 2016 & February 2017. Four interviews were conducted with arts organization representatives, whether past or current board members, or founder/operators. I was in attendance at five weekly artists meetings, at which time coalition member organizations updated the group about organizational happenings, & received updates from Kyle Kessler at the Center for Civic Innovation about changes happening at city hall & in the private development realm in the area. Conversations touched on a variety of topics, from voicing concerns & apprehensions, to



attempting to strategize & shape a shared vision, to promoting events & programming. I also engaged in participant observation at the ELEVATE 2016 panels entitled “Who will survive in Atlanta?” which brought together planners, artists, & activists to engage in a discussion about gentrification, culture, & development in Atlanta. Lastly, participant observation took place at an artists’ town hall meeting hosted by Mammal Gallery & mayoral candidate State Senator Vincent Fort in South Downtown, the purpose of which being to gauge interests & concerns in the arts community. All the aforementioned material provided clarity on the interests of active arts stakeholders in South Downtown, gave insight into the complex interpersonal & inter-sector dynamics at work in South Downtown, allowed identification of grievances with city processes & programs, & lastly allowed the location of conceptual gaps in existing plans & program documents in order to make recommendations for improvement based on the data I collected through direct engagement. Because the data comes primarily from arts organizations, a constituency with which the city does not frequently engage substantively, the bulk of the recommendations & analyses will focus on lessons to take into practice, whether at the City, Invest Atlanta, or for private developers & planners looking to engage in context-sensitive development rooted in cultural preservation & placemaking.

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## South Downtown Context

For the bulk of Atlanta’s history, South Downtown’s density of business & shopping activity, walkable streets, proximity to quality public space, & centrality made it the commercial & civic core of the city (Vega, 2017). However, with the rise of the automobile, the decentralization of commercial & residential development, the disruptive process of adding the MARTA heavy rail underground, the moving of World of Coca-Cola, & the ongoing floundering of Underground Atlanta, South Downtown has fallen largely into a state of disorder. During the day, the low-cost commercial retail & the concentration of MARTA routes at Five Points Station keep the area populated with a steady stream shoppers, commuters, & passers-by. However, the area also provides a low-surveillance environment for unhoused residents & folks engaged in informal economic activity to operate relatively undisturbed. At night, when the storefront gates come down & the commuters go home, the area takes on an entirely different character; the myriad empty buildings, infrequency of pedestrian traffic, & orange-yellow glow of the street lights give the neighborhood an undergirding feeling of tension—a fact not helped by the recent homicides in the area (Darnell 2016; Proctor 2017). While particular businesses such as Miller’s Rexal Drug Store, which has been in the area for over 50 years, the vacant buildings & lots persist in the area, making it unattractive to conventional capital (Rhone, 2015). Despite what was a grim outlook, many in Atlanta appreciated the historic value of the neighborhood, remembering its heyday as a vibrant commercial district.

The tide began to slowly turn in 2012, when the Mayor’s Office of Cultural Affairs brought about a temporary activation of South Downtown with a variety of new mural commissions & a project by Goat Farm that allowed local artists to paint dumpsters (Vega, 2017; Goolick, 2015). Brian Egan, who would eventually found Mammal Gallery with his friend & business partner Chris Yonkers, took an interest in South Downtown while attending Georgia State University. Also stirring in the area was Eyedrum, a gallery that had been operating for a time, which needed a new home after losing its space on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. According to Priscilla Smith, former Board Chair of the organization, interest in buying the building Mammal would eventually occupy did not move the group to action quickly enough.

In 2013, Kyle Kessler, a resident of South Downtown & a consistent booster of the area through efforts at Center for Civic Innovation, & Courtney Hammond, an arts entrepreneur responsible for organizing the ELEVATE program, connected Brian & company with the owner of the Greene building & helped them work out a lease. Mammal opened its doors in 2013 (Wheatley, 2016). According to Smith, Eyedrum at this time worked out a deal with LAZ Parking, which owns the building Eyedrum currently occupies. This arrangement provided a seven-year lease at one dollar per year. Meanwhile, Egan, Yonkers, & company literally camped inside the Mammal building—an unsavory notion given its history as a night club, long abandoned & vacant, & lacking working plumbing & electricity—for upwards of a year, cleaning it up, painting, & putting on events. According to Yonkers, co-founder, the building's central location & existing layout made it ripe for conversion into a venue & gallery space.

At this point, Anthony Harper, Allie Bushak, & others at the Goat Farm stepped in—after a year of deliberation during which time they formulated a plan for engagement in the neighborhood—under the auspices of the so-called Beacons Program. In this capacity, they assisted the Visitors Center, Downtown Players Club, & Murmur sort out leases with building owners, clean up the spaces, & plan for revenue generation through various programming (Goolick, 2015). Danny Bailey & Jared Pepper leased a shuttered liquor store across the street & planned to transform the spot into a recording & performance venue called Broad Street Visitors Center. In 2015, Downtown Players Club opened, billing itself as a performance arts incubator. With some support from Goat Farm, Elizabeth Jarrett & Kris Pilcher leased 28000 s. ft. building on South Broad, to get it ready for performances, events, & one loft apartment unit that they hoped would generate revenue.

After spending a year deciding how the Beacons project could take shape, Goat Farm decided against purchasing assets in South Downtown for various reasons, capital not being one. In my conversation with Anthony Harper at Goat Farm, I learned that his company aimed to eventually facilitate asset ownership for downtown gallery operators through an alternative-financing scheme, probably a rental-purchase structure. Like Smith, others at Eyedrum, & the guys at Mammal, Harper & company did not anticipate the disruptive ownership transitions that would sweep the area in 2016. Therefore they did not feel the need to hasten purchasing arrangements between current tenants & owners for self-defensive reasons; everyone felt that there would be plenty of time to sort out the details. As the galleries were getting going, Center for Civic Innovation formed a loose coalition called the South Downtown Initiative made of CCI Staff, area non-profits, & arts gallery operators to begin building relationships with Invest Atlanta & exploring the possibility of TAD funding for South Downtown improvements. Jarrett of Downtown Players Club met with Tim Keane to begin discussing potential public private partnerships for the establishment of an arts district (Goolick, 2015). Meanwhile, Beacons was making progress in negotiations between gallery operators & building owners about rental-purchase deals.

Driven by the technical support of an established organization, the plethora of vacant buildings with owners itching to stop sliding property values, & the sweat equity of arts entrepreneurs, a small but vital arts district was beginning to take shape in South Downtown. According to Creative Loafing, the South Downtown groups host approximately 1,000 events & bring approximately 90,000 people through South Downtown each year. Furthermore, an arts nonprofit called C4, which offers trainings & courses for socially-minded artists looking to build capacity, has its office there. The other organizations bring a steady stream of



programming & people, collaborating with each other to fit potential programs to available spaces, creating a sophisticated synchronicity powered by a blend of improvisation & a spirit mutual support.

Though things appear to be going well down there—with some sort of programming in South Downtown every night of the week, being the scenes, the tides have changed yet again. As WRS, a South Carolina Developer, started working out the finer details of its deal to purchase & redevelop Underground Atlanta with the city in late 2015 & into 2016, artists in South Downtown began worrying about the coming changes to the neighborhood. These fears deepened when they learned that WRS's then-equity partner on the Underground Deal, Newport Holdings LLC out of Germany, had an interest in acquiring & redeveloping a wide array of properties in South Downtown, including those inhabited by the arts organizations. Through informal talks with Newport & WRS, the arts organizations discovered plans using WRS as property manager for would-be Newport assets. Even as Newport withdrew its equity investment from the Underground Deal, they persisted with aggressive acquisition efforts, intent on redevelopment to the south of Underground on Peachtree Southwest, Broad, Mitchell, & Forsyth (the four streets that comprise the bulk of the informal South Downtown arts district). This turn of events immediately dashed aspirations of rental-purchase agreements for the artists, whose offers fell well beneath those made by Newport.

At this point, the artists began meeting weekly, discussing updates in the neighborhood, sharing contacts, unpacking meetings they were having one-on-one with personnel at WRS, Newport, Invest Atlanta, & the planning department, & generally commiserating. They reached out to Invest Atlanta, the economic development arm of the City of Atlanta, insisting that support for the arts through some version of a public private partnership would return on investment & be an efficient & fair use of funds (Wheatley, 2016). According to Chris Pilcher in a conversation with Creative Loafing, “We’re doing them a favor by building this neighborhood & doing what we’re doing” (Wheatley, 2016). In other words, by their estimation, after investing inestimable sweat equity, personal moneys, & creative energy into a once-despaired area of town, the City of Atlanta should show interest in supporting them in a substantive way.

Eloisa Klementich, CEO of Invest Atlanta, attended a weekly meeting of the South Downtown Artists, & acknowledged that, not only was the city interested in supporting the area, but also that benefits to private development could be tied to certain community-oriented covenants. Unfortunately, since initial discussions, Newport withdrew from the Underground deal, limiting options for bargaining pieces in potential public-private agreements (Wheatley 2016). Furthermore, Invest Atlanta & representatives in the planning department agree that stakeholders cannot work out agreements until the process of acquisition of properties slows down or stops. In the mean time, the artists continue to meet weekly & try to come up with solutions despite a sense that options—and time—are running out.

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## Understanding the Artist Perspective

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The following sections outline key themes identified in the interview & participant observation data. Through the course of six months of engagement with the South Downtown arts community I uncovered themes around uncertainty & apprehension about coming development, difficulty around forming a common vision among constituent organizations, pressure to form immediate or rapid response strategies, & limited inquiry into long term goals

& needs. The artists who live &/or work in South Downtown share common insights around the value of their work to the city & to incoming developers, the importance of the arts scene in South Downtown to the sustenance of the regional arts & culture pipeline, & the need for more substantive support & engagement from city officials. Likewise, they have shown sophisticated shared understandings of alternatives in potential public-private partnerships, receiving city support around key technical & financial components, & strengthening their work as a community through strengthening their coalition in targeted ways. The below sections, hopefully, will serve to both outline those understandings, highlight the barriers to converting them into actions & deliverables, & make recommendations for the practice regarding how best to engage with artistic communities to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

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### Why South Downtown?

Understanding how artists conceive of their own efforts in the context of placemaking in South Downtown provides an important first step in understanding where to move forward in terms of policy solutions. A variety of factors—social & physical—emerged around the significance of South Downtown to the work. For one thing, older practitioners tell stories of going to the area as youngsters with their parents to shop, to watch the peach drop on New Years, & to enjoy the public spaces & people watching. Older Atlanta's remember pre-suburbanization, pre-deindustrialization South Downtown, in which the area served as the civic & commercial center of the Atlanta region. Its small blocks, intimately scaled streets, & quality storefronts made perusing the windows or enjoying the public spaces a key aspect of leisure time for a broad spectrum of Atlantans. Now in its current state, artists & placemakers at work in South Downtown appreciate it for its spaces of experiment & expression I artistic practice. Many cited the neighborhood as one of few spaces in Atlanta in which gender & sexuality diverse, of color, differently abled, or politically radical artists & musicians can go to get experience, build audiences, tell stories, & make intentional community. Others sited the flexibility & creative freedom afforded by a neighborhood which the city had seemingly turned its back.

Street improvements were made on the artist's dime. Building improvements were made on the artist's dime. Murals & other public art were added on the artists' dime. Why? Chris Yonkers says, "We improve the street because we like to." In other words, as an artist, work, play, & home life intersect constantly. When this intersection occurs in place where a lot can be done with limited financial resources, artists capitalize on that flexibility to make exceptionally creative programs & spaces happen. The South Downtown neighborhood also provides a lot of value in its centrality. Constituents of the South Downtown arts ecosystem come from East, South, & West Atlanta, studios in Downtown, College Park, & the Georgia State area, & many of them come from low-income neighborhoods & lack transportation options. Therefore, the success of South Downtown depends on its centrality & exceptional MARTA accessibility. In other words, only in South Downtown can such a diverse group of radical & experimental artists, & the equally diverse audiences who find meaning & community in immersing themselves in these programs, converge so readily.

As Grace Kim, newly added board member at Eyedrum Gallery, put it, "The value that we create is first & foremost for artists & for volunteers who are interested in creating an arts experience. & then from the quality of the programming we attract a larger audience who is interested in that space." But the value runs deeper: for other arts organizations in South Downtown, the intentionally crafted spaces for creativity in South Downtown exist despite

disappearing venues & opportunities for diverse creatives to show their work—artists who are queer, trans, &/or of color express fear that spaces for creativity are limited & shrinking for them. In their minds, if the city values these voices, & wants to prove it, they should invest in the time & resources that would be needed to help them stay.



Figure 10. Courtesy of Atlanta OCA.

## Recent Sales and Appraised Values, South Downtown and Surrounding

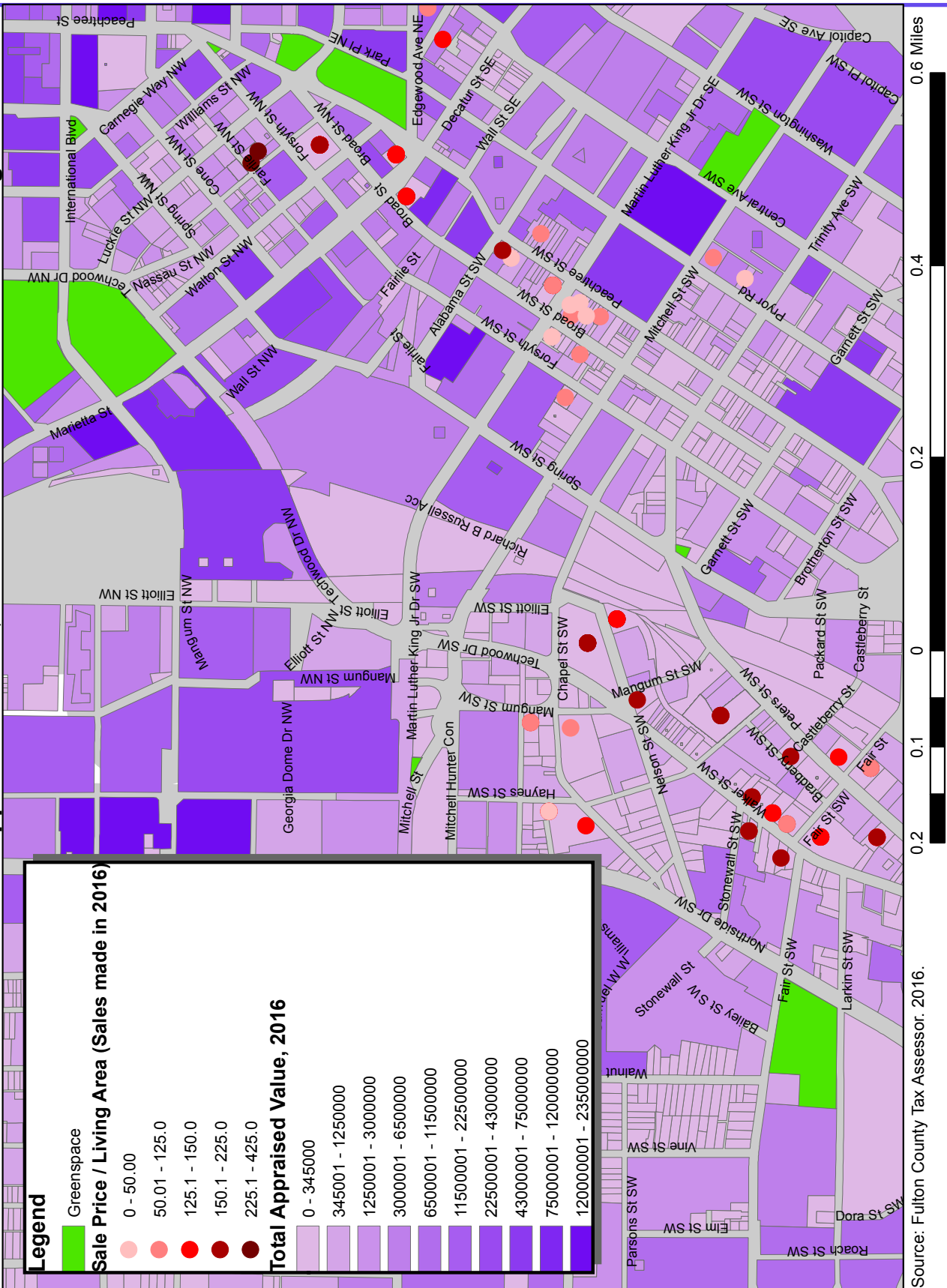


Figure 11



### Persisting Through Uncertainty

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The uncertain fate of Underground & the South Downtown neighborhood, given the rapidly moving & opaque negotiations between WRS, Newport, & the city of Atlanta, left many South Downtown stakeholders on edge in late 2016. On several occasions, in informal discussions between Newport US CEO Olaf Kunkat or his representatives & staff at Center for Civic Innovation (CCI) or artists in downtown, Newport expressed that they did not plan to force out any tenants as Newport begins developing in the area. Olaf, in a discussion with Kyle Kessler of CCI, maintained that he did not wish to exclude arts & culture from downtown Atlanta. With the partnership between WRS & Newport in the Underground Redevelopment & South Downtown in flux & a lack of information about the rapid movement in negotiations between WRS & the city, the arts organizations in South Downtown found it difficult to focus their attentions on identifying shared interests & values in an attempt to generate a list of asks for Tim Keane & the City in the form of support or resources. If a process existed to facilitate the location of intersecting Newport, City, & artist interests, & that provided stakeholders in South Downtown with pertinent information in real time, than a mutually beneficial partnership could emerge. However, without this infrastructure in place, stakeholders must divert attentions away from the long-term visioning processes that they had begun in years past & toward basic survival tactics.

### Trying to Shape a Mutually Beneficial Platform in a Time Crunch

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In late 2016, the tone at the weekly meeting of South Downtown artist organizations was apprehensive but optimistic. They had picked up signals of willingness to cooperate & negotiate from Newport & a partnership or agreement seemed possible. However, when the New Year came & went, sales of several South Downtown assets to Newport closed, & details continued emerging about the Underground Atlanta deal, the tone grew increasingly worried. Jessica Holland, CEO of C4 Atlanta, an organization that works with artists & their organizations to build capacity, & Kyle Kessler, the CCI contact in the artists' coalition, urged the group to quickly determine on an organization-by organization basis what assistance they may need from the city to survive the ownership transitions that their buildings would soon undergo. Folks were starting to consider that perhaps in a year they would no longer occupy their spaces. After all, Newport offered almost triple what any of the artists organizations had began working out with their building owners in the form of lease-to-own sales with the help of the Goat Farm.

Mammal Gallery founders Chris Yonkers & Brian Egan had been in conversations with their building owner about a lease-to-own agreement prior to Newport's entry into the market. Because Newport's offer dwarfed Mammal's, they began focusing instead on an interim agreement that would decrease rent or other expenses with the current building owner to help get the organization through the transitional phase. Egan & Yonkers anticipate a months-long interruption of operations to get the asset up to code when Newport takes over property management, a period the two fear their organization cannot withstand. Because Mammal constitutes for many the foundational organization in the South Downtown community, Eyedrum Gallery Board member Grace Kim & others saw the importance of addressing that organization's needs first, which may provide clarity down the road in terms of how best to advocate for the arts community's needs & how best to build up capacity to show themselves as viable tenants & worthy investments. The community who works in South Downtown does not oppose development or a change in ownership. As a matter of fact, many of them see the opportunity to improve facilities to meet code standards, attaining certificates of occupancy, & other items as being important steps in the process of organizational growth. However, they

feel that because of their role in bringing the attentions of private capital to the neighborhood through their semi-formal street improvements & activations, that it would be inequitable for that private capital & the city so anxious to expand its tax base to not extend support to the folks who stopped the downward slide of property values in the area.

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### Short-Term Needs Identified

While the artist organizations continuously affirm the importance of strengthening the group through aligning missions & interests, in 2017 the rapid movement of Newport into the neighborhood has motivated them to set that mission aside in order to identify some short term needs to communicate with contacts at the City. In anticipation of their new landlords demanding higher standards of formality & quality in South Downtown assets, the volunteer-operated arts organizations running on fairly small revenue streams need technical support with basics such as acquiring certificates of occupancy, technical support acquiring liquor licenses, & other items which new management may demand to maintain tenancy. Furthermore, the groups need assistance through relaxed code enforcement, cash infusions, or otherwise to help ease the transition of ownership. This could come in the form of grants or below-market loans from the city, Invest Atlanta, or area foundations with support from the city in the application processes. Tax Allocation District funding, other Invest Atlanta moneys, or any financial support should go to supporting artists & their programming, rather than incentivizing high basis developers or property owners. This sentiment comes with the understanding that lowering costs for Newport through relaxed permitting & entitlements processes opens opportunities to ask for binding concessions or covenants in return. While foundation funds for the arts in Atlanta & Georgia remain low & falling, Holland recommended the organizations in South Downtown ask the arts funders in town for what she called “emergency funds.” All that said, the City of Atlanta should make itself an active partner & ally in these processes.

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### Long-Term Needs Identified

Despite pressure to form contingency plans in the face of rapid transition in ownership, the artists have still made space to discuss long-term goals grounded in interests in 1) preserving the character of South Downtown, which the arts organizations have tirelessly worked to cultivate & 2) ensuring long-term tenure in South Downtown at reasonable costs. On multiple occasions, stakeholders have raised guaranteed, long-term leases—in lieu of ownership—as solutions that would not threaten Newport’s desire to retain control over their assets but would guarantee tenure. A partnership between Newport & the South Downtown organizations (with a project coordinator to mediate & negotiate on the partnership’s behalf) could offset these costs by applying for Eastside TAD funds. Current programs are the Resurgens Grant & the Downtown Façade Improvement Grant. Although by themselves, the artists may not qualify for TAD grants because they cannot provide evidence of being in operation for upwards of five years & because they do not have five year leases or certificates of occupancy (Eastside TAD Program Requirements 2016), Newport can help secure funds by writing long term leases, showing their track record of development, covenanting to certain placemaking outlays, assist in assembling other documentation needed to prove artist organization viability, & provide written approval for the funds. In other words, perhaps Newport could qualify for Resurgens or Downtown Façade Improvement Moneys & pass some of those benefits down to the tenants in the form of discounted long-term leases. An arrangement such as this would address several of the TAD’s stated objectives, including addressing vacancy, transit accessibility, implementing contextual architecture, improving the

public realm, generating activity in arts & culture entrepreneurship, & attracting tourism (Eastside TAD Program Requirements 2016). Supporting a partnership between nonprofit organizations & private development with the aim of placemaking, cultural production, & neighborhood revitalization in the core of Downtown would be a creative way for Eastside TAD to accomplish its objective of maintaining the City of Atlanta as the historical commercial center of the metro region, attracting Downtown jobs & residents, creating an attractive, walkable Downtown (Eastside Program Guidelines 2016).

## Tailor Strategies to Stated Interests

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The sections below draw from the qualitative data to shape specific recommendations for the practice that the City of Atlanta, Invest Atlanta, or area foundations can follow to more substantively engage with & support the artists who work in South Downtown & in Atlanta at large. These include going to lengths to understand the value of having strong coalitions of artists & cultural groups as advocates for arts & culture in the policy & political realms, how providing technical support to such coalitions in shaping partnerships & agreements will facilitate equitable, desirable outcomes, how & why providing sustained support constitutes a critical element in the overall framework of cultural planning, & how lessons learned in South Downtown can help policymakers plan ahead for cultural districts in other areas of Atlanta that would benefit from an arts & culture-driven community development process.

## Understand the Value of Arts Coalitions

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To have a chance at long-term creative presence in the district, organizations in South Downtown need to strengthen & formalize their coalition. This can be difficult considering artists see their work as relatively boundless & fluid. Chris Yonkers of Mammal Gallery illustrated this point, stating, “In our work, there is never a finalized anything, really. You are always pursuing something, but never quite catching it. If you feel like you’ve caught it, that’s when you’ve stopped progressing as an artist.” This quality, undergirded by a fierce sense of individuality & creative independence, has made it difficult to craft a shared vision & set of action steps. This dilemma most tangibly surfaced at a visioning session facilitated by Jessica Holland of C4 in November 2016, in which the group set out to solidify a vision statement to begin identifying a set of concrete action steps & a timetable. The lack of expertise around matters of real estate, public-private agreements, & city code exacerbated the difficulty in accomplishing this task. Further complicating the dynamic, at the coalition meetings, a few actors fill the role of gatekeeper & translator of technical knowledge. That reality leaves other stakeholders to either question the validity & efficiency of propositions made by those gatekeepers, feel as if they may somehow lose creative individuality & control over their own enterprises, or take the gatekeepers’ word at face value. To address this obstacle, access to information about alternatives & technical processes should be democratized through capacity building training which prepare artists to run their organizations as professionalized enterprises prepared to engage in creative partnerships across sectors.

Without a coherent vision & platform, the coalition suffers a lack of visibility in local media & in popular discourse, a reality that precludes certain strategic political actions. Although the changes in South Downtown have been covered in local media, the stakeholders in the area still crave the ability to speak in a unified voice & with a common purpose in response to disruptive policy proposals. For instance, were the South Downtown arts organizations to issue a statement or whitepaper regarding Mayor Kasim Reed’s arts tax upon its announcement, they would have won a degree of credibility that would have positioned them to cultivate a public

discussion & implement in a targeted advocacy campaign. Nevertheless, the coalition understands that the creative entrepreneurial community in Atlanta comprises a significant voting block. South Downtown, as a spatially & symbolically central piece of this block, should capitalize on the opportunity to lead this community in advocating for artists, pressing policymakers for substantive change, & forging new partnerships & programs with city & foundation support.

Given the loose organization & minimal capacity of arts organizations & the coalition they have formed, Invest Atlanta, the Department of Planning & Community Development, & the development community, cannot readily justify the sorts high-touch investments needed to maintain the district's current occupancy & enable it to grow. If the coalition can strengthen & formalize the arts coalition through specialized trainings, it could activate its broader network to advocate for policies & candidates that support their work. This would provide an opportunity for the city to dialogue with an entity that represents artist interests when devising policy items that impact that community.

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### Provide Technical Support

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Technical support remains the primary need & concern for artists in South Downtown. If the group had access to personnel with financial & real estate expertise, they could begin to formulate market studies showing the impact of their arts organizations in the area on the built environment & on property values. With financial feasibility due diligence, they could begin to make the case for cross subsidizing artist rents from market rate tenants in oncoming developments. Part of this involves a deep dive into progressive programs, zoning codes, & financing tools being implemented in other cities that have effectively enabled arts districts. With these tools, artists may be able to argue not only that the market has space to support these activities in South Downtown with increasing viability as development unfurls & organizations build capacity, but also that cross subsidy from the developer or alternatively packaged financing from Invest Atlanta would effectively maintain authenticity & vibrancy in the area as it redevelops.

Working out specific packages of concessions, subsidies, benefits, etc. that would comprise the public private partnership can become bogged down with assumptions & uncertainties quickly; all interested parties (the city/Invest Atlanta, Newport, the artists) agree that it would be difficult to craft a package that meets all constituent interests given continued, aggressive property acquisition by Newport. Without a relatively accurate figure in terms of square footage, costs of improvement, etc., negotiations cannot identify areas around which to make concessions, relaxations, subsidies, & covenants.

Potential packages could include calculations which balance the rent per square foot of market rate verses under-market space with cost savings found in zoning relaxations, parking requirement elimination, certain tax benefits, expedited permitting & entitlements processes, & other benefits. Informal conversations between stakeholders in South Downtown & Newport have revealed an anticipated need of these sorts of benefits to make possible a cultural preservation program. One concrete item already mentioned by Newport is a facilitated historic preservation designation for eligible properties under contract or that Newport may be interested in later. As mentioned above, the city should also consider facilitating a joint application for TAD funding by Newport & the coalition of arts organizations. The City or Invest Atlanta, in an effort to facilitate authentic placemaking & revitalization of South Downtown,



should support the coalition in identifying which version of organizational formalization would enable this joint application & to then facilitate the process.

Despite all of the aforementioned uncertainty & doubt, space for optimism around the potential for a public-private agreement rests in statements from Newport staff that suggest willingness to collaborate. Suggestions have been made to Kessler & others at CCI & in the South Downtown Initiative (SDI) that the developer has an interest in breaking fro status quo & working out an arrangement with extant arts organizations. Executives at Newport understand arts & culture constitute a foundational piece of authentic development. Similar messaging has come from Tim Keane's office & from Invest Atlanta. The question remains: what can decision makers at the city do to act on these principals? Planners & decision makers at the city should consider the infrastructure—or lack thereof—in place for facilitating conversations between communities & developers around the sorts of private agreements that mutually benefit developers as well as the communities affected by projects. [

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### Assist with Coordination

The South Downtown coalition needs a dedicated project coordinator to explore challenges & possibilities, as well as to fill a variety of other organizational & management gaps. For instance, artists in interviews consistently cite a lack of self-assessment & organizational management skills. The group does not have the skillset to evaluate areas of improvement, weigh alternatives, confidently make decisions based on objective criteria, & plan concrete actions. A coordinator would facilitate productive meetings, induce accountability among coalition members, & network human capital & financial resources. As meetings run now, coalition members share ideas, hear information about potential alternatives from a few knowledgeable attendees, & then slip into a cycle of debating different options without a base of sufficient knowledge—or confidence—to move forward. The artists seem to seek a combination of project manager & facilitator—someone to send out meeting minutes, write up notes on the board, reach out to potential partners & other stakeholders, & make progress on various policy & advocacy items on various timetables between meetings. On top of that, the coordinator would help add legitimacy to the group's cause; she would design & implement public relations & communications strategies based on member feedback. Other coordinator duties could include serving as a third party liaison to manage communications between various stakeholders; improving on an existing asset map of South Downtown; facilitating public engagement processes or negotiation sessions between various stakeholders; organizing group ideas & packaging them for official consumption; attending negotiations between tenants & landlords; & assessing alternatives for a public-private partnership based on market analysis, policy research, & zoning analysis. Lastly, in the event that the coalition succeeds in arranging a partnership with Newport & the City, the project coordinator would become the partnership manager, serving as a third party agent to track implementation & compliance with the help of a representative group of partnership constituents.

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### Plan Ahead for Future Arts Districts

Some in the South Downtown community have raised concern about the appropriateness & effectiveness of asking for subsidy & expending great political capital to achieve an arrangement that benefits private capital entering the neighborhood at a very high basis. In lieu of this arrangement, Cherie Ong, a regular collaborator in South Downtown initiatives, suggested that instead, the artists may be better off seeking ownership of cheaper land elsewhere, or land owned by the city. That approach, she argued, would cost less, provide more

flexibility for negotiating alternative financing structures, & would more likely result in permanent tenure or even asset ownership for the arts community. Given the extensive research showing the healthy returns-on-investment afforded by arts & cultural investment, Invest Atlanta & Tim Keane's team should seriously consider facilitating & financing the creation of such an arts community in an area of Atlanta that would benefit from a tactile, place-based development strategy.

### Provide Sustained Support & Programming – a note on ELEVATE

Elevate, a one-week-long event, which the Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs (OCA) has hosted for the past few years, was partially funded through an NEA grant for \$25,000 this year. The stated mission of Elevate per the OCA FY206 Annual Report is to "enhance cultural offerings in downtown Atlanta" via a temporary activation of downtown with visual arts, performances, & other events (28). However, to many of the artists who struggle to maintain operations & programming, a temporary activation highlights the disconnection between city arts & culture programs & real community need. As the artists unpack the happenings of the week, many agree that 1) Elevate was too long, that 2) the event did not generate a considerable increase of foot traffic in gallery spaces throughout the week, & finally, that 3) many, if not most, of the attendees were from within the South Downtown arts networks already. If these perceptions hold any truth, OCA should reconsider their claim that Elevate enhances the city's cultural offerings. Instead, artists in South Downtown hope for support from the OCA in the form of street improvements & public art commissions in South Downtown, capacity building support, & other versions of technical assistance which would strengthen organizations as they look to expand their reach & deepen their presence in the area.



Figure 12. ELEVATE 2016. Photo taken on South Broad. Courtesy of OCA.

The following sections go into more detail connecting stated interests & concerns of arts

stakeholders in South Downtown to larger questions about the importance of vibrant arts districts in cultivating strong, vibrant downtown places. Through the data collection process, artists identified several considerations that the city should take into account when formulating arts & culture planning documents & other plans, or when awarding subsidy or benefits to developers. These include a shift from top-down to bottom-up placemaking to increase authenticity of Downtown neighborhoods, recognizing & acting on the importance of South Downtown & other neighborhood-based arts communities in the Atlanta regional arts pipeline, & supporting arts & cultural production in South Downtown (& the ensuing physical & social changes that come with concentrating these activities) as a way to make Atlanta more competitive in attracting new business & residents from the national market.

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### Authentic Placemaking by Building on Existing Assets

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The artists & other relevant stakeholders in South Downtown revealed a keen understanding of several key components of organic, incremental, authentic placemaking. For instance, themes around racial, cultural, & income diversity as important pieces of a successful neighborhood came up across interviews & group meetings. The artists also demonstrate an intuitive sense that incremental, slow, responsible development in a neighborhood makes for the most stable & authentic revitalization. Anthony Harper at Goat Farm initiated the Beacons program in South Downtown with the intent of getting new arts organizations acquainted with building owners, working out affordable rents, getting basic improvements done to prepare spaces for programming, & to eventually begin negotiating rent-to-own arrangements between artists & their landlords. All of these goals show an understanding that if a framework for the circulation of arts entrepreneurs & cultural practitioners through certain spaces in South Downtown could be built, it would set up an opportunity for a cultural hub to naturally evolve over time.

Participants in the Beacons program have understood that the South Downtown district could serve as a key linkage in an emerging arts & culture landscape running through the Atlanta core—from Castleberry Hill, into South Downtown, up to Broad Street, & through downtown to Midtown & the Sweet Auburn district. Unfortunately, language in planning documents & program requirements from the City, Eastside TAD, & CAP fail to acknowledge the critical role a flourishing South Downtown arts district would play in linking Castleberry Hill to the latter districts. The aim of Eastside TAD investments, private development facilitated by city concessions & tax benefits, & arts programming in the City in general ought to be to stimulate entrepreneurialism while not losing sight of context sensitivity—the businesses already at work, the residents (housed & unhoused) & their interests, the value of historic buildings, & the vibrancy of a place cultivated by incremental, creative interventions in the streetscape by artists & other community organizations. In Chattanooga, for instance, the city piloted a program in collaboration with the Lyndhurst Foundation that aggressively recruited arts organizations & businesses to relocate to Southside (Chevalier 2016). Like South Downtown Atlanta, this area had quality building stock but suffered heavy vacancy & sliding property values. The CreateHere program eased some of the risk of starting up businesses in that submarket by offering discounted mortgages & assistance with move-in costs. This program bridged foundation money with city resources in an effort that has cultivated an extremely popular & vibrant cultural district in Chattanooga. Atlanta, if it wishes to promote the goals of walkability & livability articulated in its various planning programs, ought to look to peer cities such as Chattanooga when considering placemaking strategies.

Representatives at Newport & WRS (the developer heading the Underground Redevelopment) understand that good development cannot happen if current users are forced out, & they recognize that outcome as contradictory to their overarching interest, which, as stated, is to cultivate a vibrant & authentic community in South Downtown. Support from the city in the form of temporary operational support, alternative financing, capacity building & training, & technical support for financial planning would strengthen South Downtown as an arts district, which in turn would provide a stable yet dynamic fixture of cultural assets around which incoming residents & businesses could coalesce. In other words, starting off by strengthening an existing place to shape future development rather working from a blank slate would more effectively garner community & political support, as well as establishing precedent for innovative public private partnerships & fine-grained investments in arts enterprises moving forward.

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### Supporting the Arts & Culture Pipeline in the Atlanta Region

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Artists, developers, & planners, & policymakers all agree that vibrant artistic & cultural places provide a crucial component in accomplishing the aims of comprehensive, equitable placemaking. A city concerned with this endeavor must account for & support places in which people can encounter cultural expression, creative friction, & intentional spaces for interactions between social groups. Arts districts, whether formal & institutional such as the Woodruff Arts Center or informal & tactical such as South Downtown provide these opportunities. However, in addition to providing support for development of the former, decision-makers must also consider the role of the latter in sustaining & expanding the pipeline of artistic formation & production that feeds into the established arts institutions. Put a different way, without neighborhood-based, community-serving arts ecosystems, Atlanta can neither foster a body of creative professionals which exports its goods & services locally, nor ensure equitably distributed access to cultural amenities.

In relating this principal to the situation in South Downtown, planners ought to critically reflect on what it would mean, symbolically & in terms of possible outcomes, if this district were displaced due to a lack of political will to explore creative options & support the artists there in crafting a cross-sectoral solution to displacement.

One might ask, as Brandon Sheets of Downtown Players Club has, “How many progressive arts venues can one neighborhood support?” However, decision makers must also consider the damage done to the arts ecosystem of Atlanta by allowing the displacement of venues in which artists can develop professionally & artistically in preparation for regional competitiveness. Because failing to support these creative economies at the neighborhood, entrepreneurial level amounts to failing to support an economic & community development strategy that creates value through fostering stable neighborhood change & authentic placemaking, the City of Atlanta would be remiss to turn a blind eye to the challenges the South Downtown arts community faces.

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### Arts & Culture Make Atlanta Competitive

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Declining to support the artists & organizations that have brought vibrancy back to a core downtown neighborhood amounts to a an additional tax on creative activity while simultaneously separating arts organizations from the communities they serve & the places they cultivate. City officials should consider the long term effects of these development patterns on the sustainability of a vibrant cultural sector, given that much of Atlanta’s development in



the past five to six years has been geared towards appealing to the workers of the knowledge economy & creatives who consume the products & services being generated in Atlanta's informal arts districts.

Furthermore, groups such as the Atlanta Visitors & Conventions Bureau & Central Atlanta Progress agree that to attract new corporate tenants, large scale development, tourism, & convention activity, planning efforts must move away from large-scale signature facilities & instead focus on bolstering the goods & services created at the grassroots. These authentic spaces & activities evoke the vocabulary of placemaking utilized by Richard Florida & the myriad local governments that seek to attract a certain workforce attracted to the resultant effects of placemaking efforts (2002).

The authentic & fine-grained sense of place that emerges when artists live & work in a neighborhood cannot be planned from the top down or programmed into a new development—these spaces of surprise & creative friction arise naturally within specific physical (cheap rents, flexible spaces, central locations) & social (inclusiveness & tolerance, willingness to put in sweat equity to create intentional & inclusive spaces) contexts. That being said, policymakers & planners should create programmatic & financing options, as well as zoning & land use conditions that promote the preconditions of place, & should be prepared to argue the value of these environments to developers & businesses seeking sites of expansion.

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## Building on Existing Planning

To effectively engage with the issue of supporting & strengthening arts districts such as the one in South Downtown, planners & other interested stakeholders ought to build off of the language in existing plans & policies. Consulting the extant plans that cover the South Downtown neighborhood, we uncover that many of the visions outlined therein refer to the kinds of fine-grained, pedestrian oriented placemaking that the community around South Downtown has been engaged with informally for the past few years. Once we identify the planning language that speaks to the placemaking capacity of South Downtown, we can locate points of improvement & begin to articulate the justificatory piece of investing in that area through cash infusion, programming, alternative financing, or the facilitation of public-private partnership made feasible through city-offered benefits. All of this ultimately ties back into the notion that Atlanta can cultivate quality placemaking not through top down, large scale, master-planned developments, but rather through the bottom up engagement processes which come naturally to artistic & cultural professionals.

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## Atlanta Zoning Code

The Special Public Interest zoning designation was born of a collaborative process that began in 2002 to review & make updates to zoning regulations for Downtown. Led by Central Atlanta Progress, the Atlanta Planning Department, Urban Collage, Inc. (now merged with Lord, Aeck, Sargent), property owners, business owners, & residents engaged with the Imagine Downtown Vision Plan to guide development in Downtown. Council passed SPI-1 regulations in 2006 (& have since updated them several times) in an effort to implement the recommendations put forth in the CAP planning effort. From the most current iteration of the plan, the statement of intent below outlines the principals that guide restrictions on façade treatments, sidewalk design features, parking requirements, FAR, & other design components.

### Atlanta Comprehensive Development Plan 2016

The Community Vision that initiates the 2016 Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan outlines the goals & priorities of the city in terms of city planning, community development, & housing. The vision statement identifies areas around which the City intends to focus, & the remainder of the report elaborates on strategies & progress in these areas. Goals listed in the Comprehensive Development Plan that pertain to the ongoing changes in South Downtown include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Promote diversity in terms of race, age, & income by planning for youth, young professionals, & the aging
- Revitalize commercial corridors & neighborhood centers
- Revitalize Downtown to remake it as the civic & economic center of the city
- Revitalize & protect historic buildings & neighborhoods
- Have active & engaged stakeholders that participate in City government
- Enhance bike connectivity, walkability, & pedestrian experience by focusing on streetscapes, sidewalks, greenways, ADA accessibility, & bike facilities
- Promote neighborhood-scaled nodes with quality retail & cultural opportunities



Figure 13. Looking West on Mitchell Street in South Downtown. The new Mercedes Benz stadium looms in the background. On the north side of Mitchell we see Hotel Row, a protected district. (photo by Grant Patterson)

### Eastside TAD Redevelopment Plan

The Eastside TAD Redevelopment Plan was prepared for Invest Atlanta in 2003 to justify the establishment of the Tax Allocation District that covers the South Downtown neighborhood. The Plan aligns its goals with those enumerated in Atlanta's Comprehensive Development Plan. Furthermore, Georgia Code language justifies the use of Tax Allocation Districts (TAD) with the following claim:

*It is, therefore, in the public interest that such areas be redeveloped to the maximum extent practicable to improve economic & social conditions therein in order to abate or eliminate such deleterious effects. To encourage such redevelopment, it is essential that the counties & municipalities of this state have additional powers to form a more effective partnership with private enterprise to overcome economic limitations that have previously impeded or prohibited redevelopment of such areas. (O.C.G.A. 36-44-2)*

To accomplish these broadly formed goals, the Redevelopment Plan touches on an array of smart growth principals including, but not limited to, the following:

- Incentivize new office space & attract business to compete with suburban markets
- Develop new housing for a diversity of income levels to attract a critical mass of residents in order to make Downtown a 24-hour activity center
- Reinvigorate neighborhoods surrounding the Aquarium, World of Coke, & Children's Museum
- Enhance quality of life through strategic infrastructure investments in pedestrian streetscapes to make Downtown safe & walkable
- Encourage investments in the neighborhood from small & minority-owned businesses as well as large anchor projects
- To balance redevelopment projects secured through Westside TAD incentives
- Provide funding to jumpstart revitalization of the Auburn Avenue Corridor, the Old Fourth Ward neighborhood, & the Memorial Drive/Martin Luther King Jr. Drive Corridor

Stakeholders which shaped the Redevelopment Plan made the case that the TAD structure would help reverse flat or declining property values, reduce the amount of vacant or underutilized buildings & lots, & facilitate the repurposing or redevelopment of older building stock. Contrary to the seeming smart-growth oriented nature of the above-listed broad goals, the plan elaborates on specific market conditions which hinder growth, including "obsolete platting," "ownership diversity," & "inadequate lot sizes." Essentially, this language suggests that the culturally diverse businesses in small buildings provide a barrier large scale redevelopment – a point which, although seemingly obvious, reveals something about the actual priority of Eastside TAD. Invest Atlanta, with this language, hints at a stance that assemblage & development of large-scale projects on big lots will provide the most idea outcomes, in terms of enhanced quality of life & improved streetscapes. In actuality, just the opposite is true. Lack of appreciative inquiry around the assets that already exist in South Downtown & language that promotes large projects typifies precisely the type of disruptive, acontextual development that has plagued many Atlanta neighborhoods. Rather than demolishing historic buildings & assembling land, Invest Atlanta needs to embrace & bolster the cultural diversity & unique architecture that characterize South Downtown. By suggesting that the buildings & uses there now are "obsolete" is to make a normative claim on which types of built environments & customer bases are worth catering to, & which are not. Perhaps this contradictory language can

### Stakeholders in Eastside TAD Redevelopment Plan Process

- Atlanta Board of Education
- Atlanta Development Authority
- Atlanta Housing Authority
- Central Atlanta Progress
- Historic Oakland Foundation
- Novare Group
- Portman Holdings
- SoNo Redevelopment Group
- University CDC
- Wheat St. Charitable Foundation

### To Include in Future Engagements

- Homeless people & advocates
- Current Residents
- Historic Preservationists
- Current Small Business Owners in South Downtown (Along Peachtree SW, etc.)
- Constituents from the arts & culture industry

be attributed in part to the absence of residents, current small business owners, nonprofits, & homeless folks & their advocates at the visioning meetings that led up to the writing of this plan. This lack of substantive engagement—a concern cited consistently by artists & residents in regards to changes in South Downtown—& contradictory language leads many to wonder whether, like they so often are, the placemaking language built into the TAD plan serves merely to conceal Invest Atlanta's ulterior motive of hastening large-scale signature developments which drastically alter neighborhood social & physical character.

Clearly, at the time of its writing, Invest Atlanta had not fully explored—or was unwilling to meaningfully engage with—the stakeholder landscape of South Downtown. Without this engagement piece, how was it to make good on aspirations to

connect the recent redevelopment activity of West Atlanta through Downtown to the Beltline & adjacent neighborhoods to the east? Physically & symbolically, South Downtown can provide the bridge between these two areas, especially considering the cultural diversity that can be found in the current mix of small businesses, arts groups, & pedestrians which currently use the neighborhood.

Invest Atlanta needs to be more clear & bold with its objectives: If it ascribes to vitality, urbanity, & walkability, why would the plan include language about adding new parking decks? Some language in the plan emphasizes support small & minority businesses, enhancements streetscapes, improved pedestrian experience, & preservation of historically significant spaces. Yet, it omits the historical significance, locational advantage, architectural character, & cultural diversity found in South Downtown while simultaneously promoting large developments & additional parking. These contradictions are delegitimizing. To fill these gaps in language, Invest Atlanta must sit down with business owners, residents, & arts groups in the area to explore the assets already in place in the area in order to locate areas for substantive, incremental improvement. A change & approach & a focus on South Downtown could help revivify the former civic & commercial heart of Atlanta.



## ARTS-DRIVEN NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE: Deep Ellum, Dallas, TX

Deep Ellum, one of the first commercial districts for black Americans & immigrants, is one of the most historically significant neighborhoods in Dallas. While it supported small & medium-sized commerce & retail in the early twentieth century, it was famous for its jazz & blues scene. The removal of the streetcar, the construction of the freeway, & suburbanization caused neighborhood decline. The neighborhood has struggled since the mid-twentieth century to regain the vitality it enjoyed in its heyday.

Today, however, the neighborhood enjoys the presence of many small galleries, street murals, cafes, small creative firms, public art, recording studios, neighborhood festivals, & new residences. Much of this rejuvenation can be attributed to the work of the Deep Ellum Community Association, founded in 1992 to focus revitalization on objectives of cultural diversity & independent creativity. Furthermore, the Deep Ellum Foundation was founded as a nonprofit to distribute public funds for the improvement & marketing of the neighborhood. In that role, the Foundation manages the Deep Ellum Public Improvement District, as well as advocates for neighborhood interests to the city to support the versions of neighborhood change that constituents wish to see.

DeepEllumTexas.com

## Eastside TAD Program Guidelines 2016

### *Program Objectives*

As was mentioned above, the Eastside TAD aims to facilitate the revitalization of Downtown & surrounding neighborhoods by providing funding for new developments, public infrastructure & amenities, & other projects to boost the walkability of the district. In project evaluation guidelines under the Eastside TAD plan, Project Impact & Community Revitalization count for 50 percent of the evaluation criteria, with the other 50 percent made up of developer experience, financial strength, project readiness, & financial feasibility. In the list below will outline the indicators of project impact & community revitalization as listed in the Program Guidelines. Each of these points will be connected back to the work done by the South Downtown artists to make the case for bringing Invest Atlanta money in to either help establish a cultural district, or facilitate with the improvements/acquisition of a set of properties.

1. **Tax generation:** *directly increases the property tax base in the Eastside TAD, as well as supports new sales &/or lodging tax collection in the City.*

The interviewing & participant observation processes with the artist community revealed that, powered by the do-it-yourself sense of resourcefulness & a sense of entrepreneurialism, artists at work in South Downtown seek to support themselves financially through the programming & products that come out of their spaces. If redevelopment occurs around a constellation of small arts entrepreneurial enterprises (verses one large anchor), the district will benefit from increased property values, as well as a more authentic & stable version of redevelopment. If a targeted effort to

revitalize South Downtown through a public-private partnership is pursued, the arts & cultural activity will draw other galleries, new restaurants & bars, & then eventually small firms & residential developers. From an economic development perspective, this incremental neighborhood change (rather than the mega-block, master-planned pseudo urbanity that would come by assisting a developer in assembling & re-platting several small plots into one) should be important to Invest Atlanta if they value to claim walkability & livability as core objectives.

2. **Job creation:** *generates construction jobs & permanent employment that supports local business, arts/culture, & shopping & dining options, or contributes to the city's national/global competitiveness in the following key industry clusters: advanced logistics, computational processing, digital arts & media, convention/tourism, life sciences, & corporate headquarters/support administration.*

Artists make the case that by supporting their work in South Downtown, Invest Atlanta would be investing in the future of the neighborhood. The artists in South Downtown understand that their work adds value because it draws audiences from around Atlanta. Interview data revealed this insight, as well as the fact that artists—who see themselves as natural communicators—desire to craft an authentic identity & PR strategy for South Downtown. The audiences which all of this work attracts include other creative professionals—architects, designers, software engineers, studio artists—who will observe the vibrancy of South Downtown. This will encourage these types of firms to occupy, improve, & preserve the historically significant built fabric that remains in South Downtown.

3. **Vacancy & Obsolescence:** *directly activates &/or reuses vacant or obsolete buildings & surface parking lots or indirectly contributes to the repositioning of Downtown & the surrounding neighborhoods to compete more effectively, regionally & nationally; thus, attracting & retaining new or existing tenants.*

**Artists have shown expertise at activating & adapting South Downtown streets & buildings.** Organizations in South Downtown have expressed interest in receiving training & technical support to acquire some of the key organizational capacities needed to sustain programming, arts sales, & studio rentals. As discussed, these organizational capacities include technical support for certificates of occupancy, liquor licenses, financial planning, business training, & other items. However, if these resources can be provided with investment dollars & through city personnel support, the artists' work, at its core, will activate & adapt vacant buildings. Interview data reveals that the small, historic commercial buildings artists inhabit are not obsolete in their eyes, but rather huge assets. The histories, layouts, & architecture of South Downtown buildings inspire & shape the artists' programming & shape their work in unexpected ways. Chris Yonkers said in an interview, that Mammal can only do its work in its current space—there is too much connection between the building & the vision for programming to move elsewhere. Creative adaptation cannot be forced; Invest Atlanta should support it where it occurs organically.

4. **Transit-orientation:** *leverages proximity to MARTA transit stations, bus stops, &/or current or future Atlanta Streetcar locations (see Atlanta Streetcar System Plan), as well as*

*supports the use of existing & planned bike lane/s paths to promote alternative transportation modes & reduce transportation costs for local households & businesses.*

**The artists consistently referred to centrality & transit access as key benefits of having their work located in South Downtown.** Because many of the artists who work, perform, & play in South Downtown do not have automobile access, having spaces & programs located at the crux of Atlanta's public transportation system is critical.

5. **Urban Design & Sustainability:** contributes to significant visual improvement of the exterior of the existing or future buildings & surrounding neighborhood by applying best practices in urban design, placemaking & green building. This includes exemplary or contextual architectural features, beautification of public realm (landscaping/streetscaping, pedestrian/bicycle accessibility, lighting, water features, public art, etc.), activated ground floor uses, innovative green building design, & sustainable best management practices (BMPs) such as green storm-water infrastructure.

Interview data shows that artists at work in South Downtown make improvements to the streets & buildings they inhabit because it serves their work & creates the aesthetic qualities that attract other artists & broad audiences. These same features attract creative firms, who will be enthusiastic partners in the implementation of sustainable upgrading & design. Furthermore, anyone can see walking down South Broad that because of the artists' presence, the area has benefited from quality murals & engaging public art.



Figure 14. Women's Rights rally, which marched from the Center for Civil & Human Rights, past CNN Center & World Congress Center, & then East down Mitchell toward the government district. South Downtown can again be the core of Atlanta civic li.

### *Resurgens Grant*

The Resurgens grant program intends to spend TAD tax increment dollars to provide gap financing for real estate projects that will catalyze further growth. Specifically, the grant prioritizes mixed-income & mixed-use development in historic neighborhoods, specifically mentioning South Downtown as one of those neighborhoods (7). Additionally, the objectives stress reuse of historic, vacant, or obsolete buildings. This mission aligns perfectly with the values & visions for the future of South Downtown articulated by the artists working there—a fact which Invest Atlanta knows because of its improving relations with these groups. If representatives from Invest Atlanta can sit down with Newport, other building owners, legal experts, & artists organizations, they may be able to figure out a way to work through the requirements for Resurgens eligibility, discovering areas where partnership & shared resources can help meet all the requirements that no individual would be able to meet on her own. For instance, if a foundation, district, or some other geographically bound entity was formed to include a specific set of parcels with owner buy-in, the artists' group could provide the necessary evidence of property control, bolster financial feasibility with long-term affordable leases offered by landlords, & offer building owners & developers needed capital to make improvements without having to raise rents drastically on arts tenants.

Because of the economy of scale that would operate at a district level TAD allocation, versus the Resurgens typical project-by-project allocation, perhaps Invest Atlanta could waive administrative or application fees to further ease the costs of working out a partnership for developers, justifying the fee waive with the fact that the investment will ultimately support the work of long-term community-focused artistic practice. Artists in South Downtown, representatives at Newport, & staff at Invest Atlanta & the planning department have all expressed interest in working out an arrangement like this. The artists, whose efforts should & must remain focused on their work, should not be expected to initiate these discussions. It is in the city & in Newport's best interest to instigate a partnership, & interview data revealed that prominent Atlanta zoning attorney Larry Dingle has already offered to provide his legal expertise to support the effort. The artists shared their sense that only missing component at this time is political will.

### *Downtown Façade Improvement Grant (DFIG)*

The project goals for this program are to enhance commercial areas' appearances to help attract new businesses & customer bases. Furthermore, the objectives emphasize that funds should be used to complement other community revitalization goals. Clearly artists' improve the appearance of their buildings, & the argument has been made that artistic practice attracts new business & customers. A partnership of private capital & arts organizations should work with Invest Atlanta to leverage private dollars with DFIG money to enhance the community revitalization efforts already underway. The benefits of subsidy for façade improvement & the revitalization brought about by an increasingly strong community of artists should more than outweigh the costs for Newport in providing the minimum 5 year leases required to secure the grant funds. To foster this collaboration, Invest Atlanta would need to waive its exclusion of non-profit facilities from DFIG & consider waiving fees.

In the Downtown Façade Improvement Grant we see what can happen when building owner, artist, & city work together to bring improvements for an organization engaged in the arts. When interests were shared between Eyedrum & LAZ Parking, the owner of the building they sought to move into, they discovered that in exchange for a long term one-dollar lease, Eyedrum & local technicians would facilitate the securing of a façade improvement grant. The

benefits of increased property value & subsidy for building improvements more than outweighed the cost of offering such a lease.

## CONCLUSIONS

Stakeholders across sectors all agree that a culturally diverse, artistically entrepreneurial South Downtown would provide an ideal base upon which to build a larger process of neighborhood revitalization. Folks at Invest Atlanta have mentioned their willingness to support the artists in their endeavors to work out a solution to impending tenure threats. Planning Commissioner Tim Keane & others on his team have also expressed solidarity with the artists in wanting to preserve the area as a district in which experimental & small-scale arts enterprises can flourish. Even staff at the private development interests in the area has claimed that they understand the value of cultural vitality as they begin developing in the area. Furthermore, although there is room for improvement, the current planning documents that envision the future of downtown provide myriad opportunities for supporting the work done by arts entrepreneurs in Atlanta, & with creativity & a collaborative effort, can be made to justify a partnership or developer agreement which would link combine commitments to support development projects, developer covenants to provide affordable leases & other concessions to ensure long-term tenure for the artists, & city policies, programs, & funds to fill in the cost gaps & make the partnership feasible & mutually beneficial. What is missing from this scenario is bold, assertive leadership to coordinate artist interests, facilitate negotiations between interested parties, & demand accountability & action from decision makers & check-writers. Once this coordinative leadership role is filled, an opportunity will emerge for Atlanta to join other cities in supporting arts & cultural endeavors in order to cultivate a process of creative placemaking which can turn around once-declining urban core neighborhoods like South Downtown.



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