



Center for Urban Transformation
Art and Sustainability Concept Paper

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Art and Sustainability Project

Introduction

The Center for Urban Transformation (CUT), in conjunction with several partners, is designing a community and economic development project that is informed by the principles of sustainability and the green economy.

The core of the project will combine art, design, architecture and artisan level craftsmanship into a line of products that will bring together established artists and professionals and emerging artist and those interested in developing job readiness skills transferable into trades such as construction, carpentry and welding. Additionally, the project will also serve as a business incubator for those looking long term at the prospect of becoming entrepreneurs.

The primary source of materials will be found materials recovered from the waste stream and sourced from potential partners that operate deconstruction programs as well as those materials found by the artisans themselves. When virgin materials are required they will to the greatest extent possible be from materials that are sustainably produced. The project will require that participants use eco-friendly materials and supplies in programs such as low VOC paints, stains and varnishes.

The in terms of physical facilities the project will consist of gallery spaces, studio and workshop spaces, a retail store, café, performance space and other social enterprises such as a bookstore.

Rationale

The prerequisite for developing a sustainable social, cultural, psychology and economic future is predicated on the creation of a powerful mindshift that rivals the decision of our ancestors to leave Africa and to begin settling and adapting to life in a range of ecosystems from deserts to rainforests.

A social, cultural, psychological and economic construct has emerged that uses the resources we have on this planet in a way that is unsustainable and that can't under any circumstances continue to support the lasting existence of humans and the other beings that we share this planet with. Several feedback indicators such as climate change, peak oil and events such as flooding in Bangladesh and Pakistan as well as the oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico are signals that the dominant practices cannot be sustained.

The intersection of art and development of products that primarily reuses recovered and recycled materials are powerful tools for a social development strategy that is predicated on the creation of a sustainable set of practices (via art, architecture, design and sociocultural change) that will undergird the prospect that life as we know and experience it can continue for thousands of years as it has for 2,000 previous generations.

The shift to what has been termed a “green” and/or “sustainable” economy is rooted in the development of this project. The emerging economy (economic activity is profoundly and inextricably interconnected with all areas of human activity) must be based upon repurposing materials that have already been extracted. The extractive nature of the so-called modern epoch has given rise to systems of thought and action exemplified in seemingly disparate activities as the industrial agriculture and the prison industrial complex. The mindshift and shift in practices that find value in all beings - sentient and non-sentient; from those written off living in oppressed communities to extractive practices such as destroying a mountain to extract coal are rooted in new forms of cultural and economic activity that is ecologically sustainable and human (life) oriented.

Project Overview

The following communities are under consideration as the sites for initial project are (but not limited to):

- Chicago Lawn
- Englewood
- West Englewood
- Washington Park
- Park Manor
- Greater Grand Crossing

The project is currently looking for prospective sites in these communities as the venues for the physical facilities described in the introduction. The project will provide a catalyst for the development of cultural districts in the initial community that can be replicated in Chicago and other communities in the Americas.

The unique physical nature of each community will determine the pattern that the project and the culture district that emanates from institutions formed by the project. For example, the commercial strip that exists in the Chicago Lawn community on 59th and 63rd streets between Western and Kedzie Avenues will be developed around a series of vacant storefront and consist of the following:

- Community Architecture and Design Studio – will be a community based program that will provide architectural and design services focused upon various community and economic development projects. For example the project would consult with senior residents that need assistance with repair and remodeling projects. Similarly the service will provide assistance to new and existing business for designing their retail and/or office spaces.
- Gallery Spaces – will provide opportunities for both established and emerging artists to display their work. The space will also provide unique workforce development through internship opportunities in career fields such as carpentry, art and museum curator, art management, lighting, painting, communications and public relations.

- Studio and Workshop Spaces – will be the location of work spaces for established and emerging artists and artisans for a variety of activities from sculpture to furniture making. The spaces will host workshops and master classes conducted by emerging artists in a range of multimedia and artistic practices. This workforce development aspect of this program will include career pathways in graphic arts, photography, film production, furniture making and design, web design, digital/online media such as magazines and news blogs. There will be an emphasis on business development and incubation so that interns will have the requisite skills for creating businesses as the cultural district expands and in communities where the project will be replicated as a catalyst community and economic development in heretofore disadvantaged communities.
- Retail Space – while gallery spaces will provide some opportunities for connecting artists and artisans with opportunities to sell their work retail space(s) will be developed for a range of artisans from furniture makers to fiber artists. Workforce development activities will include opportunities in customer service, sales, commercial interior design, accounting, marketing, retail management and communications. This aspect of the project will have a subdivision dedicated to fair trade products produced by global artisans particularly those in the Americas.
- Café –the café will provide a place where customers can imbibe in a selection of fine coffees, whole leaf teas, juices, smoothies and light meals and deserts. Food and beverage offerings will to the greatest extent possible be obtained from organic, fair trade as well as local and regional producers. The café will provide internet access and performance space for a range of musical and spoken word artists. The café will offer workforce development opportunities for culinary students, baristas and food service managers. A program goal will include a partnership with Washburne Culinary Institute.
- Performance Space(s) – The initial performance space will be integrated into the café but long term at least one larger performance space will be established with the capability to offer multimedia events including theater, music and film events. Workforce development opportunities include arts management, sales, event planning, public relations and marketing.
- Bookstore –no independent bookstores exist in the target communities and this will be the initial social enterprise offering for the project. The bookstore will offer a broad range of offerings and will also be a venue for literacy programs and writing workshops for intergenerational programming. Workforce development opportunities include bookstore management and library and information science services.

Multiplier Programs

The project will develop a series of programs designed to provide a pathway to educational opportunities for secondary and post-secondary students in architecture, design, nutrition as well as library and information science.

These additional programs will be developed through working relationships developed with area high schools, community colleges and universities as the project will seek partnerships with these institutions for the development and operation of the aforementioned program and program areas.

Web Site Examples of Organizations Inspiring the Project

AW Gallery	http://awgallery.com/home.html
Artistic Jeanius	http://www.artisticjeanius.com/#/home
Hugo McCloud	http://www.mcclouddesign.com/
Busboys and Poets	http://www.busboysandpoets.com/
Urban Woods	http://www.urbanwoods.net/
Madera Furniture	http://www.maderafurniture.net/
Whit McLeod	http://www.whitmcleod.com/
Natural Tree Furniture	http://www.naturaltreefurniture.com/
Roy Tam Designs	http://www.eco-furniture.co.uk/
Rebuilding Exchange	http://www.rebuildingexchange.org/

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