

# Report on the Artist Space Assistance Program pilot project

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## Summary

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The Artist Space Assistance Program (ASAP) pilot ran from October, 2011 to March 2012. The pilot program was developed by Shunpike under contract with the City of Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs to address need and opportunity for space acquisition and relocation assistance services for artists in the International District and Pioneer Square neighborhoods of Seattle. The project scope included assessment surveys and focus groups, information resource development, direct service workshops and consultations and outcome and recommendation reporting.

### Outputs

- Real Estate Professionals Roundtable
- Public Survey of Artists
- Web Resource Development
- Public Workshop Event for Artists and Arts Groups
- Needs Assessment Materials
- Direct Assistance Service Pilot Group
- Outcomes and recommendations report

### Findings

- Information resources and technical assistance are the greatest need.
- Real estate professionals also need training and information.
- There is an abundance of available space and listings for it.
- There is a lack of good data on needs and condition among artists citywide.  
In addition to existing stock, there is significant opportunity to develop new property that is designed for the arts.
- Artists are underserved with opportunities to network and communicate with one another around space and other issues.

## Introduction

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After the eviction of a large number of artists from the well-known art walk destination at the 619 Western Building in Pioneer Square due to closure, the Seattle Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs proposed a pilot program to assist with issues obstructing the relocation and/or acquisition of space for artists to work and/or live within the neighborhood.

With a successful proposal, local nonprofit arts agency Shunpike took on the pilot initiative under contract with the city, planning a four-stage process of preparation and announcement; need and opportunity assessment; direct support and assistance; and reporting. The primary deliverables were the following

- Real Estate Professionals Luncheon
- Public Survey of Artists
- Web Resource Development
- Public Workshop Event for Artists and Arts Groups
- Needs Assessment Materials
- Direct Assistance Service Pilot Group
- Outcomes and recommendations report

This report outlines the details and outcomes of these projects, highlights ongoing work that has come out of the pilot and recommends further next steps for one or several local agencies to continue the investment in this work.

## Artists Survey

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On November 17, 2011, ASAP released an online survey to find out what kinds of space artists need and how quickly they need it. The survey also functioned as an application to be a part of the Pilot Group. 133 people responded, with 107 opting to apply to the Pilot Group.

The survey shows the following:

- More than half of respondents are visual artists, with a significant number of respondents in all of the other categories (dance, theater, film/media, literary arts, music, multidisciplinary, youth/arts ed and other.) Most are also responding as an individual (71%) as opposed to a group or organization. Most (71%) also claim recent leases or sub-leases in Pioneer Square and/or the International District.
- Over half of respondents are without a current space and searching for something within the next 6 months to a year while another 16% have need to find space immediately.
- Respondents generally need less than 1000 square feet and are available for either temporary or permanent leases. Few (14%) replied with interest in purchase. Of those

interested in more square footage, most were groups or organizations involved in performance-related or other large programmatic activities.

- Of respondents that had held art space leases, the average length of the tenancy was 33 months. Half of respondents were primary leaseholder while about a third were involved in shared leases.
- On average, artists expect to spend about 30 hours working in their space weekly.
- Among respondents currently working in PS/ID:
  - More people have space that they want to keep (29% vs. 4% outside PS/ID)
  - 23% have lost space and need space immediately (vs. only 3% of those not in PS/ID).

This survey is quite possibly skewed by the promotional efforts that focused on artists in Pioneer Square and Chinatown/ID, who are largely visual artists.

### **Real Estate Professionals Roundtable**

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On December 14, 2011, ASAP held a roundtable luncheon at the Wing Luke Museum, bringing together 15 real estate brokers, agents, property managers, and neighborhood representatives to discuss the benefits and challenges of working with artists as tenants. The following are some highlights of that conversation.

It is popularly recognized that artists are good long-term tenants and play a strong role in neighborhoods currently. It is also recognized that with good leadership and advocacy that role could be even stronger.

- *What's surprising is the stability of artist-tenants – if you can offer them predictability, they will invest.*
- *It's a myth that artists can't pay rent.*
- *We want arts and culture that care about local residents – how do you create that structure? How best to engage art/culture without creating gentrification?*
- *Artists have a broad sense of what goes on in the community. Will care and engage more.*

Artists could be much more effective if given more training and assistance in best practices of business management, business development, negotiation and legal documents. And not just related to real estate issues.

- *I'm shocked at how few artists come back to negotiate lease terms – they don't know about stepped rents, long-term lease, capping. Someone with business sense would come in with lower offer and negotiate. Really important to educate artists about what they can ask for.*
- *Artists genuinely do need advisers to help them and manage expectations. This is a real need.*

- *Commercial brokers will not work with artists with small square footage needs. If artists need under 5000 sq ft, a master leaseholder and/or developer are going to come into play. Or, artists need to be comfortable doing business directly with the property manager.*
- *Artists need to have a business model that will justify a long-term lease.*
- *Artists need to understand all the parts of a lease and responsibilities of tenancy, including insurance, guarantors, etc.*

Just as artists can benefit from training and assistance, property managers and real estate agents have as much, if not more to learn about working with the arts.

- *Training property managers is as important as training artists. Artists may have high needs up front, but after that are stable tenants.*
- *Artists ask a lot of odd questions, have odd requests – can we paint graffiti, hang from ceiling? – it’s a learning curve.*
- *Brokers and managers need to know that unusual spaces are not off limits to artists, and need a listing resource for these spaces.*
- *Working with artists can be good business. That said... can the city help by creating incentives if you set aside sq feet for arts?*
- *Real estate professionals must engage in training and learning hours for their license every year. Topics for these range dramatically and it would be appropriate and possible for there to be sessions focused on artists and/or cultural organizations.*

Other recommendations and notes

- Organize an open-house event where available properties interested in working with artists are open on the same afternoon and/or evening and interested artists are invited to attend and tour available spaces. It could be promoted through local arts agency partners at SOACA, 4Culture, Artist Trust and Shunpike.
- There are many listing services and artists mostly just need Craigslist. There was some doubt among the attendees as to whether another listing service would be effective.

## **Web Resources**

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In preparation for announcing the program, a resource page was developed on Shunpike’s website, which was further developed through the course of the program to include the following resources, among others:

Planning and Service Resources

- Link to Square Feet Seattle, a space-related publication of SOACA
- Shunpike’s Arts Business Clinic

- Washington Lawyers for the Arts Legal Clinics
- Arts Space Google Group Discussion Forum

#### Listings

- Commercial Brokers Association
- Craigslist
- ActivSpace
- Artist Trust Opportunities page
- Downloadable list of live-work spaces

#### Policy and Research

- Cultural Space Seattle Public Forum
- Urban Land Institute / NEA profile on cultural space
- LINC (Leveraging Investments in Creativity)

The resource site can be viewed at the following:

[www.shunpike.org/artist-space-assistance-program/resources/](http://www.shunpike.org/artist-space-assistance-program/resources/).

### **Artist Workshop**

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On January 7, 2012, ASAP presented a seminar and peer group workshop for artists and arts groups at the Bertha Kinght Landes Room at Seattle City Hall. The workshop discussed best practices and issues of commercial real estate leasing, space acquisition, negotiation and relocation. 50 people attended (of 83 registrants).

The event featured:

- Opening remarks by our generous host Frank Video, Legislative Assistant to City Councilmember Nick Licata
- Welcome from Vincent Kitch, Director of Seattle Office of Arts and Culture
- Seminary Presentation on commercial leases and leasing by Richard Hesik, commercial real estate broker
- Breakout groups led by
  - Michael Seiwerath, Executive Director of the Capitol Hill Housing Foundation
  - Matthew Richter, Program Manager of Storefronts Seattle (Shunpike)
  - Cathryn Vandenbrink, Artspace Projects
  - Sam Forrazaino, INScape
  - Randy Engstrom, Consultant, Reflex Strategies

Workshop feedback:

Participants responded very positively in exit surveys to the information and breakout peer group conversations at the event, responding “positive” to “very positive” on information

presented, presenters and facilitator skill and experience, usefulness of breakout sessions, meeting overall expectations and likelihood to recommend to others.

*“The business aspect of art has always been so nebulous to me - the workshop helped to illustrate some aspects that I need to become aware and versed-in in order to be successful and effective.”*

The single most written comment was about the desire to network with other artists in order to work together to secure space.

### **ASAP Pilot Group**

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Our stated goal was to serve 8-10 artists or artist groups into the ASAP Pilot Group. Of the 107 applications, we accepted 11 artists working in different forms and in a variety of tenancy situations. Considerations included immediate need, history in PS/ID, and history of involvement with Pioneer Square Art Walk and the 619 Western Building.

Of the 11 artists included in the program, 8 scheduled and attended Arts Business Clinics. Most followed with additional email and phone consultation and 3 attended an additional clinic session for more guidance and support. Throughout, we were able to provide

Service included an assessment interview to help clarify space needs and discussion of strategy for planning for, searching and acquiring space. Considering the very short timeline of the program, ASAP provided immediate intervention around the most critical issue as identified in the conversation. In most cases, this was to develop communication and planning resources that articulated requirements and expectations to help in searching for and negotiating for space in the next several months. Finally, we focused on referral to additional resources in every case, most often to available recent listings on craigslist or other places and additional support like Washington Lawyers for the Arts.

Needs that emerged were:

- Identification of Space Requirements
- Arts Space listings and recommendations
- Lease reviews and other legal support
- Business Model support, to target new kinds of income to secure space
- Partnership and program development, to move toward a collective model to develop a new arts space
- Board Development

Specific space needs vary from artist to artist, but for visual artists there is a clear pull toward a private workspace that also provides access to a presentation space and a marketing tool like Art Walk in Pioneer Square.

One of the specific issues we tried to learn more about was the WSDOT relocation process for

artists evicted from 619 Western. The deadline for artists to access this support is April 2013. There is clearly more work to be done in assisting artists through the complicated and lengthy process of navigating WSDOT relocation assistance which falls outside the capacity and timeframe of this Pilot Program.

Of the artists supported, three have identified and articulated a plan for finding and acquiring a space in the next six months. Two have successfully found a space for their work. Two have decided after engaging in the assessment that they would focus on other business planning and development activities first and one is still searching currently but established an interim arrangement in her current living facility.

## **Findings and recommendations**

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### **Finding #1 – Information resources and technical assistance are the greatest need.**

Issues of space among artists and arts groups are often related to general lack of knowledge, skill and capacity in general business practices. Artists generally do not understand contracting, budgeting, business development planning, negotiation and finance, leading to mistakes and instability. With better assistance, resources would be better utilized and opportunities accessed more readily. One possible recommendation is to develop a cadre of volunteer real estate professionals who might be available to volunteer time or other resources to artists who need assistance.

### **Finding #2 – Real estate professionals also need training and information.**

There is as much need and opportunity in training and promoting artists and arts groups to real estate professionals as there is in training artists in the methods of finding and acquiring space. Real estate and neighborhood representatives see the substantive economic and community value of the arts. Given better guidance and understanding in the needs and issues of the arts community, property owners, managers and real estate brokers can better assist artists and arts groups.

### **Finding #3 – There is an abundance of available space and listings for it.**

Despite perception, there is not a significant lack of space nor lack of information resources about available space. Instead, there seems to be a lack of (and large opportunity for) “go-between” master leaseholders with capacity for managing collective or shared space resources. Property managers and brokers often have large open floorplans that are too large and expensive for an individual. If artists can be better collected together, there are many opportunities for affordable and available space which is well documented in many listing services. However, without formal or informal master leaseholders, it is unlikely that this available stock will be accessible to the individual artist or small group.

### **Finding #4 – There is a lack of good data on needs and condition among artists citywide.**

A citywide survey of artists should be conducted to assess the comparative and overall conditions of artist space needs in every neighborhood. The limited scope of this preliminary

survey made the data less valuable, especially in attempting to compare the condition of artist space and needs of artists in adjacent neighborhoods and throughout the city. A future program or current agency should take the opportunity to truly collect data from a more widespread population of artists and arts groups to get a more clear picture of the need. It might be that a city-wide artist survey on many topics could be conducted and include space and real estate issues within it.

**Finding #5 – In addition to existing stock, there is significant opportunity to develop new property that is designed for the arts.**

The program attracted unexpected attention from property developers, though it clearly was too short of a process to help developers with their long timelines. Future programs or other agencies could make a significant impact around the existence and development of artist-specific space in Seattle by marketing the value and promoting the needs of arts development to developers by producing a report, publication and/or presentation to real estate developers on the benefits and challenges of building for artists.

**Finding #6 – Artists are underserved with opportunities to network and communicate with one another around space and other issues.**

The peer group and online discussion forum have successfully led to connections that would otherwise not exist and many artists reporting communicating with their peers afterwards to share resources and even collaborate in the acquisition of space. Significant impact can come from connect artists and arts groups with each other to share resources, past experiences and foster collaborations. Formal and well-supported peer group and mentorship programs might put artists and small groups in touch with community members with more experience in planning, acquiring, developing and managing space and other business issues.