



## [Discussion of Baltimore Arts & Entertainment Districts](#)

**April 17, 2020**

### **Background by Steven Skerritt-Davis, Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC)**

Maryland's Arts & Entertainment (A&E) Districts are charged with developing and promoting community involvement, tourism, and revitalization through tax-related incentives that attract artists, arts organizations, and other creative enterprises to towns and cities across the State. As hyper-local service organizations at the intersection of arts and economic development, A&E Districts are uniquely positioned to deliver direct service to artists and businesses - including the coordination of disaster relief efforts for specific populations - while maintaining an eye on long-term economic, tourism, and promotion goals.

This discussion with the leaders of Baltimore's four A&E Districts, Baltimore City's Planning Department, and the Maryland State Arts Council (MSAC), convened by the Arts Funders Affinity Group, is a follow-up to discussions in [October of 2018](#) and [July of 2019](#). In part spurred by the initial discussion, district leaders now meet monthly, district management is now embedded within four community development corporations.

#### **Meeting Resources (sign-in required)**

[Baltimore A&E Districts Updates](#)

[Baltimore A&E Presentation 04.17.2020](#)

[A&E Districts Letter of Agreement FINAL DRAFT](#)

[A&E Operating Support Guidelines FY2021 - FINAL DRAFT](#)

### **Cheryl Casciani, Director of Community Planning and Revitalization, Baltimore City Planning Department**

- Cheryl is the coordinator for this project at the Planning Department
- The City of Baltimore had secured \$50,000 in operating support per district per year as well as city-level coordination via the Planning Department but due to the pandemic, there's been a freeze on any contracts that are non-essential.
- Cheryl tried to justify this as essential, to no avail. There's uncertainty about the flow of money. The City remains committed to this issue.
- Understand funders are affected by this as well.
- Want to thank MPN and funders for quick, visible, and swift response to COVID-19, including the many resources on MPN [COVID-19 Outbreak resource page](#).
- The A&E Districts provide essential coordination, support for individual artists, marketing and event planning and promotion, and a link between reciprocal benefits.

### **Chris Ryer – Director, Baltimore City Department of Planning**

- Chris put the A&E Districts in context of broader Community Development efforts
- The City has undergone a lot of challenges, but we are persevering.

- This is a budget freeze, not elimination. Steven's work at the State was the breakthrough we could exploit at the city. This partnership allows basic baseline support for A&E Districts so they can focus on their work.
- When at Southeast CDC, he worked with unfunded group of people. This is a breakthrough to have support. Collaborative endeavors mutually benefited partners.
- We think of funding arts orgs in a community development context; Arts as a community revitalization tool to advance neighborhood advantages.
- Expect to look to the future where City can support districts even more.
- Shout out to MPN for Census mini-grant work.

#### **Steven Skerritt-Davis - MSAC**

- State was giving a designation but not much else. He advocated for more support, and secured \$15,000 in operating support per district per year, with increases through 2021 and additional accountability measures in place.
- The Governor has now put a freeze on increases, so not sure what will happen.
- Steven also oversees county arts agencies – there's been a commitment to provide general operating support to them and see A&E districts as analogous.
- MSAC is here to provide support to A&E Districts, important that they are embedded in community. They are doing the COVID-19 response, as we will see.

#### **Update from each A&E District**

##### **Ellen Janes – How Capital Investment can be spurred by arts districts**

- Virtually nowhere else in the city have we seen increased investment in arts-related properties.
- We thought landmark projects would spark smaller investments, but barriers are so great that hasn't happened: cost of bringing back to life buildings that have been disinvested in for decades.
- Central Baltimore Partnership (CBP) has been pretty successful in efforts - \$3M with BARCO around safe arts spaces; \$2M for core of arts districts: permanent home for Made in Baltimore, façade of North Avenue Market, façade of Baltimore Improve Group on Charles Street.
- Monday, CBP will look at documents to integrate Station North Arts and Entertainment District into their organization, with integration final by June. Have taken on back-office support already. CBP has been engaged in events and arts-related activities. It is a natural progression for both organizations.
- COVID response – taking capital money that hasn't been spent and reprogramming it to provide working capital to arts organizations, so they can keep their organizations afloat.

##### **Kari Snyder - Marketing and Promotion**

- Highlandtown Arts District has been embedded from the beginning in Southeast CDC
- Marketing and promotion celebrates the diversity of the district and build community among residents, brings people into public spaces to interact with arts forms, bring people into galleries and arts spaces – to reinforce Highlandtown is good place to invest.
- Highlandtown Arts Walk, coordinated with arts volunteers promote walking among arts businesses. Have best practices for social media promotion.
- COVID pushed up to lead art walks online via Facebook. Held one in April, think it was successful, doing it again in May. Repurposing funds from MSAC to pay performers

- Physical branding. Highlandtown is well known for place-making projects, that are visible signs that people are in the districts.
- Working to get artists direct relief and then helping them have interaction online and promoting artists online.

#### **Emily Breiter** – Support for Individual Artists in the Districts

- Have to mention supports during current crisis: repositioned funds for Bromo District to award 20 \$500 grants to artists in district.
- All A&E districts were involved in establishing the [Baltimore Artists Relief Fund](#)
- Create new initiatives with Maryland Art Place and Downtown Partnership to place art on large digital displays. Artists get \$250/per display.
- Moving programming to virtual platforms: info session; Critique series, etc.
- Providing Technical Assistance to organizations about tax incentives, one-on-one with artists, advocacy and support.
- Creative placemaking and events – variety of opportunities for artists to highlight their work and unusual spaces in the districts; received two grants through Neighborhood Lights program; bringing back Arts Walks, probably in 2021, showcasing artists in their own studios or shared spaces
- Charm City Night market and Fringe Festival take place in district. Great partners, supporting larger initiatives and connecting local artists to them
- Sponsored two project core applications for gallery and gathering space in the districts
- Marketing and promotion – all the districts market individual artists, help artists tell their story.
- Working to improve services.

#### **Lady Brion** – Reciprocal Benefits

- The Black Arts District (BAD) is less than a year old. Excited we've been able to incorporate BAD independently.
- They have different CDCs and anchor institutions on board to make sure they are aligning interests and activities.
- Working with amazing graphic artist to do style guide, brand and logo. Hosted brand launch in February at Shake and Bake, hosting 200 guests throughout the day.
- Signage and placemaking activities being postponed for 2021, but planning continues.
- Shifted to digital programming and supporting online events and competitions, poetry slams, viewing of play, in partnership with Center Stage, with virtual Happy Hour. Paying artists.
- Part of [Baltimore Artists Relief Fund](#) and also looking to launch fund for black creatives in the area of \$250-\$500 grants per artist.
- Doing the work of hosting small focus groups about wants and needs as a new A&E District and align with current efforts

#### **Jules Dunham-Howie** - Upton Planning Committee

- Provides oversight of BAD and Pennsylvania Avenue Main Street. There's \$70M toward development in Upton Community.
- Collaboration between three is catalyst for agenda for commercial corridor. Penn-North, Druid Heights and Upton. Bringing all stakeholder to the table and identifying how to make the area an Arts and Entertainment destination. Identifying locations to revitalize and create a place people want to come.

- Two examples: Triangle Park create space to do arts programming and new construction of the Shops at Triangle Place for new storefronts
- Ties into creating artist housing, takes advantage of transit-oriented development and the Avenue Market. Have Request for Development Interest for Legends Park; Arts Incubation space next to Jubilee Arts – where creatives can come, learn about business operations and hopefully move to a new storefront.
- We know history of commercial corridor. Secured Lenox Theatre, asking community what programming to put in that space.

What is your budget?

- Kari - Estimate \$50K on staffing, \$20K on promotion. Thought ideal budget would be \$100K
- Ellen - \$100K, CDP provides additional \$50K
- Brion – Estimate \$200K, raised \$170K so far
- Emily – Not consistent, support from Downtown Partnership, around \$100K for programming etc. Downtown Partnership staff help with marketing and design work. Looking at that moving forward given economic conditions.

Does MSAC have deliverables? (Full answer provided by Steven after the meeting)

MSAC has worked over the past year, through a public process, to add structure to the operating support grant program for A&E Districts with the goals of:

1. clarifying the role and activities of a district,
2. strengthening coordination between local governments and management entities,
3. encouraging long-term planning, and
4. ensuring alignment with the State's goals for the program.

Going forward, districts will be required to submit five-year plans when applying for the ten-year designation (or redesignation) as well as a five-year plan mid-designation in order to receive funding. Plans will be reviewed and approved by the A&E Advisory Committee made up of representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Housing and Community Development, and Planning as well as veteran A&E district managers. (The committee also makes designation recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce.)

The attached guidelines include the program's goals, the expectations of the districts (and of MSAC), and the possible activities of districts. They also include the additional requirement for 1) an annual agreement (draft also attached) signed by the chief elected official for the county or municipality holding the designation, the head of the A&E management entity, the district's board or advisory board chair, and MSAC and 2) a contract or MOU outlining division of responsibilities and any financial arrangement between the local government and the management entity if the management entity is a non-profit.

Steven is happy to answer any questions and can be reached at [steven.skerritt-davis@maryland.gov](mailto:steven.skerritt-davis@maryland.gov) or 443-690-2353.