

DELAWARE VALLEY REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION
REGIONAL COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FORUM HIGHLIGHTS
June 29, 2012

A meeting of DVRPC's Regional Community and Economic Development Forum (RCEDF) was held on June 29, 2012, beginning at 9:30 a.m. The meeting focused on the role of arts and culture as a potential community and economic revitalization tool. Barry Seymour, Executive Director of DVRPC, welcomed the speakers and participants. Mr. Seymour gave a brief introduction before introducing the meeting's first speaker, Ms. Jane Golden, the Executive Director of Philadelphia's Mural Arts Program.

The City's Mural Arts Program uses art to create social change. The program, a public/private hybrid with 48 employees, began as an Anti-Graffiti Network under Mayor Wilson Goode. In 1997, the mural-making arm of the Philadelphia Anti-Graffiti Network was reorganized and the newly-named Philadelphia Mural Arts Program became part of the City's Department of Recreation. Soon thereafter, Philadelphia Mural Arts Advocates, a non-profit organization that allowed the program to raise funds to support ever-expanding demand, was formed.

The Philadelphia Mural Arts Program unites artists and communities through a collaborative process, rooted in the traditions of mural-making, to create art that transforms public spaces and individual lives. Ms. Golden noted that she initially did not realize the power of including neighborhood residents in the process of creating the art; today, the work has become a catalyst for social change, and the program is more strategic about its projects.

In addition to making art accessible to everyone, murals reduce blight, increase retail sales, and raise property values. The program has completed 3,600 projects since 1984, and only 10 have been defaced. Recognizing that they needed to expand beyond traditional murals, the Mural Arts Program is branching out from walls into other projects, such as wrapping recycling trucks, trash cans, and food trucks. The Mural Arts Program now includes an Art Education Program, a Restorative Justice Program (serving inmates, youth engaged in residential placement centers, and the Guild Program), and Porch Light, a behavioral health program

The next speaker was Brian O'Leary, Section Chief of County Planning for the Montgomery County Planning Commission. Mr. O'Leary spoke about the County's efforts to measure the supply of and demand for arts and cultural institutions in Montgomery County as a part of their ongoing work to create a county-wide Cultural Plan (see CreativeMontCo.org). He identified several Montgomery County towns that have created new or revitalized arts and cultural venues, including Jenkintown, Bryn Mawr, Ambler, Pottstown, Norristown, Lansdale, East Greenville, Souderton, and North Wales.

While there are strong methodologies for conducting market analyses for most businesses, there is no one single methodology for measuring the supply and demand of theatres and cultural venues. County staff began by dividing the County into trade areas, including the Main Line, Norristown, Eastern Montgomery County, Western Montgomery County, and Upper Montgomery County. Arts venues were located and baseline data was collected, to determine how much money might be spent on each of several types of art forms. The potential demand for different types of arts and entertainment was identified for each trade area. In terms of performing arts capacity, for example, the County determined that with the exception of Norristown, most trade areas have limited excess demand. Overall, the analysis concluded that opportunities for performing arts venues may exist but may also prove challenging; that with the exception of

Upper Montgomery County, the opportunity for traditional movie theaters is limited; and that an art center could potentially evolve in the still-growing areas of Upper Montgomery County.

The third speaker was Nancy DeLucia, Director of Policy and Community Engagement for the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance. Ms. DeLucia's presentation focused on the question of when and where arts and culture can serve as tools for revitalization. Arts and culture help grow the economy, elevate lives, educate people, and create a sense of community. There are currently 2,742 non-profit arts and culture groups in Greater Philadelphia, of which 2,000 are in the Southeastern Pennsylvania suburbs and 1,000 are in the City of Philadelphia. Although 80 percent of these organizations have budgets of less than \$25,000, their overall economic impact in 2007 was over \$1 billion and they employed 40,000 people while paying \$160 million in taxes.

Ms. DeLucia noted that three types of stakeholders need to be included in order for arts-based community development efforts to be successful: artists and arts organizations, local government officials, and the community (including both residents and businesses). Successful examples include Lansdowne, Kennett Square, and Norristown; projects that didn't work include the Lansdale Performing Arts Center and the Chester Cultural Center. She noted that success can be measured in a number of ways, including greater civic participation in the arts, lower truancy and delinquency rates, gradual growth, and bridges built.

The final speaker was Leonardo Vazquez, the Director of *Arts Builds Communities* at Rutgers University. Mr. Vazquez noted that creative place-making is about increasing quality of life and prosperity, and stressed that arts and culture are a very cost effective way of achieving community and economic development goals. He began by describing arts-based economic development strategies in non-traditional areas (areas not known as regional destinations, not wealthy, not known for being 'artsy', and having few if any cultural institutions). His examples included Santa Fe's informal 1912 plan to become a cultural destination, the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago, and Bradenton Florida's Village of the Arts.

Mr. Vazquez next described five steps for successful use of arts and culture to further community and economic development. The first is to build a leadership team, including artists, elected officials, people who can make things go, people who can make things stop, good listeners, good speakers, and open-minded skeptics. The second step is to assess and evaluate the conditions in and around the community, by counting the artists and arts organizations; assessing what the constituents want and expect; determining whether the community wants to be; determining who the competition is and defining how you are different from your competitors; and identifying who you can partner with and why they would want to partner with you. The third of Mr. Vazquez's steps is to clearly articulate your vision, values, and goals, and the fourth is to provide support, through funding, in-kind services, and by removing any known barriers, including unnecessary regulations that might limit creativity. The fifth step to successfully using arts to advance community development is to create a healthier environment for creativity.

Mr. Vazquez stated that art can happen anywhere: "Every wall is a potential canvas; every street is a potential stage." In closing, he noted that while there is no single solution, successful use of the arts as a community development tool requires that you build strong connections; know what you have and what you want; provide clear focus and direction; follow through; and be patient, persistent, and confident.

After breaking for lunch, a Peer Exchange was facilitated by Leonardo Vazquez and Alison Hastings, DVRPC. Participants gave updates, discussed challenges, shared good ideas, and brainstormed answers to their colleagues' tough questions.