



To: Mayor and City Council
From: Brian Phillips, Assistant City Manager
Date: December 18, 2020
Subject: Update Regarding Small Arts Grant Program

At the December 8, 2020 City Council meeting, the City Council directed staff to provide a report outlining what the Public Art Commission is doing with the Small Arts Grant Program.

BACKGROUND:

This program was first outlined at the February 11, 2020, Budget Wrap-Up Meeting. The City Council's only motion recorded in the meeting minutes relating to the program was to include funding for it in the City Budget:

“Moved by Betcher, seconded by Beatty-Hansen, to add the Small Art Grant Pilot program for \$10,000 to the FY 2019/20 Adjusted Budget.”

According to the minutes, individual Council Members did express their personal thoughts regarding the concept, but the Council as a whole provided no further specific parameters for the use of the funds:

“Mr. Schainker stated that if this passes, the money would come out of the Council Contingency Fund. Staff had carried forward \$118,000 and the Council had obligated most of that balance, but there is \$38,471 still available, and as of July 1, 2020 another \$50,000 would be added to the Fund. He noted that if the Council was unable to accomplish the Small Art Grant Pilot program for the next fiscal year then the amount could be carried forward. Council Member Beatty-Hansen mentioned that the program would meet the Council's value of making Ames fun and vibrant. Ms. Betcher stated it is designed to support individual artists as opposed to art organizations that are covered by COTA. She recommended leaving the guidelines to the Public Art Commission to decide in the future.

Council Member Gartin explained that as much as he loves the idea of the program, he thinks it is going to be difficult on principle, and felt more money should be going to Auditorium relief. He was also apprehensive about the criteria.

Roll Call Vote: 5-1. Voting Aye: Beatty-Hansen, Betcher, Junck, Corrieri, Martin. Voting Nay: Gartin. Motion declared carried.”

STATUS:

The Public Art Commission (PAC) and Commission on the Arts (COTA) each designated representatives to discuss potential uses for the funds. After discussion, the leading candidate for the use of the funds is an initiative proposed by the Octagon Center for the Arts, called the Third Floor Initiative. **It is important to note that PAC has not yet made a formal recommendation to proceed and intends to bring any proposal for the use of the funds to the City Council for approval.**

The Octagon’s proposal is to convert space on the third floor of its facility, which is currently underutilized, into co-working studio spaces and private studio spaces for artists, including tools, equipment, recording space, meeting space, office equipment, and other amenities for users. A document outlining the initial proposal is attached.

NEXT STEPS:

The Public Art Commission is continuing to evaluate the proposal and consider alternatives before bringing a recommendation to the City Council. This evaluation has been occurring since summer. No further action by the Council is required to proceed. However, if the City Council is not satisfied with the direction or efforts of the Public Art Commission, the City Council could direct the Public Art Commission to discontinue work on this initiative and provide different direction regarding the Council’s wishes.

Attachment

BUILDING A STRONGER COMMUNITY

THIRD FLOOR INITIATIVE

“A community is a group of people who share things in common, who work together towards a common purpose which they care about and who care deeply about each other. Creating the conditions for such a community to emerge should be a goal of any organization.”

-- David Gurteen, writer

Octagon Center for the Arts

427 Douglas Ave.
Ames, IA 50010

www.octagonarts.org

Hard & Soft
July 20 to Sept 17 | Third Floor
Athletics by April Katz & Bruce
Expanded SO | Printmaking Community

Play of a

Surface Wear
May 11 to July 21 | Third Floor
Athletics by April Katz & Bruce

Twenty Years
May 25 to August 17 | Third Floor
Athletics by April Katz & Bruce
Expanded SO | Printmaking Community

417

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

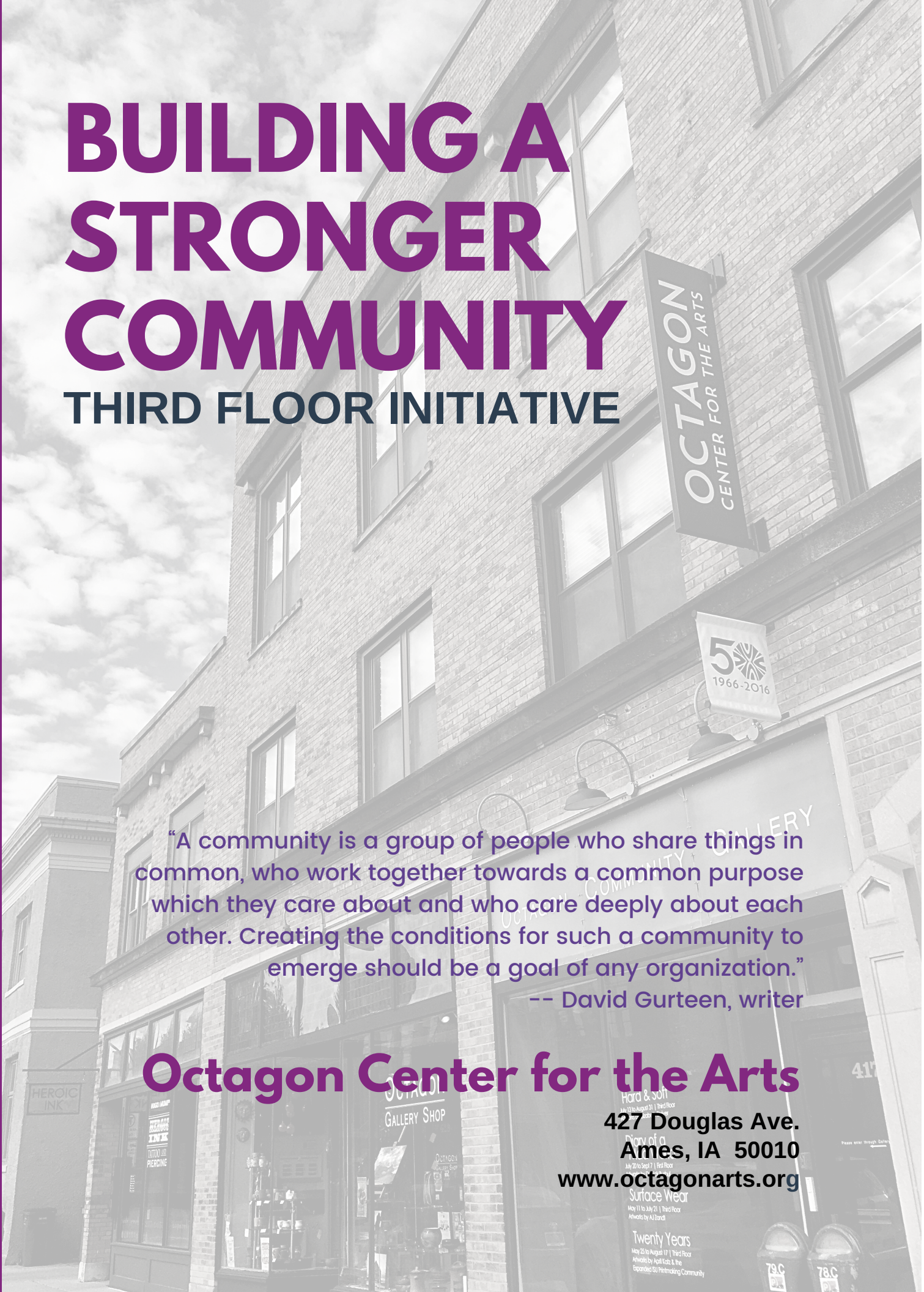
HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK

HEROIC INK



WHO WE ARE

The Octagon Center for the Arts is a non-profit community art center in the heart of downtown Ames, Iowa. A cornerstone of the cultural scene in Ames since 1966, the Octagon a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization funded in part through memberships, donations, and grants, including the City of Ames Commission on the Arts (COTA) and the Iowa Arts Council.

Communities (real communities) matter. We yearn to belong, to feel connected. We need each other to manage our everyday lives and to chase our dreams. In the face of continuing pandemic conditions and societal unrest, community is more important ever – yet, it seems more difficult to grow.

It is time to rethink everything, to take a good close look at “what we’ve always done”. This is a time for clarity, innovation, creativity, and inclusion. This is a time to think about what we have to offer, what we can do for our community, and, even, how we can change the world. We want to listen, build, and chase some dreams.



Inaugural Business of Art Conference, Octagon Main Gallery, 2019



Working at the pottery wheel

At the Octagon, our community includes:

- fulltime and parttime artists across Iowa and the Midwest
- those who wish to buy or to experience art
- students of all ages and skill-levels who enjoy the process of making
- folks who are passionate about the value of art and culture in a city
- our business and residential neighbors in downtown Ames.

Hard work has already begun on inclusion, diversity, and equity in our organization; it is our goal to create a “longer table”, so that all feel truly welcome at the Octagon.

WHAT OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

In 2018, we sent a questionnaire to a large pool of artists that applied to show their work at the Octagon over the years. Last year, we invited independent artists to the Octagon for a focus group. We asked questions, listened to ideas, and discussed what artists in Ames need to thrive. The artists in both cases (questionnaire respondents and focus group participants) were consistent on several key points:

- **Exhibit space is very important.**The artists love to show their work in the Octagon's beautiful street-level Community Gallery. Conversely, the Octagon's largest gallery (Main Gallery) is not well liked due to its overly large space, high ceilings, relatively poor lighting, and third floor location. The space feels like a rental venue, rather than a gallery. Despite the Octagon's efforts to promote it, the public is often unaware of the third floor.
- **The Octagon has the potential to impact the community by fostering emerging artists as entrepreneurs via studio space and education.** Artists emphasized the need for space to work and connect with each other and potential customers.

In the time since these conversations, Ames has lost studio space due to the closure of ISU's Design on Main. Design on Main was a gallery space and studio space for College of Design graduate students and closed for financial reasons.

The loss of Design on Main is part of a troubling pattern. Ames has lost other spaces for creative work, such as DG's, The Space, Zeke's, and La Boheme (venues for music, theater, and/or spoken word). Ames has become more dependent on the Iowa State University for cultural events and venues, but ISU is not immune to budgetary cuts. The future of CY Stephens Auditorium appears to be in question. Other arts and culture organizations are in danger with the lasting effects of the pandemic.

Yet, data tells us that arts and culture impact quality of life:

“Arts and culture help fuel our state's economy – it's that simple. Economic impact studies have proven time and time again that there's an inextricable link between the creative industries in a community and that community's economic development, job recruitment, and tourism... National and statewide research confirms the importance of the arts to economic development and revitalization. In 2010, Gallup and the Knight Foundation found 'empirical evidence that the drivers that create emotional bonds between people and their community are consistent in virtually every city and can be reduced to just a few categories. Interestingly, the usual suspects – jobs, the economy and safety – are not among the top drivers. Rather, people consistently give higher ratings for elements that relate directly to their daily quality of life. The arts are in the top five drivers attracting people to communities.”

(Source: <https://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/The-arts-and-culture-affect-community-s-quality-4407124.php>)



THE SOLUTION: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING



“It’s always been ‘cool’ to have a charming, vibrant downtown. Now it’s necessary. That’s because a place attracts talent and talent attracts investment. This trend has been rising for a while, but the pandemic has underscored its validity. More and more, people can work from anywhere. Increasingly they will choose where they want to live, regardless of where their employer is located—and the communities that give them what they want will be the winners.”

(Source: <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2020/5/8/why-now-is-the-time-to-get-intentional-about-placemaking>)



Creative Placemaking recognizes the value of arts and culture in creating a vibrant place where people want to live, work, and visit. In creative placemaking, diverse partners work together to reshape a place and build a real community.

(Source: <https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ROW-Creative-Placemaking-handout.doc.pdf>)



WHAT WE CAN OFFER



Mission: The Octagon Staff and Board spent a year crafting a new mission statement and strategic plan. This new plan underscores the desire to: 1) support artists, especially emerging artists; 2) engage with a more diverse and inclusive pool of artists; 3) create a space that invites and welcomes all in the Ames community.

Programming: We have long demonstrated a strong commitment to serving and supporting artists and, in 2018, we took it a step further. We partnered with the Ames Community Arts Council to create the Business of Art Conference. This annual conference is meant to fill a gap often found in formally trained and self-taught creatives by providing a place to learn entrepreneurial skills and connect with each other. We have also offered free workshops to assist artists in applying for exhibitions, photographing artwork, and writing artist statements.

Space: The Octagon third floor (Main Gallery, Sweeney Gallery, Reading Room, kitchen, bathrooms, and closets) is underutilized. The large space has not been able to contribute significant revenue to the organization. Due to building layout, the use of the third floor as gallery space has necessitated extra staff, but it has not seen high traffic. Additionally, artists do not feel their work is enhanced by showing in Main Gallery.

How could this large space better support the work of local artists and support our mission? We envision a large co-working space, coupled with smaller private studio and artist residency spaces. With relatively minimal financial investment, we could offer artists a place to work, gather, exhibit, and grow their businesses. The space could include needed amenities such as a kitchen, a meeting room, and spaces for product photography, mat cutting, recording (for podcasting or virtual teaching), WIFI, a printer, lockers for storage, and use of specialized studios (clay studio, print studio).

Community Engagement Emerging Artist in Residence: One studio would be dedicated to hosting an emerging artist who focuses on community engagement as an artist in residence. A community engagement artist in residence (CEAIR) uses the Octagon as a catalyst to enrich their personal practice by creating great art. In turn, the artist uses and shares their art with the community around them to ask questions and to foster a sense of togetherness. The Octagon would host a CEAIR for a period of six months at a time, provide the artist with the space to do their work, help the artist with promotion of their work on the Octagon platform, and provide a stipend of \$3,000.

THE DETAILS

Co-Working Space for Creatives (Main Gallery)

Available for up to 6 creatives during pandemic and up to 20 creatives after the pandemic

General Fees (contracts available by semester/summer session):+

- January-May (5 months) \$150
- June-July (2 months) \$60
- August-December (5 months) \$150

Additional Fees for Use of Ceramics or Printmaking Studio:+

- January-May (5 months) \$50
- June-July (2 months) \$20
- August-December (5 months) \$50

Amenities

- Use of Co-Working Space for "clean work" (Main Gallery)
- Cleaning area (Mop sink, utility sinks, ventilation cleaning table)
- Kitchenette (Fridge, kitchen sink, microwave, coffee maker)
- Lighting studio (Basic photography lighting equipment, tripod, backdrops, projector)*
- Small meeting room (For client meetings, virtual meetings, phone meetings)*
- Virtual recording space (Recording equipment, tripods)*
- Framing area (Mat cutter, Framing stapler, extra blades, hammer, pliers, microfiber rags, glass/plexi cleaner and rags), Tools available for checkout
- Gallery pin-up space (Hallway, Small Wall Gallery)
- Art book library and loungeStorage (For tools, paper, canvasses, etc.)
- Wifi internet
- Printer
- Cleaning for the bathroom, vacuuming
- Opportunity to participate in Octagon Gallery Nights

Access:

- Monday-Friday, 10:00am - 5:00 pm
- Open Studio Nights, Wednesday and Friday, 5:00 - 9:00 pm
- Open Studio, Sunday, 12:00 - 6:00 pm

+Fees are subject to adjustment as more data about costs are collected.

*by reservation

Private Studios for Creatives (Sweeney Gallery)

Available for up to 4 individuals. One of the four studios would be dedicated to the Artist in Residence.

General Fees (contracts available by semester/summer session):+

- January-May (5 months) \$625
- June-July (2 months) \$250
- August-December (5 months) \$625

Additional Fees for Use of Ceramics or Printmaking Studio: +

- January-May (5 months) \$50
- June-July (2 months) \$20
- August-December (5 months) \$50

Amenities

- Private studio space (Sweeney Gallery)
- Cleaning area (Mop sink, utility sinks, ventilation cleaning table)
- Kitchenette (Fridge, kitchen sink, microwave, coffee maker)
- Lighting studio (Basic photography lighting equipment, tripod, backdrops, projector)*
- Small meeting room (For client meetings, virtual meetings, phone meetings)*
- Virtual recording space (Recording equipment, tripods)*
- Framing area (Mat cutter, Framing stapler, extra blades, hammer, pliers, microfiber rags, glass/plexi cleaner and rags), Tools available for checkout
- Gallery pin-up space (Hallway, Small Wall Gallery)
- Art book library and lounge Storage (For tools, paper, canvasses, etc.)
- Wifi internet
- Printer
- Cleaning for the bathroom, vacuuming
- Opportunity to participate in Octagon Gallery Nights

Access:

- Personal studio, 24/7 access
- Studio Space, Monday-Friday, 10:00am - 5:00 pm
- Open Studio Nights, Wednesday and Friday, 5:00 - 9:00 pm
- Open Studio, Sunday, 12:00 - 6:00 pm

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE -- COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 6 month residencies available by application
- AIR compensation: private studio and a stipend of \$500 per month
- AIR responsibilities: community engagement activities/events as agreed upon

+Fees are subject to adjustment as more data about costs are collected.

*by reservation

NEEDED RENOVATION/CHANGE

ESTIMATED COST

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

Artist in Residence Initial Stipend
Artist in Residence Studio Space

\$3000
Renovation is not necessary

January 2021

Convert current 2 small bathrooms to one accessible bathroom

\$8000

1st priority:
Jan. - April 2021

- Plumbing, water and return pipes
- Plaster/drywall repair
- Framing
- Flooring
- New door and frame, accessible size, door hardware
- Fixtures, sanitary napkin box, toilet paper holders, grab bars, mirror, hand dryer, infant changing table
- Lighting
- False ceiling

Renovate kitchen & create cleaning room

To be determined

2nd priority:
May - August 2021

- Plumbing
- Framing
- Flooring
- Lighting
- 2- Utility sinks
- Mop sink
- Ventilation
- Cabinetry
- Fixtures, coffee maker

Renovate Main Gallery to create co-working space

To be determined

3rd priority:
Sept- Dec 2021

- Add a lockable door at the bottom of the mezzanine
- Add electrical outlets
- Update lighting
- Improve WiFi, add hardwired internet area

Renovate Sweeney Gallery to create private studios

- Add electrical outlets
- Update lighting
- Framing

If sufficient funds can be raised, renovation can be started sooner. It would be ideal to complete renovation by Aug 2021 and ready for use for the Fall semester.

NEEDED RENOVATION/CHANGE

ESTIMATED COST

ESTIMATED TIMELINE

Studio Equipment Needs

To be determined

4th Priority: 2022

Ceramics Studio

- Kiln room
 1. Ventilation
 2. Electrical work
 3. Framing, drywall (fireproofing)
- Pug machine

Printmaking Studio

- Ink slab areas
- Ventilation area, hood
- Cabinetry
- Tables, chairs
- Rollers, Large brayers, barens
- Drying racks
- Other types of printmaking

THE IMPACT

Sustainability: Some progress on the Third Floor Initiative can be completed almost immediately, such as hiring the community engagement artist in residence. Grants, donations, and sponsorships will be needed to finance the renovations. The stepped approach will allow us to make progress in a manageable way.

Converting the space would result in loss of rental revenue (venue rental), however, the space is not being used at this time due to COVID. By carefully adding a limited number of people to the space, we hope to add over \$2000 to the budget. In the future, the third floor co-working and private studio spaces could host up to 30 artists. The goal is to make the spaces affordable to students and other emerging artists (those who need it most) and to cover all Octagon expenses. We will need to adjust fees as we collect more data in order to keep the project financially sustainable.

Another aspect of sustainability is the ability to maintain excitement and investment in the organization. Empty rooms do not engage the public -- vibrancy comes with a busy space. We believe that the re-imagined space will reinvigorate all of our programming and increase our relevancy to the Ames community.

Our Vision for the Future: By creating this inclusive vibrant space based on the input of artists, the Octagon is poised to impact the whole downtown. More artists downtown could translate into more activity – more people in coffee shops and businesses, more people attending downtown events, and more people actively creating the downtown they want. We imagine active partnerships with other nearby cultural organizations, like the Ames History Center and the Ames Public Library; retail businesses; and residents. We imagine a lively space that draws people in, a space where people feel they belong and want to stay, a real community.



Contact Information:

Kristen Greteman: exhibits@octagonarts.org

Rhonda Scott: info@octagonarts.org

Heather Johnson: director@octagonarts.org