BUILDING AN ART COMMUNITY

Affordable artist housing could be on the horizon for Arlington County

By MICHAEL BULLERDEED

ONE IS looking to build a baseball field out of a cornfield, but Arlington Times Editor Mike Hahn is not about to build it. He will, though. He'll build it in the form of an affordable housing project for artists to live and work.

The conversation of establishing affordable housing for area artists began in earnest in 2016, when representatives from the Potomac Trust got in touch with Arlington Public Arts Director Angela Adams about developing an arts project on 23rd Street in Crystal City. When word of this got to Michelle Isabelle-Stark, the cultural affairs division chief for the county, she remembered her previous experience working with Artspace on a project on Long Island, New York. "The village now is a model," she says. Isabelle-Stark, who now sits on a number of boards with the project and Arlington.

The Artspace Foundation for Arts and Innovation is leading the project, with funding support from the Potomac Trust and help with community engagement coming from Arlington and Isabelle-Stark. Artspace, meanwhile, has been providing its services to help determine the community interest and feasibility of such a project.

To do so, Artspace came down to Arlington in February 2011 to inspect four possible sites and test the waters with groups of community members. The sites were Crystal City, Virginia 8 Square, Columbia Pike and Poolesville. Any future project is not limited to these four sites, but those were the sites the council identified to Artspace to determine if Arlington was capable of such a project. After the two-day visit, Artspace took the information gathered to write out a full report on whether or not it should move forward.

"Waslington was a place we were very excited to come back to," said Poolesville. "We think that's something more here, something we could Like and really get at the heart of these sectors," says Stacey Mickleth, vice president of advancement and government relations with Artspace. The next step was a survey that was opened to anyone within 50 miles of Arlington and that closed in mid-May.

"The numbers prove out what our hunch was," said Mickleth. "And that is at least one space, one artist live/work space could be possible and probably an artist's working studio building with no residential that would just be a place for artists to work."

Some of the specific findings indicated that in such affordable housing, there was a number of people who would consider moving into Arlington. Isabelle-Stark believes that many of these responses came from people who live in surrounding areas of Arlington and may work in Washington, but cannot afford to live there at the moment. This is slightly unusual, according to Mickleth. Typically, the people who are most interested in these types of projects, apples are in the area that they are living in. This is slightly unusual, according to Mickleth. Typically, the people who are most interested in these types of projects, apples are in the area that they are living in. This is slightly unusual, according to Mickleth. Typically, the people who are most interested in these types of projects, apples are in the area that they are living in. This is slightly unusual, according to Mickleth. 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