

**Arts–Driven Economic Development:  
The Use of Arts and Culture to Advance Urban Revitalization in Providence, Rhode Island  
and Durham, North Carolina**

by

Jeffrey M. Kay

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## **Abstract**

Given the increasing popularity of arts-based economic development strategies, this paper considers two cities, Providence, Rhode Island and Durham, North Carolina, in an effort to gain some new insight into how cities support and develop the arts as a component of urban revitalization efforts. A review of the relevant literature on the topic seeks to establish why the arts are considered a viable tool for economic development as well as the characteristics that define a successful artistic culture in cities. The subsequent section investigates the development of the arts in Providence throughout the 1980's and 1990's, which is commonly considered a textbook case in successful development of arts and culture as part of an equally successful urban revitalization process known as the Providence Renaissance. Generally speaking, the successful cultivation of a flourishing arts scene in Providence was the result of creative and ambitious efforts on the part of artists themselves in concert with dedicated stream of financial and regulatory support from the city government. Durham, by contrast, is in the early stages of a revitalization process and, while artists are working diligently to organize their community and claim a role in the process, the commitment of the government to emphasizing the arts as part of the larger revitalization has thus far been mixed. Recognizing the many differences between the two cases and the consequent limits on the ability to generalize from them, this paper concludes with a consideration of the lessons learned from Providence and Durham and establishes some basic prerequisites for winning arts-based revitalization strategies. Chief among these conclusions is that providing public sector support for programs initiated in the private sector is the most effective model for success.

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## ***Introduction***

Through a consideration of the existing literature on the role of the arts in economic development, as well a thorough investigation of the development of the arts in two cities, this paper will examine how cities, particularly struggling cities, attempt to create successful arts districts and communities as a part of an urban revitalization strategy. This includes the creation and implementation of specific policy approaches as well as challenges of resource allocation, promotion and marketing of urban arts districts, and more subtle issues of urban character and quality of place. Though the actions of city governments and agencies are of great relevance to this process, the scope of this research is not limited solely to governmental actions and will also consider the role of the arts community and the private sector as actors and participants in the development of the arts and urban revitalization more generally.

## **Why the Arts? A Justification of the Use of the Arts and Cultural Amenities to Advance Economic Development in Cities**

Since the mid-1990's, the advancement of the arts and urban creativity has gained widespread popularity as an economic development strategy. Countless cities have sought to become centers of vibrant creativity, or at the very least to portray themselves as such to the outside world. While costly infrastructure projects like convention centers and sports stadiums were seen as the keys to revitalizing cities a decade or two ago, a new goal now exists in the more amorphous notion of the creative city. Simply put, a city with a thriving arts scene, a place that is culturally active and cutting edge, is better positioned to attract and keep the types of citizens who are considered the engines of economic growth in the modern economy. Young,

well-educated citizens – those who are most likely to work and innovate in key technology sectors of the workforce – are attracted to creative, urban locales.

Firms, it is believed, are less tied to geography than ever before and are willing to move their operations to wherever a desirable workforce is present. Huge packages of tax incentives and publicly funded infrastructure improvements may be a successful, if dubious, tool for luring traditional firms to new locations, but for the businesses on the cutting edge, those that are likely to add new jobs and contribute substantially to tax bases for decades to come, the secret ingredient appears to be the workforce. The trick for cities, then, is to attract the right sort of workers and to retain the ones already present.

Nothing here is really all that new. Policy makers have long understood the importance of a favorable climate for business. The idea is that urban areas need to work at being the right sort of place where businesses want to be and can thrive. Former Citicorp chairman Walter Wriston wrote in 1992 that, in the modern information-dominated economy, “capital will always go where it is welcome and stay where it is well-treated” (1992). What is new is that the resource cities need to be treating well is a certain class of workers. Because people are more mobile than ever before, there is now competition between cities to attract the most desirable citizens. Though this group transcends normal notions of demographic categories in that it crosses traditional racial and socio-economic lines, it is nonetheless a specific demographic that cities are hoping to attract and appease.

The new emphasis on the arts stems from a commonly made empirical observation that cities that are doing well and, more specifically, cities that are leading centers of development in new fields such as information technology and biotechnology, also tend to be centers of artistic activity. The implication, easy to recognize if harder to prove, is that workers in these fields –

typically young and highly educated – and a vibrant arts scene are a natural fit. Cities that experience great economic success almost always have flourishing arts communities. Cities that are struggling, such as those in the oft-derided rust belt, tend to have notable shortages of cultural activity. The most salient examples are the leading tech centers of the dot-com boom in the mid 1990's: San Francisco, Austin, Boston, and Seattle come up over and over again. These regions have clearly been magnets for this desired demographic, and other less successful regions are naturally attempting to recreate the conditions that have enabled other places to win the competition.

The most obvious potential for criticism of this theory is tied to the issue of causality. It may be easy to establish a correlation between economic development and the arts but, to some degree, the arts must be considered a consequence of the success rather than its cause. Surely, a city with high concentrations of educated and financially successful young workers is more likely than others to cultivate and nurture the arts. Even if we ignore the issue of tastes and relative preference for artistic amenities, regions with abundant wealth are better positioned to devote resources to a non-necessity like the arts. Cities that have experienced great economic growth can naturally be expected to have tax revenues to spare on the arts and a class of Medici-inspired patrons available to offer financial support. Is it really wise, however, for a less successful city to devote scarce resources to providing a set of amenities at the expense of failing to provide for more basic needs?

While the challenges of tradeoffs and opportunity costs are obviously specific to each region, the argument that arts are solely the result of the presence of a certain demographic is somewhat shortsighted. First, every city obviously has some sort of existing arts scene regardless of the general condition of the urban economy. If the participants in that scene have been

recognized as key engines of economic development, a city would be wise to nurture and support that demographic to ensure its continued vitality. Second, and most importantly, the existence of a flourishing cultural artistic community has clearly proven to be a self-fulfilling phenomenon. For whatever reason it may have developed, the artistic vibrancy in places like San Francisco and Seattle is clearly serving to draw new workers – often those just out of college – into those cities. The best way to attract the people who are likely to support and participate in the arts is to already have a successful arts community firmly in place. Thus far, there are no indications of problems stemming from having too much art-based activity. The stronger a scene becomes, the stronger its ability to sustain itself and the more likely it is to be a benefit to the larger regional economy.

## **A Review of the Literature on Urban Creativity**

### **Richard Florida and the Creative Class Discourse**

The present popularity of art-based economic development strategies, at least in its current incarnation, can be traced primarily to Richard Florida's book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). Florida argues that, in the latter half of the twentieth century, developed economies underwent a revolutionary transformation from the system of mass production to a new, more disaggregate system of organization that relies on flexibility and creativity. Though it has obviously always had value in society, creativity is now "the decisive source of competitive advantage" (p. 5). Decades ago the key ingredient was typically efficiency and firm success was the result of the ability to achieve economies of scale, cut waste and produce at the highest possible quantities. Today, according to Florida, success is more likely to be based on the ability to innovate and adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Walter Wriston was convinced that information is the new dominant resource, and others have termed it a knowledge economy, but

Florida has looked to creativity as the most crucial building block. Knowledge and information have certainly gained credence as key resources, but they are merely a means to an end, which is innovation. Creativity is the link between them. If this is true, firms are more than ever dependent on a certain type of labor force. There is still a role for all sorts of workers to be sure, but a firm's ability to thrive is largely dependent on the creativity of its employees. Mass production is now of secondary importance to economic growth and has, in any event, more or less abandoned the United States and most other first-world economies. Politicians and those who have been victims of the job migration may focus a great deal of energy on preserving the last vestiges of our old industrial economy, but most economists agree that future success will be based on our ability to be competitive in a whole new set of industries.

Though Florida presented this phenomenon in a manner that captured a great deal of attention, he was hardly the first to recognize it. Piore and Sabel (1984), in questioning whether mass production was ever really the inevitable economic ethos it was portrayed to be, presented the notion that a more flexible, craft-based economy had supplanted mass production as the dominant form. Termed the Second Industrial Divide, this transformation represents a fundamental shift in our economic framework that is on par with that of the onset of industrialization (the first "industrial divide"). Stated in less dramatic terms, what has taken place is a shift from manufacturing as the dominant sector to specialized services. For our purposes, the significance of this development is the effect it has on the demand for labor within the economy. New skill sets are now valued, and there is a marked decline in the quality of employment available for those with few or no skills. Low-skill service jobs obviously still exist at great quantities, but they rarely offer the compensation and security that came with



manufacturing jobs a half-century ago. For a regional economy to thrive, therefore, it needs to have a sufficient concentration of employment in high wage industries.

In describing the significance of these developments, Richard Florida asserts that a new economic class has been born, and he terms it the “creative class.” He defines this group as anyone employed in the sciences, engineering, architecture, education, arts, music and entertainment (p. 8). Beyond the core group of the creative class, Florida also identifies a class of creative professionals in business, law, health care, finance, and related fields. All told, the creative class, as defined, now includes most everyone who is required to think creativity – to one degree or another – for a living, and now comprises somewhere around a third of the American workforce. In contrast to the creative class are the working and service classes, both of which will generally receive less compensation and possess fewer skills than members of the creative class. Whereas the creative classes devise the plans that drive industries and the greater economy, the working and service classes exist merely to execute those plans.

If Florida’s observations about the economic changes in the late 1900’s are not especially groundbreaking, his linking of the creative class and artistic and cultural amenities certainly is. Because both people and firms are more transient than they have even been in the past, Florida argues, convincingly, that place is now the key factor linking individuals and employers. The significance of this creative class - which has become so loaded a term in economic development that it has lost much of its meaning – is that it is defined by more than just skills, salaries and job descriptions. The real heart of Florida’s arguments is that a lifestyle change is tied to the economic one. Creative class members work and live in ways that are different than they were in the past. Workplaces are more casual, hours are more flexible, and the organization of firms is far less rigid. In what seems to be a grand extension of the economic concept of flexible

production (which traditionally applies to production methods of firms), there now seems to be a recognition that if workers produce by thinking creatively, they need to be provided with flexible working conditions in order to produce efficiently. With a blurring of the lines between work and leisure, a new emphasis is placed on a community's ability to "provide the stimulation, diversity and a richness of experiences that are the wellsprings of creativity" (p. 15). Simple observation indicates that the cities that provide this sort of atmosphere are also the places where high-tech firms have clustered. All issues of causality aside, the correlation is undeniable.

Florida's prescription for policy-makers is therefore to make cities, or at least parts of cities, into places that will appeal to creatives. Exactly what this means is an extension of the values that he has attached to the creative class: individuality, meritocracy, and diversity (pp. 77-80). While meritocracy is most likely to be manifested in the workplace, individuality and diversity are vague and frequently fluctuating concepts that can apply to an entire region. What Florida is really getting at is that a certain sense of place is important to luring the right people. Since city governments cannot simply wave a wand and create a feeling of openness and diversity throughout a city, more practical strategies involve physical planning, programming, business support, and funding that will nourish the amenities, events, and organizations that creative individuals value. This includes availability of cafes and bars that allow socializing and networking at all times of the day, as well as quality restaurants, galleries and shops that provide what Florida calls "indigenous street-level culture" (p. 166). Thriving art and music scenes are also necessary, though it is admittedly hard to define success of a "scene" let alone the factors that facilitate that success.

An important detail here is that all of the factors that can successfully attract, retain, and cultivate creativity are small-ticket items in that they do not require massive government

expenditures. If the public sector is willing to devote millions of dollars to building stadiums and convention centers, and countless more on incentives to lure new firms, a comparatively small investment in appealing to young, educated workers would seem to be a no-brainer if it can facilitate regional development in key growth industries. A caveat, though, is that a heavy-handed imposition of the creative lifestyle from above is unlikely to succeed. Authenticity is a must for any successful creative district, so a city is often best served by providing the necessary support mechanisms and then stepping back and letting things develop organically. Chain restaurants and retailers, for example, can be a sign of an ersatz sense of creative vibrancy that is unlikely to take hold and become truly successful.

One need not look far to find the criticisms of Florida's work, as they are abundant and often harsh. He paints many of his detractors as social conservatives who are simply fearful and uneasy about the changes he describes, but in reality his methodology and delivery invite a fair amount of skepticism from all sides. Most notable is the definition of the creative class itself. While Florida differentiates a "super-creative core" that consists of all the arts-based classifications that one normally associates with creativity-driven occupations, the larger creative class definition is too broad to be meaningful. Though enthused about the rising prospects for hip urban places that have developed in the past couple of decades, Karrie Jacobs wrote of Florida's book, "all the way through I kept trying to understand how 30 percent of workers could be part of this booming creative class. A third of Americans are earning a living at self-expression? Or is it just that 30 percent of us own iPods or prefer Chipotle burritos to McDonald's burgers?" (2005). When reading Florida's writing, one can help but feel that he is grasping for as many ways as possible to convince the reader that the rise of the creative class is so dramatic an event that it will completely overhaul the world as we know it. In attempting to quantify the size of the

class in the most inclusive possible manner, Florida is, in fact, diluting the significance of his message. The creative class may be massive, but if its members aren't really all that creative, the designation ceases to be of much consequence. Hip-ness comes off as more of a fashionable development aesthetic than a viable economic development strategy. Many other scholars, therefore, have taken to using far more specific definitions of creativity that center on the arts, cultural institutions, and select high-tech and scientific industries where innovation is the dominant ethos. Generally, this paper will also take a more narrow approach to the components of urban creativity though precise definitions will be elaborated below.

In a more substantive critique that confronts the efficacy of art-based strategies rather than Florida's definitions, Joel Kotkin (2004) argues that a more effective means of urban revitalization would be a return to what he calls "sewer socialism," a strategy dating back to the early 1900's of confronting blight by addressing its most pronounced effects; lack of investment, public education, transit, and basic infrastructure. The gist of this argument is a common one; that art-based strategies are too often a superficial approach to a complicated problem. The assertion that arts and cultural programs fail to address the full spectrum of urban distress is a legitimate one, but the basis of the attack is also somewhat off the mark. No one has suggested that arts facilities, programs, and amenities are themselves a source of revitalization. Rather, they are a means to making cities more attractive to a host of people and firms who will in turn bring in much needed capital and investment.

## **Prior Literature**

If the literature on urban creativity seems to be dominated by Richard Florida, it is likely because his work has been the focal point of the discourse on the topic in recent years. A striking

percentage of publications on this topic exist as either a critique or a defense of the creative class theory. As noted above, however, Florida's ideas were, for the most part, nothing new. Jane Jacobs (1961) was pushing for the same type of diverse, vibrant urban communities over 40 years ago. Though Jacobs has always been quick to use economic justifications for her arguments, her assertion in this arena was largely based on a more fundamental concept of quality of life. In neighborhoods that are sufficiently dense and diverse, residents are more able to rely on networks of interaction that provide mutual assistance, crime prevention and general richness of the urban experience. Jacobs' ideal neighborhood includes cafes, pubs, used bookstores, studios, galleries, and ethnic restaurants; a recipe that may have seemed somewhat quirky in the 1960's but is now something closer to a utopia for urban planners.

Sir Peter Hall (2000) has suggested that the current interest in creative industries is rooted in the work of John Maynard Keynes in the 1930's who suggested that an era was approaching during which man would no longer have to struggle for the basic means of existence and would then turn his attention to finding the highest and best use of his leisure time. Though this projection is in obvious contrast to Florida's notion of the workaholic techies, Hall implies that leisure pursuits "have themselves become sources of income and economic growth, generating new industries of a kind never known to earlier and simpler era" (p. 640). Larger than, but certainly including, the arts, this new wave of industries has come to be known as a creative economy that is fundamentally different from sectors that existed before.

Many have noted, however, that spatial distribution of creative industries is far from uniform. Clusters of creative industries can be easily observed and have been frequently termed creative milieus. The original concept of the creative milieu has been attributed to Swedish geographer Gunnar Torngvist in 1978 and the theory received considerable academic attention –

especially in Europe – beginning in the 1980’s. A creative milieu has been described as “a physical setting where a critical mass of entrepreneurs, intellectuals, social activists, artists, administrators, power brokers, or students can operate in an open-minded, cosmopolitan context and where face-to-face interaction creates new ideas, artifacts, products, services and institutions and as a consequence contributes to economic success”(Landry, 2000). Ake Andersson (1985) presented six prerequisites for the creation of a creative milieu which were presented by Hall as follows:

1. A sound financial basis, but without tight regulation
2. Basic original knowledge and competence
3. An imbalance between experienced need and actual opportunities
4. A diverse milieu
5. Good internal and external possibilities for personal transport and communication
6. Structural instability – a genuine uncertainty about the future within the general scientific and technical environment

(Hall, 2000)

Though Andersson’s prerequisites have not received a great deal of attention in the United States, they provide an excellent starting point for policy-makers who are hoping to cash in on the benefits of the creative milieu. The first point really contains two crucial requirements; one, the need for financial stability, is reflective of Keynes’ quote from above suggesting that creative industries are sustainable only after more basic needs can met. Second, excessive governmental regulation can hinder creative industries in a variety of ways even when a policy’s intent is to enhance them. This challenge will be further explored in the context of the policy investigations later in this paper. Andersson’s second requirement has been manifested in the

U.S. through an extensive body of research on the links between universities, innovation and creative industries. Surely other forms of knowledge are also relevant but one will rarely find a thriving creative region without at least one major research institution in close proximity. Like the need for financial adequacy, the third point speaks to the need for excess time and/or labor within a regional economy. Diversity, the fourth requirement, is a hallmark of Florida's theories and is important because creatives are attracted to socially open cities, and because diversity can oftentimes be a facilitator of creativity. This ties in to the fifth requirement, which calls for an open flow of information (the need for transportation, while beneficial, is less crucial in the age of the internet). More than just a simple social amenity, places like cafes and other meeting spaces enhance the opportunity for a free flow of diverse and ever-changing information streams that are crucial to innovative processes. Andersson's last prerequisite, structural instability and uncertainty, might be debated by some, though it raises an interesting point about the nature of artists and creative thinkers who commonly live and work on the fringes of mainstream society. Safe and predictable actions take a backseat to risk-taking when creativity is active, and uncertainty is therefore a key characteristic of a truly creative region.

The value of a creative milieu is that it yields certain agglomeration effects relative to creativity and innovation, which then extend benefits to firms and the regional economy as a whole. In spite of traditional notions of inter-firm competition, the health of the creative network is crucial to the long-term viability of individual firms as well. Competition is still relevant in certain instances, but generally, firms will rise and fall as a group based on the health of the region (Landry, 2000). Successful creative zones are subject to self-perpetuating increases in research and development spending, venture capital, and technical innovation – all of which will in turn create more jobs and higher tax revenues. Success tends only to breed further success as

new capital and resources in the form of investment and immigrants will flock to an area in part because of its record of success but also because creative cities are now associated with an accompanying quality of life that appeals to these key actors.

While the prerequisites presented above provide an excellent summary of the underlying conditions required for a creative milieu, the methods and policies that can achieve them are still largely unknown. The bulk of this paper will attempt to address the questions of what policies work, how differences between cities can sometimes require very different approaches, and the extent to which government is the appropriate actor to be advancing a program of urban creativity.

## **Definitions and Methodology**

### **Toward a usable definition of urban creativity**

One of the most obvious challenges that emerges from the literature discussed above is that terms and definitions of the primary components seem to fluctuate with frequency. While there does seem to be some agreement as to what is meant by “creativity,” its application to cities and economic development is far from constant. The Richard Florida model of creativity yields a “creative class” that covers roughly a third of the United States’ population and includes such disparate occupations as visual artists, computer scientists, and lawyers. All of these people will undoubtedly be called upon to employ creativity when executing their occupational duties from time to time, however, the precise effects of this sort of creative class upon a community is extremely hard to measure. If we are agreed that a creative milieu is a desirable goal for cities, and that creative milieux are by definition made up of creative people, is it wise to implement a policy that seeks to attract people from all corners of Florida’s class definition? And, if so, is there any way a policy could effectively apply to such a diverse group?



In contrast, many proponents of creativity-based models of economic development have used far more narrow definitions of their target populations, which facilitate effective policy-making and enable more accurate measurements of the economic effects of a transformation. Charles Landry (2000) writes that creativity depends on “qualities which could be thought of as belonging to individuals, organizations, or cities – qualities such as resourcefulness and problem-solving capability based on thinking in an open-minded way; a disposition to take intellectual risks, to approach problems afresh and be willing to experiment; and crucially, the capacity to be reflexive and generate a cycle of learning that leads to creation and re-creation.” While Landry’s broad definition is a useful justification of the value of creativity in economic development, the quest for urban creativity has commonly been whittled down to just the arts, a group that includes visual artists, musicians, actors, some writers, and various other sorts of performance artists. Though this designation may, in some ways, be too narrow to capture the full spectrum of participation in a creative environment, it frequently acts as an adequate proxy in that the gains or losses in participation and employment in the arts can be assumed to be roughly proportional to changes in the vitality of urban creativity. It is important to remember, though, that the creativity that exists in the arts community is to some degree distinct from the sort of creativity that leads to scientific innovations in technological industries. This paper focuses on culture and the arts because these amenities have been successful tools for attracting all types of creative workers. Projects and policies that facilitate technological innovation are distinct, but certainly complementary when a city wants to boost its overall creativity.

The definition used for the most part in this paper corresponds most closely to the United States Census Bureau’s industry classification for arts, entertainment, and recreation. This group, used in the Economic Census to track firms, is sector number 71 under the North American

Industry Classification System (NAICS). The scope of the sector is defined by the Census Bureau as follows:

The Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation sector (sector 71) includes a wide range of establishments that operate facilities or provide services to meet varied cultural, entertainment, and recreational interests of their patrons. This sector comprises (1) establishments that are involved in producing, promoting, or participating in live performances, events, or exhibits intended for public viewing; (2) establishments that preserve and exhibit objects and sites of historical, cultural, or educational interest; and (3) establishments that operate facilities or provide services that enable patrons to participate in recreational activities or pursue amusement, hobby, and leisure time interests.

This definition includes cultural institutions, including museums, that are not always counted as part of the arts but will be considered here as a significant component of creative urban efforts. The census definition however, fails to cover restaurants, nightclubs, theaters, and libraries (most of which fall under NAICS classification 72), which are also vital to the establishment of a creative district. What attracts a certain demographic to a city, it should be remembered, is not merely the presence of other like-minded people, but the sense of place that the agglomeration of those people creates. Active neighborhoods and districts are sure to have a diverse array of cultural and artistic amenities, and a practical definition should be correspondingly diverse.

It is also worth pointing out that, while the NAICS classification offers a good starting point for our definition of the arts and culture, the unit of the firm is not particularly useful. The nature of the arts is one of nontraditional forms of organization that rarely fit neatly into category schemes devised to measure more traditional industries. Artists, even those who work full time as such, rarely organize into traditional firms. Further, many, if not most, members of an artistic community are likely to have other employment in more traditional sectors (and may not be

reporting any arts income for tax purposes). Therefore, most indicators used to measure the size of an arts community will yield only rough estimates. Where appropriate, this report will make use of a variety of employment indicators, but little consistency exists across the research and the results can therefore only be viewed as imperfect estimates.

Given the need to balance a number of factors, urban creativity is defined in this paper as: all establishments, organizations, and individuals that provide entities or services involved in the creation, performance, or presentation of cultural or artistic products or closely related services or amenities. Necessarily open-ended, this definition reflects the wide range of qualities that are necessary for the creation of a successful creative milieu.

One final caveat before turning to the case studies is in order. Many critics of arts-based revitalization strategies argue that fail to address more dire problems of poverty, health, and unemployment. This is entirely correct and, therefore, the arts and culture are in no way assumed to constitute a sufficiently large scope for any revitalization plan. While arts districts can do great things to boost the fortunes of cities, the beneficiaries are unlikely, at least initially, to be those who are most in need of help. Nevertheless, if a city is to become truly successful economically, a certain level of creative vitality is absolutely mandatory. The strategies discussed below, therefore, are presented with the clear understanding that they comprise just one facet of what should be a comprehensive program of urban economic development.

### **Project Overview: A Case Study Analysis**

The remainder of this study will examine the efforts undertaken to use arts and culture to advance economic development efforts in Providence, Rhode Island and Durham, North Carolina. Providence experienced a hugely successful urban revitalization in the 1980's and

1990's and the arts played a key role in improving the city's image and in bringing a new level of activity and vitality to districts that were previously plagued by disinvestment and blight. Though a city-sponsored downtown arts district failed to achieve its stated goal of creating affordable conditions for residential occupancy of downtown Providence by working artists, it did succeed in creating an entertainment district that has since become a popular residential destination for higher-income residents of the city. Meanwhile, other areas of Providence, particularly an industrial mill district that was left with high vacancy after textile firms left in the first half of the twentieth century, have provided desirable and affordable residential and studio spaces for the arts community. In almost all instances of successful development of the arts in Providence, the city government has facilitated the process by offering financial incentives. Though the impacts are less concrete, the symbolic value of the city's enthusiastic and explicit commitment to developing the arts has also been beneficial.

Durham's arts movement has only begun to pick up steam in the 1990's, but there are already indications that the groundwork for a successful revitalization is in place. In recent years, the arts community has taken steps to become more organized and more involved in the political process that is driving most revitalization projects. Cognizant of successful cases such as Providence, city officials in Durham have expressed a willingness to utilize the arts as a part of the process; however, full political support is not as concrete at this point as it has been in Providence. The salience of the Durham case, then, is the search for insight into the challenges involved in linking artistic and political forces to coalesce around a common goal.

The selection of these two cities was based on three factors. First, they are both fertile examples of art-based strategies. To varying degrees both cities have utilized the arts as a viable tool to further urban revitalization efforts. Second, both cities are sufficiently similar in size,

history, and economic structure to enable a basic level of comparison. Providence and Durham are by no means twin cities, as the analysis will show, but they do have several key characteristics in common. These factors include total population, existence of the remnants of a serious industrial decline, the presence of major research universities, and an abundance of historic buildings and properties available for creative reuse. Lastly, in spite of the similarities, certain differences between Providence and Durham enable valuable distinctions to be drawn between their policy and program options and results. Specifically, the timelines of implementation of arts strategies and the political climates in the two cities create constraints and enable opportunities in very different ways.

While a case study approach enables us to understand and evaluate real-world actions and conditions as they apply to urban creativity, the limited number of cases investigated constrains the degree to which broad generalizations will be possible. A policy that works wonders in Durham may not be at all applicable to Providence and vice versa. Nevertheless, in addition to providing a descriptive account of the policies employed in these cities to advance the arts, this analysis will hopefully enable a better understanding of the prerequisite conditions necessary for a given effort to be successful. Further, this research can be used as a first step in the creation of a policy and program toolkit that will be of use to leaders in both the public and private sectors in all cities.

Though the basic geographic unit of analysis will be the city, a particular emphasis will be placed on traditional downtown areas. Unfortunately, quantitative data available are rarely sufficiently granular to enable a clear understanding of the differences between downtown cores and the surrounding areas. Both Durham and Providence have substantial residential, and virtually suburban, districts within their city limits so city data, though helpful, has clear

limitations. Because Durham County stretches out to an even wider geographic scope, including Research Triangle Park, which is a significant source of employment in a decidedly non-urban setting, the county data is even less useful. Taking yet another step further out, census data that considers metropolitan statistical areas (MSA's) includes, for both cities, a large collection of suburbs and exurbs that, for these purposes, are highly disconnected from the cities investigated here. Durham's MSA designation includes North Carolina's capital city of Raleigh as well as the entire Research Triangle Park region, so useful generalizations about Durham's economy are rarely possible with MSA level data. In spite of these limitations, the focus here is on the use of the arts to advance urban revitalization, so the analysis will be restricted to urban areas. The limitations of the data will be noted as such.

## **Methodology**

Given the limitations of relevant quantitative data noted above, this project relies primarily on a descriptive approach. Because Providence's experience with arts-based revitalization is now over two decades old, a fair amount of research has already been conducted on the process. This written record was used as a starting point for the research, which was then augmented by extensive interviewing of public officials, employees of arts organizations, historic preservationists, and individual artists. Durham, far newer to the process, has virtually no relevant literature available. Interviews, therefore, comprised the overwhelming majority of research conducted for Durham. For both cities, interviews were conducted in person, over the telephone, and via email, with the intent a gaining both a factual account of what has occurred as well as a qualitative assessment of the effectiveness of the efforts. Virtually every interviewee expressed a desire to use the arts as part of the revitalization process, though specific approaches

and philosophies vary considerably. One goal of this research, then, is to illuminate the effect a given actor's perspective has on his or her approach to advancing the arts. Sometimes the differences were the result of differing priorities, but other times they simply represented very basic disagreements on potential effects of different program options.

To the extent possible, both case studies are presented within a similar framework. The presentation for each case will begin with a very brief overview of the city's history along with present demographics as they relate to the arts or revitalization. This section will also detail the extent to which each city possess any natural advantages or challenges that impact its ability to develop urban creativity. The second section will consider governmental efforts to develop creative assets. These will largely be municipal actions, though state policies also play a role to some degree. Next, comes a look at the role of the private sector arts community as well as grassroots arts movements that exist outside of the immediate scope of governmental action. The fourth section examines the spatial effects of arts-based revitalization efforts with respect to the traditional downtown cores of the cities. Urban revitalization typically aims to breath new life into central business districts, but both cities have faced a fair amount of controversy over the distributional patterns of involvement. The next section will consider historic preservation as a form of cultural development – an angle that has been employed to a significant extent and with good success in both Providence and Durham. Related to historic preservation is the adaptive use of historic buildings for arts purposes, which has also taken place in both cities. In the concluding section, an attempt will be made to understand the degree to which it is possible to draw conclusions across the two cases. Though a consideration of two cases offers a noted limitation on the ability to generalize, some lessons will nevertheless emerge that can be applied to a wide range of urban places.

## ***Providence, Rhode Island***

### **A Brief History**

Roger Williams founded the city of Providence, at the confluence of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers, at the head of the Narragansett Bay, in 1636 to serve as a safe harbor for religious refugees from Puritan Massachusetts. The city's historic role as a home for dissenters and nonconformists has long been embraced by its residents. Even today, artists frequently cite the past as a partial justification for the success of cultural development, believing that the city's history has created an environment that many believe is particularly well suited to the arts. Providence's location initially made it an ideal sea-port, but the railroad and the proximity to Boston and New York also shaped much of its economic history. In fact, by the 1780's the railroad was so dominant a force in mercantile transportation that the city's leaders were filling in portions of the rivers to facilitate land-based navigation and trade. When rivers were left intact, new bridge construction often made them un-navigable (Leazes & Motte, 2004).

Around the same time Providence was becoming the primary textile-manufacturing city in the United States. Industry grew rapidly and successfully in Providence and, by the end of the nineteenth century, also included the manufacture of steam engines, jewelry, machine tools, and metal goods. The city grew up around a dense downtown and a collection of outlying neighborhoods that sprouted up on the several hills in the city. No attempts were made to ensure a uniform or organized pattern of development and the result was a city made up of a diverse array of organically derived districts that exhibit a wide spectrum of architectural styles. Politically, the city was historically controlled by a small handful of wealthy families. The process became a bit more sophisticated in the late nineteenth century with the advent of political



machines, but concentrated distribution of power in the hands of a few elites remained a constant. Corruption has long been an understood, and often accepted, trait of local politics. In 1904, journalist Lincoln Steffens wrote that “Rhode Island is a state for sale, and cheap” (Stanton, 2003). That sentiment was every bit as applicable in the 1990’s as it was at the turn of the century.

With the booming of the industrial age and massive immigration to America’s cities in the early twentieth century, Providence’s economy flourished and its population peaked at just over 250,000 in 1940 (Leazes & Motte, 2004). The health of the city began to change for the worse after World War II, however, as the industrial age was drawing to a close for the northeastern United States and suburbanization was rapidly changing the nature of cities. Providence’s neighborhoods have always been Balkanized, to some extent, based on ethnic clustering, but now, those who could afford to do so moved to the suburbs. The overall population began to decline and the percentage of African-Americans in the city’s population grew markedly. The introduction of the interstate highway system further wounded Providence when the construction of major new routes, particularly I-494 and I-95, bisected the heart of the city.

The population, as well as the prosperity of Providence, has recently begun to rebound, though, and the changes are frequently invoked as a poster case for urban revitalization. A combination of physical and social planning projects have reversed a great deal of the damage done in decades past and brought a new sense of vitality to the city which seemed a half-century back to be in the midst of an irreversible decline. The transformation, known by city boosters as the Providence Renaissance placed a great emphasis on the ability of the arts to facilitate revitalization and is the subject of the following sections.

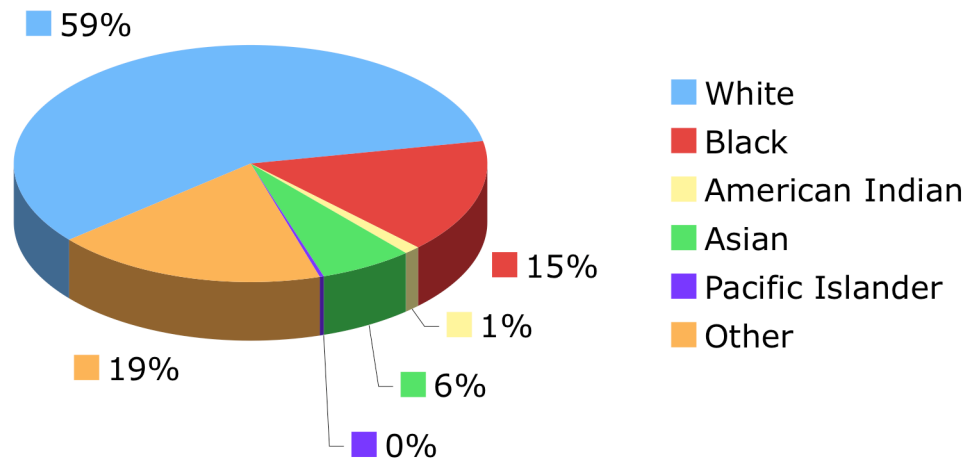
## Basic Demographics and the State of the Arts in Providence

**Table 1: Population of Providence**

|   | <b>1960</b> | <b>1970</b> | <b>1980</b> | <b>1990</b> | <b>2000</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|   | 207,498     | 179,116     | 156,804     | 160,728     | 173,618     |
| Data for the City of Providence. Source: US Census Bureau |             |             |             |             |             |

A declining population is hardly unique for an industrial city in the Northeast, but, unlike some other cities, Providence has exhibited a clear reversal of the trend in the past two decades. This new growth has been vastly outpaced by suburban growth, to be sure, but city leaders in Providence now strive for a city that can coexist and complement the suburbs rather than compete with them. The composition of the city population has also changed considerably. While whites are slowly beginning to return to the city, and the African American population has largely held steady, a large influx of Latinos from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and parts of South America has brought the introduction of a new minority group that now outnumbers the African American community two to one (Leazes & Motte, 2004). Though the national origins of the Latino populations are different, the trend in Providence in other ways mirrors the growth of the Hispanic community in Durham and countless other American cities. The growth of the Latino population is not evident in the figure below because the United States census Bureau treats Hispanic as an ethnicity rather than a race. Of a smaller, but still significant magnitude is the immigration of Asians to Providence from Cambodia and Vietnam. This occurred for the most part in the early 1980's and has leveled off some since (Leazes & Motte, 2004).

**Figure 1: Providence Population by Race**



Employment in the arts and related sectors in Providence is not a perfect measurement of the impact of the arts and culture, but it does reflect, in part, role of the arts in Providence relative to that of the nation. The table below shows employment in NAICS codes 71 (arts, entertainment, and recreation) and 72 (accommodation and food services) in the Providence MSA. The location quotients of 1.08 and 1.09 indicate that Providence has a higher concentration in these sectors than exists in the United States as a whole.<sup>1</sup> Also clear from this data is that both sectors receive wages that fall far short of the average wage in the Providence economy. This is not at all inconsistent with other geographic regions, but it does shed light on one of the challenges inherent in promoting the arts. Low wages tend to suggest that the arts have a minimal impact on a regional economy and therefore are not worthy of substantial attention

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<sup>1</sup> Location quotients are calculated by dividing the percentage of jobs in a given sector by the percentage of jobs in that same sector in a reference area (in this case the nation). Location quotients over 1.00 indicate that the study area has a greater percentage than the reference area, location quotients below 1.00 mean that the sector is underrepresented in the study area, and a value exactly equal to 1.00 indicates that both the study area and the reference area have equal concentrations of employment in that sector.

from policy makers. The literature on the arts and economic development, of course, suggests otherwise as the arts are capable of having a positive indirect impact on several other high-wage sectors if they can successfully be used to promote a region and attract a desirable workforce.

**Table 2: Arts and Related Employment in the Providence MSA**

|                  | <b>Industry</b>                     | <b>NAICS Code</b> | <b>No. of Units</b> | <b>Annual Avg Employment</b> | <b>Annual Wages Paid</b> | <b>Avg Annual Wage Per Employee</b> | <b>Location Quotient</b> |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Year 2002</b> | Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 71                | 518                 | 7,097                        | \$138,601,836            | \$19,530                            | 1.08                     |
|                  | Accommodation and Food Services     | 72                | 2,065               | 40,504                       | \$563,158,923            | \$13,904                            | 1.09                     |
|                  | Total All Industries                |                   | 35,187              | 468,451                      | \$16,293,164,345         | \$34,781                            |                          |
|                  | Arts/Accommodation as % of Total    |                   | 7.3%                | 10.2%                        | 4.3%                     | 56.8%                               |                          |

Data for Providence MSA  
Source: Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training  
National Data from Bureau of Labor Statistics

The wage data for the arts also reveals one of the challenges of promoting artistic and cultural industries. Given that workers in these sectors earn wages that fall far below societal averages, they are particularly susceptible to market changes in real estate and cost of living. Observation of the spatial distribution of arts activity in both Providence and Durham reveals that artists consistently seek out a city's most affordable markets. To the extent that a city does not have affordable districts that are conducive to the arts, or does not have any affordable districts at all, that city is likely to have a hard time cultivating the arts.

### **Providence's Natural Predisposition for an Arts Movement**

One reason Providence has become a poster case for an arts-based revitalization is that it possesses a number of key natural advantages that facilitated the development of the arts movement. Close proximity to Boston is an advantage for luring artists who may not be able to afford to live and work in Boston, but desire reasonable access to a first-rate metropolis. Boston has also served as an inhibitor of this movement to a lesser degree in that it has attracted a handful of corporations that had previously been headquartered in Providence, but, overall,

almost all Providence residents cite the existence of a major city less than an hour north as a key advantage. Providence also has the advantage of being a state capital. While government jobs can often seem to be the antithesis of arts and culture, jobs are jobs, and the government provides a large and steady base of employment for Providence. This in turn provides a degree of economic stability and a steady tax base that shields the city's economy from major fluctuations.

For decades, Providence failed to make use of its greatest resource, its rivers. In fact, the early leaders of Providence deemed the rivers such an inconvenience to trade and land transportation that they were either paved over or covered with bridges so wide and ugly that the mere existence of a river below was lost on most observers. A great amount of entrepreneurial creativity and good fortune was needed for Providence to rediscover its rivers and make its waterfront a civic gathering place rather than a source of blight. While the rediscovery of the value of the waterfront was not an arts strategy specifically, the river was transformed into a work of art when local artist Barnaby Evans, with strong support from the city government, created WaterFire, a series of floating bonfires that proved to be one of the city's most successful attractions.

Both Providence and Durham share a crop of historic buildings and architecture that has proven to be a crucial component of the arts development in both cities. Old buildings, particularly old industrial buildings, are conducive to creative forms of rehabilitation and reuse. Providence has wonderful and intact neighborhoods, commercial districts, and industrial zones from a variety of historical eras. When economic decline brought down real estate prices, a new opportunity was created for artists to move in to many of these historic buildings and reinvent them in ways that have greatly enhanced the strength of the arts in Providence.

A final advantage for Providence that is somewhat difficult to define and quantify is a general sense of openness to people, activities, and cultures that exist outside of standard American norms. Though it can be hard to imagine how 350-year-old history can have a tangible effect on the urban developments of the present, several local artists and arts supporters believe that the legacy of Roger Williams has benefited the cultivation of the arts scene in Providence. Among the most important of Richard Florida's prescriptions for the creation of an environment that will appeal to the creative class is tolerance, but tolerance and openness are impossible to create out of thin air. To a great extent, either a community possesses these traits or it doesn't. Surely community values can and will change over time, but explicit efforts to make a city tolerant or liberal (a term Florida seems to be hinting at, but afraid to use) are not likely to work. Creative districts seem to pop up most often in blue states or small progressive enclaves in conservative states such as college towns. Providence was able to develop a thriving creative community, in part, because it has always possessed the sort of societal values that tend to appeal to creatives.

## **Origins of the Providence Renaissance and the Subsequent Arts Movement**

Of crucial importance to the success of the Providence Renaissance generally, and the development of the arts more specifically is the role of leadership and willpower from the top. Individuals and small, grassroots organizations were clearly important as role-players, actors, and innovators, but unwavering support from the city government has been a constant that sets Providence apart from many other cities. And while governmental support of a great magnitude is not necessarily a prerequisite for a successful revitalization, it is needed to achieve a transformation as dramatic as what took place in Providence. The Renaissance is generally believed to have lasted from around 1980 through the mid 1990's, though some would argue that

it continues to this day, and many have identified roots that existed prior to those years. In a biography of Vincent A. “Buddy” Cianci, the mayor who presided over the bulk of the revitalization era, Mike Stanton (Stanton, 2003) offers an excellent description of the change in Providence:

The city that the Wall Street Journal in 1983 had called “a smudge beside the fast lane to Cape Cod” had undergone a remarkable transformation. The grimy railroad yards and parking lots that had bisected downtown were gone. Rivers that had been smothered in ribbons of concrete had been uncovered and moved. Authentic Venetian gondolas glided along the water, past impressive stone and brick buildings that spoke to Providence’s storied past as a maritime power and factory town. At night, thousands congregated to behold WaterFire, a series of meditative bonfires on iron pyres in the rivers, accompanied by music ranging from New Age to opera. With its nationally acclaimed restaurants and devotion to the arts, Providence had become a Mecca for tourists and a trendy place to live, a poster child for the rebirth of the American city.

Stanton’s account, in addition to ably describing the scope of the revitalization, also hints at the challenges inherent in considering the arts without recognizing the vast array of intertwined factors that go into a creative revival. Providence is a particularly useful case for those interested in development in the arts because the development was so successful, but the arts comprised only one piece of the larger goal, and, combined with tourism, food services, and infrastructure improvements, was but one component in an interdependent process that changed the entire city.

When Cianci was first elected in 1974, Providence’s downtown was in terrible shape. Jobs had been fleeing either to other cities or the suburbs for decades, the residential base was virtually non-existent, and many of Providence’s impressive historic buildings were vacant and in disrepair. One major attempt to bring a revival to downtown Providence had been the construction in 1972 of the Providence Civic Center, a large arena that hosts minor league

hockey, Providence College basketball games, concerts, and circuses, but the project had been controversial from the start and never really generated sufficient income or activity to be deemed a success. The Civic Center is still in use today, but several financial bailouts from the city have been needed to keep it afloat, and it is presently in need of repairs and renovation. In spite of the mixed success of the Civic Center, however, Cianci never failed to recognize the power of large and visible projects as symbols of change in the city. Within the first few years of his tenure, Cianci rescued the Ocean State Performing Arts Center, a 1928 movie house, by assembling financial support from the city, the state, and a handful of corporate donors. In 1984 the theater was renamed the Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC), and it was expanded in 1995 and restored once again in 2000 (Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau, 1999). The PPAC continues to host dramatic and musical performances and has remained a successful keystone of downtown Providence.

Over time, the arts were made an explicit part of the larger plan in Providence, representing one of the earliest instances of a metropolitan government recognizing the ability of culture, creativity, and art to advance broader urban objectives. In addition to Cianci, who seemed to be becoming more and more convinced that cultural amenities were a key to Providence's hope for revitalization, the arts had a key ally in United States senator Claiborne Pell who was the chief senate sponsor of a 1965 bill that created the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (Leazes & Motte, 2004). The NEA subsequently funded a 1974 study by researchers from RISD and MIT, titled *Interface Providence*, which laid out a plan – primarily concerned with transportation infrastructure - for the revitalization of the central business district in Providence. Pell never attempted to take on the vocal role that Cianci excelled in, but he was an



important and powerful component of consortium of local leaders that drove many of the renaissance's biggest projects.

Ron Marsella, who at the time served as the chair of the Providence Foundation, a non-profit off-shoot of the chamber of commerce, recalls seeing the introduction of *Interface Providence* and the rehabilitation of the theater as a sign of the power of revitalization strategies based on colorful, visible methods, and he quickly became an ally in the mayor's quest to change the appearance of downtown in the hopes that such a transformation could, in turn, spur a more substantive revitalization over time. During the next few years the city government, in partnership with the Providence Foundation, the chamber of commerce, the Providence Redevelopment Agency, and a host of funding sources, executed the renovation and restoration of a series of landmark buildings, most of which were tied to Providence's historic legacy. These included the Providence Arcade, an 1828 shopping mall, Union Station, and the Biltmore Hotel, Providence's grandest historic hotel, which had been sitting idle for years. In the process, Cianci became something of an accidental leader in the national historic preservation movement. In 1980, he spoke at a national forum on historic preservation in Washington, D.C. where he wowed a crowd of political insiders with a slideshow of Providence's most impressive rehabilitation projects and lobbied in favor of federal historic preservation tax credits (Stanton, 2003).

A final key development that laid the groundwork for the revitalization of the city is the reconfiguration of Providence railroads and rivers. Though this initially was a project that had little to do with arts or culture and everything to do with infrastructure, the process is important both for the illustration it provides on the political methods of getting things done in the city, and because the recaptured and relocated waterfront eventually came to be the greatest symbol of the

triumph of the arts in Providence. The rivers that had once cut right through the heart of downtown Providence were virtually invisible by the mid twentieth century, and a wide swath of impenetrable rail yards separated the state capital building from the core of the city. Taking advantage of federal legislation aimed at bailing out the struggling rail industry and reducing America's dependence on oil in the wake of the OPEC embargo in 1973-74, an opportunistic group of Rhode Island political actors, led by Senator Pell were able to leverage \$30 million from the Federal Rail Authority – and eventual \$135 million more from the Federal Highway Authority – to fund a project that truly changed the face of the city (Leazes & Motte, 2004). The process was long and complex but, in the end, the city had moved railways and highways and uncovered (and partially relocated) rivers to reconnect portions of the city that had been separated by what had been known as the “Chinese Wall.” Providence then capitalized on its improved condition by working with private developers to create the Capital Center district in the newly available real estate between the downtown core and capital building. In spite of objections from those who were concerned that the new development would irrevocably draw activity away from the historic downtown core – known as Downcity – the Capital Center brought a wealth of new office and retail development to what had previously been a wasteland in the middle of the city. The linking was completed when the city created WaterPlace Park to capitalize on Providence's newly exposed riverfronts at the confluence of the Moshassuck and Woonasquatucket Rivers.

In all the infrastructure changes and resulting physical development projects took most of the 1980's to complete and involved the use of billions of dollars culled from local, state, federal, and private sources. Though they had little to do explicitly with the development of the arts, these changes, which occurred at the same time as many of Cianci's projects to save the city's

historic cultural facilities, were absolutely essential to the success of the revitalization. They also typify the risk-taking spirit that was overcoming Providence's leadership at the time. Though the relocation projects were incredibly complex and expensive, public, private and governmental resistance were far less burdensome than one might have imagined. The spirit of the time in Providence was one of radical change, and the arts were next in line to capitalize on the enthusiasm.

## **Leadership, and the Role of the Public Sector**

A fair amount of debate exists concerning the amount of credit due to Buddy Cianci for the Providence Renaissance. In the case of the massive infrastructure changes that were the most visible – and perhaps most important – aspects of the transformation, Cianci was, at best a supporter of someone else's plans. Architect Bill Warner was the initial source of the creativity needed to conceive of and design the plans for the relocation, and Senator Pell, along with Ron Marsella and chamber of commerce chair Bruce Sundlun, were the key figures in the identification and acquisition of capital. Cianci was certainly in favor of the project and his support may have helped to generate the support of the public, but, in this case, that likely would have existed with or without the help of the mayor. In the case of the revitalization of Downcity Providence, however, Cianci was indeed the principle actor, even if the ideas he espoused came originally from others.

With significant success in office and retail development in the Capital Center district, Downcity was initially left out of the revitalization of Providence. Piecemeal improvements such as the PPAC and the Biltmore Hotel existed, but the overall condition of the core of the city had changed little. Because Providence's employment base in the financial and professional fields had largely shifted to the Capital Center, Downcity was ticketed for a livelier sort of

revitalization. Architect Andres Duany was hired in 1993 to conduct a series of charrettes in Downcity and he eventually suggested making the district into an arts and entertainment hub to capitalize on the existing facilities, which now included a revived Trinity Repertory Theater, recently rescued with a \$230,000 loan from the city. Cianci quickly embraced the notion of a vibrant, artistic downtown and began implementing programs to increase arts activity in downtown and to start building a residential base in the district to bring a sufficient level of day and night activity.

### **The Downcity Arts District**

After winning a landslide reelection in 1994 after a brief hiatus from office following a conviction for assaulting a man he believed was having an affair with his wife, Cianci stormed back into action seemingly empowered by a new sense of national notoriety. He officially created the Downcity Arts District which was modeled after a program in Dublin, Ireland (Stanton, 2003). The district offered tax incentives for conversion of historic buildings into artist lofts as well as abatement of income tax for artists living in the zone and the elimination of sales taxes on goods produced by artists. It was in this effort that Cianci as a cheerleader was at his most effective. The implementation of the arts district coincided with a general real estate boom in the region and, combined with a handful of well chosen city-supported projects, Downcity's condition did indeed start to improve considerably.

Despite numerous pronouncements of success – the Creativity Economy Council (2004) claims that the arts district plan “worked wonders” – the tax incentives themselves had very little impact on downtown Providence. Real estate prices in Downcity quickly grew beyond the reach of most artists and neighboring districts and cities were far more successful in attracting an arts-

based demographic. What did work in Downcity was the proliferation of twenty-four hour activity through increased residential use (albeit of a sort that most working artists could not afford), major attractions like music, movie, and play houses that were developed with strong city support, and a flourishing restaurant scene. Suddenly, Downcity was buzzing with activity and was able to draw in new residents, visitors from the neighborhoods and suburbs around it, and tourists from all over the country, a notion that would have seemed preposterous a decade before. The PPAC was among the major attractions along with the Providence Black Repertory Company, which was incorporated in the heart of the district in 1996. Downcity was certainly an entertainment district, and the arts were a player in the form of big-ticket attractions, but it must be noted that the original intent of the Duany plan never really came to fruition. Several Providence residents who are deeply familiar with the state of the arts in Providence have stated that fewer than a dozen artists are presently making use of the Downcity incentives and that the number was never significantly higher (Bright, 2005; Carnevale, 2005; Crenca, 2005).

The actuality of the arts district is perhaps the result, in part, of a failure to include artists in the original planning process and instituting arts programs from above with little understanding of the needs of the ground level participants. The arts, in the mind of the city's leaders was more a product than a process, and the manifestation of the arts district produced real and valuable artistic amenities, but almost all of the sort that exist for consumption by non-artists. The social and participatory benefits of the arts were largely absent from the Downcity zone. While this may well have been successful as a means of drawing economic activity and, in time, a bigger and more general sense of urban vitality to downtown Providence, it certainly did not represent an all-encompassing approach to developing the arts. Consequently, without successes on other more informal fronts the arts may not have proven to be sustainable in

Providence because the city would have faced a lack of suitable spaces, institutions and amenities to attract the talent needed to support Downcity's big-ticket attractions.

The failure of a grassroots arts movement to take hold in Downcity should in no way be construed as a failure of the revitalization more generally. Two factors in particular suggest that the Downcity plan was in fact enormously successful. First, is simply the level of current activity in a district that was desperately inactive ten or twenty years before. The city has remedied the blight in its historic core that had become a sizable symbolic black eye, and the tax base downtown has improved dramatically. Second, in spite of its failure to achieve the intended arts development, the creation of an arts district sent a clear message to artists both locally and nationally that Providence was fast becoming an arts-friendly city. Reports of Providence's caricatured mayor - self-effacing, corrupt, tied to the mob, and enthusiastically in the corner of artists - spread quickly and worked to make the city attractive to the creative demographic. Far more important than the financial value of the tax abatement, it seems, was the symbolic message behind the programs. Providence wanted to be known as a city of the arts, and artists of all sorts were therefore welcomed and valued there. Working in concert with the stated goal of developing around the arts, the creation of the arts district had, in effect established a community standard of artistic visibility and vibrancy for the city. Artists and arts supporters could latch on to that standard as a justification of arts support and participation and also as a means of holding the municipal government to its word, allowing a new sort of vigilance to keep pressure on the city to maintain its support.

Through it all, Cianci was at the forefront of the movement, serving as a visionary, a salesman, and a cheerleader. The mayor was also an active participant in renewed buzz in Downcity. He attended the shows, marched in the parades, promoted the city in appearances on

the *Today* show and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, and probably spent more time drinking in the city's bars than any other resident. Providence citizens commonly joke that Cianci would have happily attended the opening of an envelope. Of the many lessons that can be pulled out of the Providence experience, one of the most salient is that marketing and public relations are more than just fluff accompanying more substantive efforts. Cianci was able to boast in the mid 1990's that Providence had more artists per capita than any other city in the United States, in part, because he counted every student enrolled at the Rhode Island School of Design as both an artist and a resident (Stanton, 2003). By claiming to be a Mecca for the arts, Providence able to advance the process of becoming just that. Consequently, when one questions Rhode Island artists about the efficacy of the arts district, the responses universally suggest that the district failed to meet its objectives, yet never suggest that the district was a bad idea. The incentives for the arts district are presently up for legislative review, and will likely be altered by the state government (Bright, 2005), but their original value seems secure.

A largely unsuccessful effort to become the east coast hub of the film industry further illustrates the magnitude of Cianci's zeal and ambition once he decided to pursue the arts as a revitalization strategy. After several years of successfully luring Broadway plays to the Providence Performing Arts Center, he started the Providence Film Commission in 1995 to serve as a facilitator liaison between the city and Hollywood production companies filming in Providence. He hosted an annual "Rhode Island Night" at a major film industry convention each year in Los Angeles during the late 1990's. Most enthusiastically, the mayor promoted the rebuilt Providence as a set for major motion pictures. During a fairly short period of time, several films including *Federal Hill*, *Amistad*, *There's Something About Mary*, and *Meet Joe Black* were shot in the city (Stanton, 2003). Shortly after running unopposed and winning yet another term in

1998, Cianci attempted to lure Robert Redford's Sundance Cinema to Downcity, though the deal failed when the theater's financial backer filed for bankruptcy (Leazes & Motte, 2004).

In 2001, Buddy Cianci was indicted on 97 charges of racketeering and the Cianci era in Providence was essentially over. After a long trial, Cianci ended up in a federal prison in New Jersey and the city began the process of moving on without him. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence that revealed extensive corruption in the Cianci administration, though, much of the city remained behind the embattled mayor. While the trial was ongoing, author Tom Wolfe spoke at a Brown University conference on the state of American cities and praised the revitalization of Providence, stating that in the new "psychology economy, money is exchanged for an experience, not a product." Wolfe argued that Providence had succeeded by emphasizing the arts rather than outdated factory employment. Across the river from the courthouse, RISD students, typically among the most cutting edge artists in the city, unveiled a fourteen-foot inflatable Buddy to show their support.

### **A New Era of Politics in Providence**

In 2002, David Cicilline was elected mayor of Providence with 84% of the vote ensuring that, even if the Cianci administration had finally fallen, the days of having a mayor with an overwhelming public mandate would continue. The tone of the new administration was vastly different with a significant reduction in political pomposity, but also in the system of graft that become so common as to be almost accepted under Cianci. The emphasis on the arts, however, was not compromised. One of Cicilline's first major acts was to announce the creation of the Providence Department of Art, Culture & Tourism in November of 2003. The department's mission statement, with includes a prominent and quote from Richard Florida's *The Rise of the*



*Creative Class* (2002), identifies an intention to “catalyze artistic innovation, and economic and human development across the city. The Department will implement a citywide, cultural plan for strategic and synergistic use of art, culture, film and tourism, which will build our downtown, inspire our neighborhoods, and enrich our schools” (Cicilline, 2003). The department has a cabinet-level executive director, presently held by Cliff Wood, ensuring that artistic and cultural interests will have a guaranteed seat at the political table in Providence. Specific components of the department include partnerships with the Providence Economic Development Partnership and the Department of Planning, a Film Advisory Panel to encourage filmmaking in Providence, and a series of artist services including assistance finding studio and residential spaces, funding sources, and exhibiting options.

Some artists in Providence has expressed a sense of nostalgia for the days of the Cianci administration when artistic interests were promoted with enthusiasm and vigor, but few have questioned the commitment of the current administration. Umberto Crenca (2005), who serves as artistic director of AS220, a non-profit studio, residential, and exhibition space for the arts in Providence, as well as on the board of the Department of Arts, Culture & Tourism believes that current funding levels for the department limit its effectiveness to a certain degree, but he stresses that one should not underestimate the importance of the very existence of the department. The creation represented a commitment on the part of the Cicilline administration to the arts and established a go-to source for arts issues in the department’s executive director. Crenca is confident that the new regime in Providence is every bit as committed to the arts as the one that came before, and that the new enhanced transparency of the current leadership will yield a more fair and smooth process of getting things done in city politics.

Another significant sign emerging from the start of the Cicilline administration – related to Richard Florida’s strong emphasis on the role of tolerance and diversity in a creative city – is that Cicilline, who is openly gay, was elected with a large majority of the vote. Florida has used the size of a city’s gay community as a proxy for tolerance more generally, and if this method is reasonable, it bodes extremely well for Providence. In spite of a reputation for using homophobic slurs in private, Buddy Cianci, during his long tenure as mayor, marched every year in the Rhode Island Festival of Pride parade, was known to frequent gay nightclubs, and was enormously popular with the gay community. Though gay rights issues have not been prominent in city politics, Cicilline’s election further suggests a prevailing sense of tolerance in Providence.

## **AS220 and the Role of Private Sector Arts Entrepreneurs**

An organization that has been a seminal part of the arts movement in Providence throughout its duration is AS220, a self-described un-juried, uncensored artists’ space. AS220 was founded in downtown Providence in 1985 by a small group of artists with \$800 who desired a space where they could create and exhibit their work free of all forms of censorship. Originally started in an ill-suited office space, the project took off when the group purchased and renovated a 22,000 square foot building in Downcity, which was essentially a “ghost town” at the time according to founder and artistic director Umberto Crenca (2005). The new facility housed cooperative residential spaces for artists, along with studios, galleries, and performances spaces. As AS220 became more successful, the budget grew in the late 1980’s to about \$100,000 annually, though, even then, Crenca was the only paid staff member, paying himself minimum wage. Today, AS220 has a staff of over a dozen, a café, a youth program, and plans to purchase another downtown building which will boost its overall square footage to over 50,000 square feet.

AS220 has been valuable to the development of the arts in Providence both in its own right as a successful and large arts institution, and also as a political lobbyist for the arts within the city government. Crenca believes that Buddy Cianci was a great spokesperson for the arts but also concedes that the intransigencies of the Cianci administration made navigating the political waters in Providence particularly frustrating. Mike Stanton's (2003) biography of Cianci contains an account of a time when Crenca came to the mayor to renegotiate a city loan and Cianci made him negotiate with Walter Miller, a man Stanton describes as "a disheveled, gap-toothed denizen of downtown who had become Cianci's unofficial mascot." The loan was eventually approved, but the process hardly exhibited political normalcy. Crenca seems to be perfectly content with the level of arts support coming from the new Cicilline administration and is presently serving on the board of the Providence Department of Arts, Culture & Tourism.

Though AS220 is technically within the bounds of the Downcity Arts District, it receives few benefits from the district's incentives because it is a non-profit entity that paid very little in taxes to begin with. Technically, the artists living at AS220 are eligible for the income and sales tax abatements that are part of the district plan, but most of these artists do not earn any substantial income through their artwork, and rarely report art sales for tax purposes in any event. Crenca's assessment of the value of the district is therefore similar to that of most other arts leaders in the city. He believes that the program sent a positive message to artists, but had few teeth on the financial end. Nevertheless, the development of Providence's arts-friendly reputation succeeded in drawing in artists from other cities and keeping a greater proportion of the many artists coming through RISD. Crenca has observed artists coming to Providence from a variety of cities throughout the country that became too expensive for arts uses. New York and Boston are obvious examples given their proximity and exorbitant costs of living, but artists have

also come to Providence in significant numbers from Minneapolis, Seattle, and Baltimore to take advantage of the thriving arts community and affordable rents.

Despite its modest beginnings, AS220 has developed into something of a giant within the Providence arts community. AS220's founders have commonly served as a political mouthpiece for the arts in Providence and they - particularly Crenca - became adept at interfacing with politicians and the political system in spite of having few overtly political interest when forming AS220. Recently, AS220's leadership has been happy to allow new groups such as the Partnership for Creative Industrial Space take on more of a policy role, leaving AS220 to focus more on expanding and improving its arts-based programming. Because of the non-judgmental nature of the group's approach to the arts, AS220 has been particularly successful in fostering the growth of the arts because it is an atypically welcoming entity in a community that can sometimes be unfriendly to newcomers. The arts can often be a "scene" in every sense of the word, and scenes are sometimes hard to gain entry into. Because AS220 has now established a two-decade tradition of reaching out across groups, ages, and organizations, it has likely induced significant growth in the arts community.

## **WaterFire**

Another instance of the arts originating in the private sector and growing to impact the entire city was Barnaby Evans' WaterFire installation in the newly uncovered rivers of Providence. Evans, a California native and Brown graduate has been active in the Providence arts scene since the mid 1980's producing public art projects and photography and had served on the board of the city's First Night Committee in the early 1990's. For Providence's tenth First Night Celebration in 1994, aided by a grant of \$3,000 from the event's organizers, Evans set out

to create a sculpture project that symbolized the rebirth of the city (Leazes & Motte, 2004). His creation was a series of torch-lit bonfires set in floating “braziers” in the rivers along the new WaterPlace Park. The initial unveiling of WaterFire was a popular success, despite Evans’ fear that it lacked sufficient scale to achieve his desired effect and, with enthusiastic support from the mayor, the project was brought back in June of 1996 for the International Sculpture Conference, which was being held that year in Providence. In subsequent years, WaterFire has been gradually expanded and now includes 97 floating flames and is executed several times each summer drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors to downtown Providence. Touted by the Providence Journal as “the most popular piece of art created in the capital city’s history,” WaterFire has come to be seen as a symbol of the revitalization of Providence (Evans, 2000).

After the second lighting in 1996, WaterFire was established as a non-profit arts foundation further establishing it as a core component of the local arts community. The foundation is comprised of a collection of volunteers and donors who facilitate the ongoing WaterFire presentations as well as production and sale of a full line of WaterFire merchandise. With financial support from individuals and corporations, the project has existed as a gift to the city, requiring no taxpayer money. Also significant is that WaterFire has been combined with event programming to make it a component in a larger program to draw visitors to the waterfront. Concerts and festivals are commonly presented in conjunction with WaterFire and the presentations are full celebrations of the revived city. In addition to the very real economic benefits generated by the activity surrounding a WaterFire exhibition, its symbolic value has been helpful to the development of Providence’s reputation as a city of the arts. Photographs of WaterFire are extremely common in materials and presentations documenting the city’s

revitalization, and being home to such a recognizable piece of public art surely helps to further that image.

## **The Role of Location: Two Downtowns**

When the rail and river infrastructure projects were finally completed in the mid 1990's, Providence was left with a large tract of well-located, developable space between the capital building and the historic downtown core of the city. Aided by a partnership between ambitious politicians and eager private developers, this newly exposed land was developed quickly and ambitiously with a series of large projects. Generally speaking, these new projects were a boon for the city, bringing in new retail and office activity and boosting the municipal tax base, but they did little, at least initially, to facilitate the revitalization of downtown. In spite of protests, from a handful of concerned downtown interests, the Capital Center Commission, a group formed to facilitate public-private partnerships in the development of the new Capital Center district where the railroad tracks had once been, approved the construction of a convention center, three hotels, several office complexes, and the Providence Place Mall, a twelve acre shopping and entertainment venue with 1.35 million square feet of retail space located adjacent to WaterPlace Park (Leazes & Motte, 2004). All of these projects were built close to, but not within, the traditional downtown and Providence residents have since described their city as having two downtowns, one old and one new.

Due to a struggling national economy and a development climate that was primarily focused on the new opportunities in the Capital Center district, Downcity's revitalization stagnated at the end of 1990's. The door was still open, though, for Downcity to be the around-



**Figure 2: Capital Center and Rail Relocation Plan.** Source: Leazes and Motte, 2004.

the-clock, active hub of the city because the Capital Center development was almost completely lacking in arts or entertainment uses. The Providence Place Mall has been reasonably successful as a retail attraction, and WaterPlace Park, which sits between the two downtowns, has been a great draw when special events are held, but the new district is otherwise a very traditional office and convention destination with little of the flair that has been ticketed for Downcity. The strategy for Downcity, therefore, has remained the same and, in the past few years, aided by an improving real estate market that is particularly strong in Providence, efforts to bring a new residential base to Downcity have begun to pay off. With the new residential presence, the theaters and arts attractions in Downcity have continued to thrive and restaurants and retail uses have become increasingly prevalent.

While a general consensus of the Capital Center seems to indicate that the project has been good for Providence – Providence Place Mall has been mostly successful, vacancy rates in the office complexes are low, and the convention center’s success has been adequate, if not outstanding – its effect on Downcity generally and the arts more specifically is harder to judge. Political support for the Capital Center projects came more from the state government than from the Cianci administration, which may partially explain the lack of an arts or cultural component in the new projects. To the extent that the development aided the entire regional real estate market, it may be reasonable to give the Capital Center credit for the subsequent improvement in the Downcity real estate market. Once new facilities began filling up, it seems, both businesses and residents began once again looking to Downcity as an up and coming district. That boost has increased the customer base for the cultural attractions in Downcity and the concept of an entertainment district has continued to develop. If the deed was not complete already, however,



the changes in the downtown real estate markets may have been a final and decisive indication that downtown Providence was not a feasible locale for individual artists and small or grassroots arts organizations. Given the overwhelming importance of affordability for successful arts districts, a downtown core may never been an ideal location for artists if cities have any hope for successful retail, office, and entertainment uses existing concurrently. The Downcity Arts District plan does not, in retrospect, appear compatible with otherwise reasonable efforts to revitalize Downcity more holistically.

The implication for the Providence arts community, then, is that far more attractive districts for both studio and residential use have been found outside of downtown Providence the old industrial zones or in neighboring cities. Nearby Pawtucket, Rhode Island has combined incentive and abatement programs inspired by the Providence model with a more accessible real estate market to develop a thriving arts scene of its own. Some political figures have suggested that this migration of artists represents a failure of the Providence arts strategy, but most artists and arts organizations believe that any type of competition between arts communities so close together makes little sense. The political boundaries are of small consequence to artists who have a more regional conception of their community. As noted above, the changes in Downcity have also made possible the development of a thriving arts community in Providence's mill district. If the city's arts strategy had come to fruition exactly as it had been originally intended, the mill district might still be facing increasing blight with no obvious fits for its stock of historic buildings. In retrospect, allowing Downcity to develop as a flashier and more tourist-friendly entertainment hub, while the grittier and more authentic arts community sought out overlooked jewels in the real estate market may have been the best-case scenario for Providence.

## **Historic Preservation as a Cultural Development Tool**

### **Early Arts Usage of Mill Buildings**

Though Providence has been justifiably praised for proactively championing a number of successful policies aimed at promoting the arts, some of the city's greatest triumphs resulted from far more organic origins. While the Downcity Arts District was the result of a concerted effort on the part of the Cianci administration's efforts to breath new creative life into downtown, the conversion of numerous abandoned mills on the west side of downtown into artist spaces has largely occurred as a result of actions taken by artists themselves. Because real estate costs in the city's historic core moved quickly out of the reach of artists during the 1990's, they sought out sites with ample room, flexible floor plans, and, most importantly, cheap rents.

By and large, Providence's economic health was in bleak condition throughout most of the twentieth century. Industrial decline hit earlier than in other parts of the country as thousands of mill jobs moved to the South long before anyone worried about jobs moving overseas. Early in the Cianci administration, city leaders began realizing that "Providence's stagnation had been a blessing in disguise in one sense - sparing its rich stock of historic buildings from the wrecking ball of urban renewal" (Stanton, 2003). Providence's condition, it seems, was so bleak that the federal funding sources that controlled the most ambitious urban renewal projects in the 1950's and 1960's did not feel that it was a worthwhile location for major projects. As a result, the remnants of industrial Providence - including a large collection of mills - were left more or less intact. The city has more than 150 mill sites, many of which are clustered in what has become a thriving, informal arts district on the west side, and a great number of them were abandoned in various state of neglect and disrepair when artists began to move in late 1990's (Smith, 2001). Once the trend became apparent, however, the Cianci administration quickly recognized the new

opportunity and stepped in to provide a variety of incentives that have facilitated the conversion and adaptive use of a number of properties. The result has been a series of projects, some quite large, that have been targeted specifically at artists and are on solid ground financially.

An early, but salient, example of artists using mill buildings was Fort Thunder, an informal artist colony that included residential, studio, and performance uses along with weekly flea markets. Fort Thunder, which began when a handful of comic book artists moved into a building in the Olneyville district at Eagle Square in 1995, pre-dated any sort of city arts support and the community was largely illegal as tenants paid little regard to zoning and tax regulations. Fort Thunder represented the far end of guerrilla-style adaptive use of an abandoned industrial space, but was nevertheless hailed for bringing new life into a district that was being ignored by the city government and most of its citizens. Though it only housed about 24 people during its lifespan – never more than 13 at a time (Spurgeon, 2003) – Fort Thunder was representative of a creative approach to an otherwise obsolete district.

In early 2001, all members of the Fort Thunder community were evicted when their building and six other former mills were slated for demolition to make way for the Eagle Square shopping center which was described by local artist Erik Bright as a “glorified strip mall” (2005). The groundbreaking ceremony for Eagle Square provided a clear articulation of two opposing visions for the mill district as the evicted artists unleashed a bitter and vocal protest while Mayor Cianci responded that “We have a better use for this place than to have flea markets on Saturday afternoons” (Smith, 2002). The contrasting visions of artists and development forces were, in this case, in sharp contrast, but the event likely served to advance the agenda of the arts community more than was evident on that day. While Eagle Square went through in spite of the chorus of opposition, the city government, and specifically Buddy Cianci henceforth exhibited a greater

understanding of the vibrancy of the local arts community and its ability to play a lead role in the revitalization of the mill district. Meanwhile, the legacy of Fort Thunder has risen to legendary status and several of its former residents were invited to exhibit their work at the Whitney Museum in New York in 2002 (Van Siclen, 2001).

In May of 2001, just a few months after the Eagle Square groundbreaking ceremony and with implementation of the Eagle Square project still in the early stages, Cianci unveiled a program that would designate many of the 150 identified mills in the city as historic landmarks. Accompanying to the designation was a comprehensive program of tax incentives and zoning adjustments that facilitate the conversion of the mills for studio and residential use by artists. In an interesting twist on his statement at the Eagle Square groundbreaking, Cianci justified the approach at a press conference by stating “the last thing we need in this city is to go by these wonderful, beautiful structures and see a flea market on Saturday afternoon” (Smith, 2001). While Cianci maintained his support of the Eagle Square shopping center, he promised to work with the developers in hopes of saving at least one of the mills slated for demolition and rehabilitating it to be part of the retail development.

Cianci’s new proposal was intended to supplement the state’s existing Mill Buildings and Economic Revitalization Act (since renamed, less poetically, the Buildings in Blighted Areas and Economic Revitalization Act) (2001), which offered 50% tax credits for approved redevelopment of designated mill properties. The mayor offered to use the city’s federal aid received under the Community Development Block Grant program as collateral against federal loans to purchasers of mill properties who intended to rehabilitate the properties. He also proposed a program of city loans to be made available to small businesses operating within the rehabilitated mill buildings (Smith, 2001). While these ideas were widely praised by both local artists’ groups and the

Providence Preservation Society, it was also evident that the mayor's vision was still not quite in sync with that of the existing artist community. He touted the possibilities of class-A office space and residential lofts as the future of the area, a plan that must have resembled the gentrification of the downtown arts district to many local artists.

### **Major Rehabilitation Projects and the Formation of a New Arts District**

One announcement that was a largely a side note at the May, 2001 press conference was that a group of four artists had begun working on a plan to purchase and convert the abandoned Monohasset Mill into over two dozen units of live and work space specifically for artists. The plan was to take advantage of the Providence Preservation Society's revolving loan fund to finance the purchase and restoration of the building and the mayor expressed an eagerness to assist the project. One of the partners in the project, Erik Bright, suggested that, while the downfall of Fort Thunder was a significant hit to the Olneyville arts community, it might also have motivated locals to seek out more permanent options for staking their claim to the district (Van Siclen, 2001). The Monohasset proposal was to be an artist-owned space that would put strict restrictions on tenant selection to ensure that it remained a space for the arts.

The Monohasset Mill project has since come to fruition and now has 37 condominiums, which are sold at market and subsidized prices ranging from \$125,00 to \$200,000. Though the project is presently at full occupancy, when units do become available, potential purchases are required to demonstrate a commitment to an artistic pursuit, which can include visual performing, and literary arts, architecture, and design. The Monohasset Mill Project, LLC, which manages the building, clearly articulates in its mission statement a dual purpose: to protect the endangered historic architecture that presently exists in Providence, and to promote the growing

arts district. Plans are currently in place to develop an on-site gallery within the complex to complement the residential uses (Monohasset Mill Project, 2005).

The manifestation of the city's new interest in preserving historic mills was the establishment in the spring of 2002 of the Industrial and Commercial Buildings District (ICBD). Touted by the Providence Preservation Society as the nation's first thematic, non-contiguous historic district, the ICBD applies not to a specific part of the city but rather to a specific type of building which exist in a variety of districts. An estimated 250 structures were deemed eligible for inclusion. The designation, which has been inclusively applied to industrial buildings built prior to 1960, offers both zoning and tax abatement benefits to facilitate adaptive use rehabilitation projects. Any building included in the district is granted an automatic live/work zoning variances which eliminates the need to lobby the city zoning board for those looking to convert mills to historic lofts (Amer, 2004).

Buildings in the ICBD that are also listed on the National Historic Register of Historic Places receive 10-year freezes on their property tax assessments if a rehabilitation is executed and costs more than 50% of the building's assessed value. The Providence Historic District Commission must grant a certificate of appropriateness before any restoration work is commenced to ensure that the historic integrity of the property is maintained (Providence Preservation Society, 2002). The Monohasset Mill, for example, has saved tens of thousands of dollars through tax savings as a result of its inclusion in the ICBD (Bright, 2005).

Rehabilitation projects on mill buildings are also eligible for state and federal historic preservation tax credits, which offer another substantial financial incentive for qualified rehabilitation projects. The state program, administered by the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, offers tax credits equal to 30% of the cost of approved

rehabilitation work provided that the rehabilitation costs equal at least 50% of the property's assessed value. Properties on the National Register are also eligible for additional Federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits, which yields another set of credits equal to 20% of the rehabilitation costs. The combined state and federal tax credits provide 50% of project costs and therefore are obviously a huge benefit to developers considering adaptive use projects in historic mill buildings (Providence Preservation Society, 2002). Credits are typically sold through intermediary syndicators and are presently selling for about 90 cents on the dollar. The capital raised through the sale of the credits provides crucial startup equity for rehabilitation projects (Bright, 2005).

### **Defending Arts Uses from Development Pressures**

With the successes in preserving and adapting mill buildings – often for residential use either by artists or others – has come a new fear that the historic use patterns may be lost even while the structures themselves are being saved. In September of 2004, for instance, Artiste Lofts, LLC, a Los Angeles-based developer paid \$1.7 million to purchase the Procaccianti Building, a complex of mill buildings with the intent of converting them into “So-Ho style live/work condominiums” (Amer, 2004). While the Procaccianti project is beneficial to the neighborhood in that it increases residential density, brings in new activity, and raises tax revenues, it also suggests a threat of an overly homogenous use trend in the area. Because developers have recognized the potential of mill conversions to loft residences, a risk exists that virtually every mill rehabilitation project will yield more high-end residences. If the district comes to be dominated by only this one type of use, the vibrant and artistic character that has become a hallmark of the revitalization process may be lost. Further, since it has been recognized

that an artistic district can create benefits for a city that extend beyond the direct economic effects of the projects themselves, the entire city may stand to benefit from protecting artistic and affordable uses of the mills. The development of the Procaccianti building, for example required the relocation of 24 small businesses with 142 employees. Though the city's tax yield may increase with the conversion to residential use, the overall health of the urban economy may nevertheless suffer if displaced firms are forced to look outside the city for affordable real estate options.

One project, which aims to combat this trend, is the Steel Yard, a multi-use project housed in a mill in the heart of Providence's industrial district that formerly housed the Providence Steel and Iron Company. The Steel Yard consists of a large industrial shop, private workspaces, and classrooms used for teaching the industrial and fine arts including welding, blacksmithing, and ceramics. The facility is a program of the Woonasquatucket Valley Community Build, a group founded in 2001 by local artists with the stated goal of serving as a "sponsor and catalyst for innovative approaches to urban revitalization, arts promotion, workforce development, and community growth" (Woonasquatucket Valley Community Build, 2005). The partners in the Steel Yard include some of the same people involved in the Monohasset Mill Project, so it is not surprising that the mission exhibits a similar zeal for maintaining artistic integrity. The development of the Steel Yard was dependent on an early stroke of good luck when, after the Providence Steel and Iron Company ceased operations in 2003, company owner William E. King agreed to sell the building at a below market price of \$1.4 million because he believed in the mission of the new developers (Smith, 2004). The property, which has architectural components that date from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had extensive lead pollution in the soil, the cleanup of which has placed a



significant financial burden on the developers. Thus far, however, the Steel Yard has been roundly praised as a success.

While the Steel Yard is in many ways typical of the type of creative use that has become prevalent in the mill district in recent years, it is unique in that its focus on the industrial arts has kept the current incarnation of the building true to its historical uses. A fear of an impending dominance of high-end loft apartments has caused some artists to worry that the mills will soon be struck by gentrifying forces, but a project like the Steel Yard ensures at least a certain degree of artistic and non-residential use for the foreseeable future. Much of the art created in the Steel Yard is made of steel and many of the artists are making use of the mill's original equipment in the creation of artistic projects (Carnevale, 2005).

Another effort to confront the forces of gentrification in the mill district has been the formation of the Partnership for Creative Industrial Space (PCIS) by Erik Bright of the Monohasset Mill and Lisa Carnevale who works out of the Steel Yard. The Partnership's stated mission is to "preserve and provide affordable and sustainable commercial space" within the ICBD (Amer, 2004). In addition to acting as a general supporter of the arts in the mill district, PCIS is working to ensure that residential developments do not become so numerous that they eventually restrict or force out the variety of artistic uses currently in existence. The group began operating in August of 2004 and undertook as its first major project a survey of business and employment within the city's mills. The survey, funded by a \$5,000 grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, was intended to reveal the precise level of economic activity going on within the mills – which may seem like little more than abandoned vestiges of the industrial age to unknowing passersby (Carnevale, 2005). The PCIS survey found that there are 1261 businesses, and 15,672 jobs in the 250 buildings listed as part of the Industrial and Commercial Buildings

District (Amer, 2004). In addition to providing a valuable economic assessment of activity in the mills, this survey has provided those who seek to protect these diverse uses with the lobbying power needed to justify their efforts. If the mills are in fact producing a substantial and demonstrated quantity of economic output, the city is more likely to protect the mills from conversion to residential use. Further, a better understanding of the economic activity in the mills leads to a better understanding and who and what is being displaced as a result of the residential conversions.

In addition to the tax incentives already in place for the ICBD, PCIS has a wish list of additional policy tools that could further enhance the economic viability of artistic activities in the mill district. First, is the extension of the Downcity tax-free arts district to the ICBD. While the mill buildings are eligible for a variety of tax abatements for developers engaging in rehabilitations, no tax incentives are presently available to the artists themselves. In the Downcity zone, however, no sales tax is charged on the sale of artists' goods and artists do not pay any income tax on their arts-generated earnings. Though the Downcity plan has been widely praised as a well-intentioned plan to make Providence as arts-friendly as possible, the fact remains that few artists can find suitable space in the current district, so the incentives go largely unused. Extending the benefits of the tax-free zones would bring the tax abatement to its intended audience and provide a small, but significant, boost to the financial sustainability of the city's artists. This measure is presently being considered in the state legislature and the leaders of PCIS are encouraged by the initial support it has received (Bright, 2005; Carnevale, 2005).

PCIS is also lobbying for a 50% reduction in the sales and use taxes levied on commercial businesses within the mill district. This incentive, which would be offered not just to artists, but to all commercial businesses, is intended to stem the tide of residential conversions by

ensuring that other uses also remain viable in the mills. Along those lines, PCIS also advocates a repeal of the live/work zoning exemption for buildings in the ICBD. In a storyline that has unfolded in several cities in which loft-style living has become fashionable, an ordinance that was originally intended to support artists who were likely to maintain studio space within their homes has come to be used for the construction of high-end housing that has no arts component. Clark Schoettle, director of the Providence Preservation Society's Revolving Fund, believes that the PCIS proposal on live/work addresses a legitimate problem but goes too far. He has suggested maintaining the variance, but redefining the live/work requirements to better ensure that the "work" component is upheld (Amer, 2004).

### **Ownership: Guaranteeing a Long-term Role for the Arts**

Rising costs and strong development pressures began limiting the effectiveness of the arts district in downtown Providence almost as soon as it was established. Though the tax incentives offered were almost universally considered a good model for assisting artists and for sending a message that Providence is an arts-friendly community, the benefits were limited to a zone that quickly became economically unfriendly to most small-scale artistic uses. One arts studio and residential facility, AS220, remains, and a few large theaters are active downtown, but the grassroots arts movement has either relocated to the mill district or left the city altogether. This development is indicative a process that is hardly unique to Providence. Once an area becomes a thriving arts district, it becomes fashionable and demand for real estate rises accordingly. Developers tend to seek out booming markets and are likely to move in to these flourishing districts and begin building projects that cater to the highest economic tier of the new demand. The result is often a fundamental change to the character of the district as well as price increases

that are often large enough to drive out many of the artists who initiated the changes in the first place. The changes that have occurred in downtown Providence surely represent a positive transformation when one considers that the city's historic core was almost completely deserted in the early 1980's, but it should still be noted that what was originally intended to be an arts district now has a real shortage of ground-level arts.

To some degree, this process is already well underway in the mill district as well. The majority of the new residential projects are well out of the financial reach of most artists and a higher-income demographic is quickly moving in. Erik Bright of PCIS believes, however, that a significant portion of the district's arts use is likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future because artists have managed to secure ownership of the many of the mill facilities. Projects like the Monohasset Mill and the Steel Yard are owned and run by artists who have created a series of restrictions that limit the facilities' use to solely arts-related activities. With the help of a complex, but substantial series of tax incentives, these projects have been financially successful and face positive prospects for the future. Whereas in the Downcity zone, artists were almost always renters who were strongly impacted by changes in the rental market, they have secured a new level of stability on the mill district. This hardly negates the impacts of residential development throughout the area, but most artists are not interested in completely blocking out forces of change in the mills. Their goal is simply to ensure that a small-scale renaissance that began on the back of the arts continues to allow artists and arts supporters to maintain a role in the area. Thus far, the efforts appear to have been successful.

In 1961, Jane Jacobs noted that a primary value of aged buildings is that they tend to support many of the uses that are crucial to the success of vibrant urban communities. While new

construction, particularly in an urban setting, is only suitable for uses that either generate high profits or receive substantial subsidies, Jacobs believes that other crucial components of the urban fabric such as bars, ethnic restaurants, bookstores, and antique dealers are far more likely to find homes in older buildings (J. Jacobs, 1961). While some of the nuances of this argument are less applicable now than they were in the 1960's, the case of the mill district in Providence seems a perfect manifestation of Jacobs' assertions. New construction in suburbia is now considered far more cost-effective than historic rehabilitations, but in the dense environments of cities, old buildings still hold great opportunities for value-seekers. Because the mills in Providence were viewed by many as a useless vestige of the industrial age, a market was created that catered perfectly to the needs of the arts community – a community that the city government, particularly Buddy Cianci, was already working hard to cultivate.

While historic preservation is often viewed as a hobby of elites - and frequently considered to be preoccupied with quaint buildings of great architectural beauty - Providence's mills offer a salient example of historic preservation functioning as a key component of an urban revitalization process. It seems fitting that artists were the ones to find a creative new use for buildings that appeared to have outlived their usefulness, Combined with government assistance that was absolutely crucial to the success of the district, artists were able to make Cianci's vision of an arts city a reality – even if the transformation took place about a mile west of his intended target area.

## ***Durham, North Carolina***

### **A Brief History**

Compared to most of its neighbors, Durham is a young city. The area that is now Durham had been home to plantations and agriculture since the arrival of the earliest English settlers in North Carolina in the seventeenth century. The city was incorporated in 1869 and named for Dr. Bartlett Durham, who had donated land for a train station, and in 1881 Durham separated from Orange County and formed the County of Durham (Durham County Government, 2004).

By the time of the formation of Durham County, tobacco had already been established as the driving force behind the local economy. The crop grew successfully throughout much of North Carolina and Virginia, but when Washington Duke developed the technology to mass-produce cigarettes, he formed what would soon become one of the world's largest corporations in Durham and the city began to grow rapidly. Along with of several tobacco companies including American Tobacco, Liggett & Meyers, R.J. Reynolds, and P. Lorillard, Durham was also home to several large textile mills, which contributed to the city's economic development.

In what proved to be a significant use of part of his tobacco fortune, Washington Duke helped to finance the move of Trinity College from Randolph County to Durham in 1887. After Washington Duke's son, James Buchanan Duke, donated \$40 million to the school in 1924, it was renamed Duke University. By this point, Durham was also the site of North Carolina Central University, the country's first publicly funded university for African Americans. Both schools have had significant and lasting impacts on the city, though their importance was dwarfed at the time by that of tobacco. Durham also became a leading center for African American businesses in the early twentieth century, with the downtown district around Parrish Street known as the Black Wall Street because it contained the headquarters of several successful banking and

insurance firms that were owned by, and primarily catered to, African Americans. While some of these businesses, including M&F bank, are still functioning and headquartered in Durham, overall, Durham's role as a leading center of African American enterprise has been eclipsed by other cities such as Atlanta, Georgia and Washington, D.C.

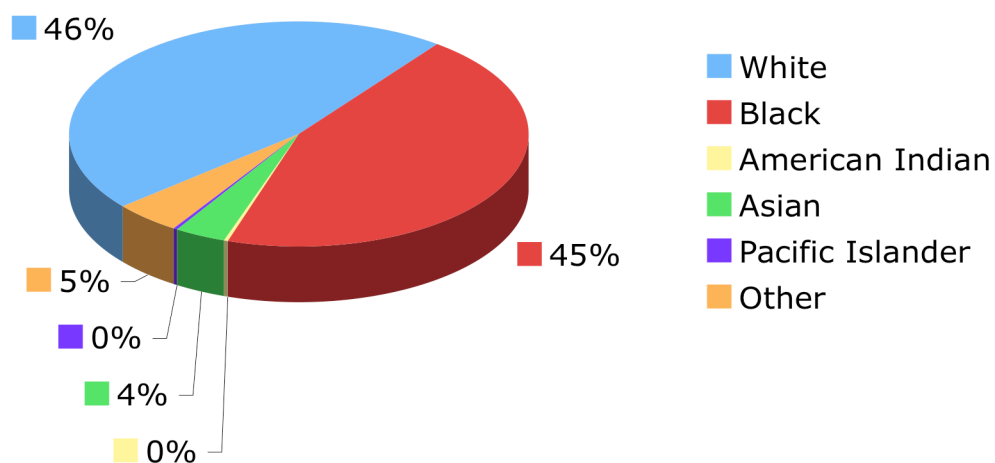
Though Durham is a far younger city than Providence, it has faced a similar timeline of economic challenges throughout the twentieth century. Reliance on the production of tobacco has obviously served as a detriment to the city as the sector has struggled and transformed. In the early 1900's decentralization of the tobacco industry caused Durham to lose some of its dominance in the sector, and in the latter part of the century, the entire industry obviously suffered greatly as a result of the public's new awareness of the health effects of tobacco. By the time American Tobacco vacated its nineteenth century brick warehouse and left Durham in 1987, virtually all of the city's tobacco facilities were abandoned (Krishnan, 2004). The county did receive an economic boost from the creation of Research Triangle Park in the 1950's, but the benefits have had a limited impact on the historic core of downtown Durham. The Park was a groundbreaking partnership between three universities, Duke, North Carolina State University, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and has spurred central North Carolina's development as a leading national cluster of cutting edge technologies and high-tech employment, but the spatial distribution of the benefits has largely bypassed urban centers while contributing to the region's rapid suburban development. Consequently, downtown Durham came out of the twentieth century in dire shape.

## Basic Demographics and the State of the Arts in Durham

|   | 1970   | 1980    | 1990    | 2000    |
|---|--------|---------|---------|---------|
|   | 95,438 | 100,831 | 137,594 | 187,035 |
| Data for City of Durham, Source: US Census Bureau |        |         |         |         |

**Table 3: Population of Durham**

In spite of the industrial decline noted above, Durham's population has grown steadily in the past few decades, which is consistent with a general population boom through the Triangle region of North Carolina. The city's population has also remained racially diverse, an asset that is commonly noted as a key advantage in Durham's quest to become a center of artistic vitality. The African-American population has continued to make up a sizable percentage of the general population and, in recent years, the city has seen a large influx of Hispanic immigrants, primarily from Mexico. The changing demographics offer both a challenge and an opportunity for further



**Figure 3: Durham Population by Race in 2000. Source: United States Census**



development of Durham's cultural assets. Incorporating new traditions and communities obviously adds to the richness of cultural offerings and potential new audiences for cultural attractions, but a risk of excluding certain groups also exists.

A quick analysis of employment in the arts and related sectors with Durham County reveals that these industries are slightly under-represented in Durham when compared to the national economy as a whole. Further, while combined employment in NAICS codes 71 (arts, entertainment, and recreation) and 72 (accommodation and food services) made up about 7.5% of the total county workforce in 1990, the figure has dropped to just under 7.1% in 2002. Nationally, these sectors increased from 8.5% to 9.3% over the same time period. Though employment data surely do not tell the whole story of the arts in a given community, neither does losing ground relative to national trends suggest the development of a successful arts cluster. It is worth noting, though, that these employment data were only collected at the county level and therefore include portions of Durham County that are outside of the incorporated city. Though information on the spatial distribution of arts employment is largely anecdotal, it appears, through both stakeholder accounts and personal observation, that the arts in Durham are more concentrated downtown where a number of galleries and studios have recently located to take advantage of the affordable real estate market. It is also reasonable to assume that Research Triangle Park, a site with large quantities of concentrated employment, mostly in high sectors, is under-represented in the arts. So, while the employment data is hardly encouraging for supporters of the arts in Durham, it does not preclude the possibility that the arts are in fact gaining ground downtown, an assertion that is being made with increasing frequency.

**Table 4: Arts and Related Employment in Durham County**

|   |                                     | NAICS Code | No. of Units | Annual Avg Employment | Annual Wages Paid | Avg Annual Wage Per Employee | Location Quotient |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Year 2002   | Industry                            |            |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |
|   | Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 71         | 85           | 1,464                 | \$24,407,575      | \$16,671.84                  | 0.63              |
|   | Accommodation and Food Services     | 72         | 527          | 10,135                | \$151,476,453     | \$14,945.88                  | 0.78              |
|   | Total All Industries                |            | 6,386        | 164,638               | \$7,828,079,347   | \$47,547.22                  |                   |
| Arts/Accomodation as % of Total                       |                                     |            | 9.6%         | 7.0%                  | 2.2%              | 68.1%                        |                   |
| Year 1990   | Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation | 71         | 56           | 1,194                 | \$6,417,121       | \$5,374.47                   | 0.91              |
|   | Accommodation and Food Services     | 72         | 284          | 8,146                 | \$34,427,324      | \$4,226.29                   | 0.88              |
|   | Total All Industries                |            | 4,133        | 123,901               | \$1,645,670,220   | \$13,282.36                  |                   |
|   | Arts/Accomodation as % of Total     |            | 8.2%         | 7.5%                  | 2.5%              | 67.1%                        |                   |
| Total Employment % Change from 1990-2002              |                                     | 32.9%      |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |
| Arts/Accomodation % Change from 1990-2002             |                                     | 24.2%      |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |
| Data for Durham County                                |                                     |            |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |
| Source: North Carolina Employment Security Commission |                                     |            |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |
| Nation Data from Bureau of Labor Statistics           |                                     |            |              |                       |                   |                              |                   |

## Origins of the Durham Arts Movement

Unlike Providence, where the city government made the arts an explicit part of a comprehensive revitalization strategy in the early 1980's, the movement in Durham has primarily been underground and organic, and is therefore harder to trace historically. Dan Ellison, a Durham lawyer and arts supporter, remembers making his first attempts to bring some arts activity to downtown Durham in the late 1970's when he attempted to purchase a building to open a jazz club. A graduate of Duke University, Ellison recalls discovering the downtown area that, even at that time, was largely foreign to students relegated to the Duke campus area just a few miles away. Buildings were vacant and rents were cheap, so Ellison quickly recognized that an opportunity existed to capitalize on the economic distress downtown. Though his deal to purchase a building eventually fell through, Ellison used his new familiarity with the downtown real estate market to rent the second floor of a restaurant building. He initially used the space as a darkroom, though in 1979, he responded to demand for more arts spaces by converting the loft into an artists' cooperative (Ellison, 2005).

Around the same time, a movement was underway to save the Carolina Theatre, a historic movie theater, built in 1926, that had been badly damaged by neglect. The City Council had originally intended to close the theater when, in 1977, the North Carolina Department of Archives and History responded to citizen objections by conducting a survey of downtown Durham. The results of the survey designated the Carolina Theatre as a "significant building in the city" and placed the entire center portion of downtown on the National Register of Historic Places. While the city government had hoped to divest itself of a building that was no longer profitable, the public outcry that eventually saved the building indicated that, in spite of the downtown decline, citizens of Durham still recognized and valued the historic character of many of its buildings. As a first step in a developing movement, the saving of the Carolina Theatre is in many ways similar to rescuing of the Providence Performing Arts Center in Providence around the same time. In both cities, the threat of demolition of a long-neglected landmark was a catalyst to increased interest in preservation and development of artistic and cultural amenities. The Carolina Theatre was leased to a new operator in 1978 and in 1986 the city used a \$7.8 million bond issue to pay for a full restoration.

The Carolina Theatre is still active today showing independent, first-run films, and hosting occasional concerts (The Carolina Theatre of Durham, 2005). Ellison believes that the movement to save the Carolina Theatre was the beginning of a concerted movement to protect and restore downtown Durham. Even though few residents had direct ties to downtown as either a place of work or residence, the community was apparently unwilling to allow it to erode completely. If a downtown district is to have value to a city, and not offer significant housing or employment opportunities, it is likely to serve as a civic hub of some sort, which may be why the arts have been a key component of efforts to revitalize downtown Durham. Cultural amenities

and programming may have been the most feasible options to inject some sort of life into the district.

### **Durham's Natural Predisposition for an Arts Movement**

Unlike Providence, Durham does not sit at the junction of natural waterways, and it therefore has no waterfront on which to base a redevelopment strategy like so many other cities have done. It is also not a state capital, meaning that it does not have the benefit of a steady and large source of employment and tax revenue to protect its economy from total collapse. Yet another key challenge is crime and the perception of crime – two factors that exist quite independently yet combine to inhibit commercial and residential development. Though crime figures compare favorably to several other peer cities, and have improved some in recent years, crime is often cited as a key cause of reluctance when merchants or developers consider projects downtown. The police, therefore, are involved in several redevelopment strategies as efforts are made to convince the public that Durham can be safe for visitors, residents, and businesses. The best way to eliminate crime, of course, is to make downtown Durham a vibrant, twenty-four hour community where sufficient activity exists to deter criminal activity. Unfortunately, it may be necessary to alleviate the crime problem before this can become a reality. Lastly, Durham faces a notable lack of corporate leadership. Corporate donors can often be crucial lifelines for cultural and artistic organizations that either function as non-profits or struggle to stay profitable. Corporations tend to give disproportionately in the cities where their headquarters are based, and Durham is, unfortunately, home to very few corporate headquarters. The days when a major tobacco company could give enough money to a university to entice it to move to Durham have passed. Given that the city's tax based has continually eroded, diminishing the potential for

public support, the lack of corporate financing options is perhaps the most significant obstacle to developing the arts.

A key advantage that Durham does share with Providence, however, is a large stock of historic buildings. As noted above, historic buildings, especially those within a distressed urban district, are ideal locations for artistic activity. Historic buildings in deteriorated cities tend to be affordable, and they often provide the type of open and flexible floor plans that suit arts uses well. Further, historic buildings give a district a sense of authenticity that can be crucial to the creation of a viable arts district. Creative individuals tend to vehemently resist developments that feel overly plastic or heavy-handed. Old buildings immediately give a district a legitimacy and credibility that is often missing from new construction. Bill Kalkhof (2005), executive director of Downtown Durham, Inc. also believes that Durham's historic architecture will help the city develop a unique identity, another trait likely to appeal to artists who tend to avoid regions that could be Any Place, USA.

Location is another beneficial attribute likely to aid revitalization efforts. Durham is less than an hour from Raleigh, Chapel Hill, Greensboro, and Research Triangle Park. Though neighboring communities are sometimes treated as competitors in the short-term fight for economic development, most Durham residents seem to believe that, in the long run, the region's cities are likely to rise or fall as a group, at least to some degree. Durham is well positioned to take advantage of proximity to the state's capital, the huge employment and technology benefits of Research Triangle Park, and three major research universities in North Carolina State, the University of North Carolina, and Duke.

## City Government Initiatives

Unlike Providence, Durham's city government has not yet presented a clear and explicit plan to cultivate the arts as part of an economic development strategy. The city has exhibited a defined intention to promote the revitalization of downtown, and it has funded the Durham Arts Council, which supports and promotes artists and cultural events, but there exists no solid link between the two. A common explanation for the disconnect is a lack of vision and leadership on the political level. Bill Bell, the current mayor of Durham has frequently invoked a vision of a twenty-four-hour downtown, which seems to implicitly include an active cultural scene to draw in visitors as well as an increased residential presence around downtown, but the process of translating this vision into action has not been easy for the city government. A serious challenge seems to be a lack of clear leadership. Durham's political system gives the mayor far fewer powers than in many other cities, including Providence, and most major political initiatives, therefore, must meet the approval of the City Council and the County Commissioners. Given that major programs must be supported by a sizable number of elected officials to be enacted, Durham's political system has generally not been successful in passing visionary or non-traditional policies, especially those that require significant public investments. This contrasts the political environment in Providence, where the strong personality and willpower of the mayor was often sufficient to push through a number of experimental programs that supported the development of the arts. When comparing Durham and Providence, the Cianci factor is perhaps the most striking difference between the two. Bill Kalkhof (2005), who works extensively with business and real estate leaders in Durham, believes that firms and developers considering Durham for new projects or relocations can be swayed by an "articulated, enthusiastic vision that

everyone is behind.” Cianci clearly provided such an articulation in Providence, but its presence in Durham seems unclear at this point.

### **The Durham Cultural Master Plan**

Thus far, the best indication that the citizens and politicians in Durham are committed to developing the arts has been the commissioning and subsequent completion of a cultural master plan. The Durham Cultural Master Plan (DCMP) was commissioned by Durham Arts Council which receives about a third of its funding from the city government. According to the Council’s Executive Director, Sherry DeVries, citizen willpower was instrumental in convincing the city and county governments to commit \$200,000 to fund the creation of the DCMP, authored by Wolfe, Keens & Company (DeVries, 2005). Major components of the DCMP include an assessment of the economic impact of the arts within the regional economy, an inventory of major arts organizations in Durham, and a lengthy series of suggestions to improve the quality of the arts within the city. The report found that the nonprofit arts sector generates \$103 million of economic activity annually in Durham County but stressed that this value could be far higher if better overarching leadership and funding were available. In many respects the tone of the DCMP is exactly as one would expect because, in addition to serving as a guide for future arts development, it is also a marketing piece designed to leverage greater funding for the arts.

In addition to calls for public investment in new venues and nonprofit organizations, however, the DCMP suggests several policy initiatives that would require minimal fiscal investment. Durham’s zoning laws, for instance, were deemed too complicated and rigid to adequately provide sufficiently studio, rehearsal, and live-work space for Durham’s art community. The DCMP also suggests treating downtown as the “hub of Durham’s cultural life,”

which merely requires a change of focus on the part of city leaders. Including arts and cultural components in community discussions of racial issues is another suggestion in the plan that would not require significant financial investment.

The DCMP was completed late in 2004 and has since been adopted by the county commissioners. City Council approval is expected to come soon, though funding for implementation remains an open question. In total, full implementation of the plan would cost millions, though most arts supporters are merely interested in seeing progress get underway at this point. The initial endowment for creation of the DCMP included \$500,000 from an occupancy tax for implementation of portions of the plan. This funding is supposed to be controlled by the city's department of economic development, but the money is presently under the control of the county government and there is no mechanism yet in place to allow the city government to access these funds. This type of complication, which seems to be a case only of bureaucratic confusion rather than substantive disagreement over how the funds should be handled, is an unfortunately common occurrence in Durham politics. Years of scandals and apparent incompetence throughout several wings of Durham's government have eroded citizen confidence and resulted in the creation of a complicated bureaucracy that frequently serves as a major obstacle to getting things done. Funding and creating the DCMP was a monumental first step in the process of creating a defined vision and plan for the development of the arts in Durham, but the larger challenge of implementation lies ahead.

The sole component of the master plan that has received a great deal of political support is the creation of a 3,500-seat performing arts theater just south of downtown. The center would be Durham's largest venue for performances and would serve as a new home for the annual American Dance Festival, a multi-week event that brings more than 30 dance companies from



around the country to Durham each summer, presently making use of a variety of existing spaces at Duke University. The projected cost for the center was recently raised from \$30 to \$35 million which will be paid for using a combination of private investment and city funds raised through a 1% increase in the local hotel-motel occupancy tax, which was approved by the state legislature (Skalski, 2005b). While few dispute that the performing arts center would be a beneficial addition to Durham's existing roster of cultural facilities, the center has nevertheless become a large source of controversy and has revealed great differences of opinion on the best political strategy for promoting the arts.

Generally speaking, the strongest support for the performing arts center has been from politicians who view it as a sizable and tangible tool for injecting new life into Durham's struggling downtown area. The center is to be located outside of the small, traditional downtown district known as "the loop" but would be within walking distance of this central business district. The approved site is adjacent to the former American Tobacco warehouse, which was recently rehabilitated and developed into a mixed-use project with a sizable retail component. Also adjacent to the event center site is the Durham Bulls Athletic Park (DBAP), a 10,000-seat baseball stadium constructed in 1995, which serves as the home of the Durham Bulls, a minor league baseball team with a long history in Durham. Both the American Tobacco redevelopment and the DBAP have been largely successful in drawing new crowds to the city thus far, and the performing arts center is clearly intended to further strengthen a cluster of activity that is poised to be the signature locale for Durham's revitalization process.

## **Downtown Durham, Inc. and the Department of Economic Development**

Though not officially a part of the Durham city government, Downtown Durham, Incorporated (DDI) tends to function as the lead actor in most facets of the revitalization process. The impetus for the formation of DDI was the failure, in the late 1980's of the city government to close deals for a proposed new ballpark for the Bulls (the aged park in which they played for much of the twentieth century still sits idle near the loop) and a museum of life sciences in downtown Durham. To many, this failure represented rock bottom for Durham and it therefore created new willpower to enact a more comprehensive and effective revitalization program. Andy Widmark, a professor at Duke's Fuqua School of Business, became convinced that Durham desperately needed an economic development organization and raised \$50,000 in private funds, mostly from corporate donors, to help fund one. When the city agreed to match that amount, Downtown Durham, Inc. was formed and Bill Kalkhof was chosen by the donors to be its executive director.

For the most part, DDI fills the role that is played by municipal economic development departments in other cities which includes business recruitment, location-finding assistance, marketing of downtown businesses and the downtown district in general, and lobbying for programs and incentives that increase the success of local businesses as well as Durham's appeal to prospective firms. Believing that Durham stood to benefit from its location and sizable stock of historic buildings if only the business climate could be improved, Kalkhof has frequently served as a first point of contact for individuals considering starting or relocating a business in Durham. DDI has also participated in the planning Durham's revitalization strategy, throwing its weight behind projects such as the performing arts center, the newly initiated realignment of downtown streets (which are made up of a series of one-ways and awkward intersections

representing the worst of city planning's mid-century failures), and financial incentives to assist downtown firms. Though DDI is, as noted, not officially part of the city government, its relationship with City Hall has almost always been positive and DDI has therefore functioned very much like a part of the municipal government. Though the organization's greatest loyalty probably lies with its corporate funding sources, the general visions for downtown of DDI and the city have been largely compatible.

Though the arts are not an explicit part of DDI's mission, Kalkhof has clearly recognized that the development of the arts in downtown Durham has been beneficial to the revitalization thus far and DDI is targeting what he terms "indigenous arts and crafts" businesses for the downtown loop. Though new retail developments on the fringes of downtown such as American Tobacco to the south and Brightleaf Square to the west have brought a mix of chain and locally-owned businesses, the loop is almost entirely locally-owned and therefore presents an opportunity to carve out an identity and sense of place that is definitively Durham and consequently compatible with the notion of authenticity that is crucial to viable creative districts. Though vacant storefronts still abound inside the loop, the new businesses that have opened in recent years have been overwhelmingly of the sort that befit a creative district: galleries, cafes, studios, and small restaurants. Though some artists have accused DDI of supporting and promoting a more corporate and polished set of goals for downtown, the organization's support for arts businesses in the loop has been undeniable. When local photographer and photography instructor Roylee Duvall set out to open a gallery and framing shop in Durham he quickly realized that downtown offered real estate options that were far more affordable than most everything else in the region, and he says that DDI was instrumental in helping him find a suitable location and getting his business off the ground (Duvall, 2005). Duvall ended up

opening Through This Lens Gallery in 2004 in a building in the heart of downtown that is owned by Dan Ellison who has now been active in the local arts scene for decades.

Other facets of DDI's support for culture and the arts in downtown Durham include the promotion of new civic open spaces and planning for subsequent downtown programming once the redevelopment of the new street grid is completed. Perhaps most important is the redevelopment of an open lot just outside the DDI offices that presently exists as a wasted block of decaying concrete but has the potential to be the symbolic heart of the loop. Kalkhof has indicated that DDI will be active in efforts to program this space with a variety of civic events which will presumably be consistent with the growing cultural character of downtown and provide a much needed draw of people from other parts of the city and the region.

A final key impact of DDI on the revitalization plans for downtown Durham was the organization's role in convincing the city government to open the Department of Employment and Economic Development. Kalkhof believes that the formation of a dedicated department has simplified the economic development by providing a single point of contact. DDI still works extensively with local business owners and prospective firms, but, with the new department on board, the city drafted a master plan for the revitalization effort in 1998 – albeit with considerable input from DDI. Consistent with most government efforts, the master plan does not explicitly address the arts and focuses primarily on physical improvements – particularly the plans to realign the streets inside the loop. Also in the plan, however, is a call for a higher level of activity downtown, especially after dark, and this suggests a vibrancy that is consistent with the developing arts community. The Department of Employment and Economic Development recently created a downtown events coordinator position and this new person will likely work to

increase downtown programming in conjunction with DDI's efforts in the same area (Sharpe, 2004).

A notable absence in the set of policies employed in Durham is the vast array of tax incentive programs that have been a hallmark of Providence's efforts. This is primarily the result of state governmental prohibitions on tax abatement policies at the local level, which is specified in both the state constitution and its general statutes. General Statute §105-380 ("No taxes to be released, refunded, or compromised", 1973), was originally passed in 1901 and last amended in 1973. The bill states that "the governing body of a taxing unit is prohibited from releasing, refunding or compromising all or any portion of the taxes levied against any property within its jurisdiction." Further, the state's constitution dictates in Article 5, Section 2, that "no taxing authority other than the general assembly may grant exemptions" and dictates that state tax laws should be made uniformly and be applicable to all areas equally. Local officials have suggested that some loopholes do exist, specifically in the form of tax rebates (Mills, 2005), but, overall, the legislative prohibition – whatever its merits in promoting tax equity – has severely limited the powers of local governments to implement incentive programs that are commonly used in other states.

Legal limitations, therefore, prescribe that Durham is not able to use many of the tools that have worked effectively in Providence, such as property tax freezes for rehabilitation of historic mills and abatements for artists within designated districts. North Carolina does have a state historic preservation tax credit program which, coupled with the federal program, offers substantial equity for developers working with historic properties, but local government suffers because of its inability to offer abatement programs specifically aimed at artists or projects that are suited to arts uses. The Durham city government has recently been able to offer some more

modest incentives aimed at improving the overall health of businesses downtown. In March of 2005 the City Council approved a program that offers \$7,500 matching grants for street-level façade improvements for businesses located in the downtown loop and in seven other designated target areas throughout the city. The same program also offered businesses located in either basements or higher level floors reimbursements of up to 6% of capital improvements totaling at least \$100,000 in cost (Southern, 2005). Neither of these programs is specific to arts uses, but with a number of new retail arts spaces inside the loop, including two galleries that have opened in the early months of 2005, the grants may well bring some benefit to arts-based businesses. The capital improvement grants may also be useful to some of the spaces above retail stores that are sometimes used for artist studios.

Bill Kalkhof of DDI was among the earliest supporters of the capital improvement incentive programs because he believes they can be helpful tools in the larger transformation and improvement of real estate in downtown Durham. He also laments the lack of tools at his disposal due to legislative prohibitions. Richmond, Virginia, a city considered a comparable peer to Durham, has recently instituted a ten-year tax abatement program – similar to that used in Providence within the Mill District – which freezes property tax valuations for rehabilitated or renovated buildings, thus providing an incentive for property owners to make substantive capital improvements to structures. If legally permissible, Kalkhof believes a similar program could be effective in Durham. Both DDI and the North Carolina Metropolitan Coalition have had some discussions with legislators regarding a loosening of the state's tax controls, but no such change appears to be imminent (Mills, 2005). Kalkhof would also be interested in creating an arts district with sales and income tax abatements for artists and artist goods if the state government allowed it. More than the absolute value of the tax benefits of the tax reductions, arts district like the one

created in Providence send a positive message that a city government welcomes and values the arts, so the possibility exists for Durham to implement some sort of arts district that offers different types of financial incentives while providing the same symbolic support. Parking vouchers for working artists and free parking validation for downtown shoppers are commonly mentioned as potential benefits, however, this does not, at present, seem to be a top priority.

## **A Missed Opportunity? Historic Preservation in Durham**

Just like Providence, Durham is fortunate to have a wealth of intact historic structures available for adaptive use rehabilitation projects. Thus far, though, the most significant projects in historic buildings have involved high quality retail and residential development with no significant arts component. The redevelopment of the American Tobacco complex was completed in 2004 and seems destined to be a successful mixed-use district just outside of the loop offering about 200 residential units and well over 100,000 square feet of residential space. Capital Broadcasting, which owns the property, has recently exercised an option to purchase six acres on an adjacent lot, so the project is also expected to increase in size in the coming years. Named the American Tobacco Historic District, this newly reinvigorated part of Durham also includes the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, which has successfully drawn visitors to Durham for almost a decade now.

Just to the north, and also outside of the loop, is Brightleaf Square, a similar redevelopment project that is almost exclusively retail. Completed in the early 1980's, Brightleaf represents the first major conversion of tobacco warehouses to modern uses and has brought fair amount of retail and restaurant activity to the city that was previously lacking. Of particular importance is the increased activity after dark that, though not specific to any arts use, can help to make the city more appealing to artists and creatives. West Village, which is adjacent to

Brightleaf Square, is a sizable project of 241 loft-style apartments housed in four former Liggett & Myers warehouses built at the beginning of the twentieth century. Though the “loft” style is often associated with, and well suited to, arts uses, these units do not contain a particularly high percentage of artists. At a Durham Arts Walk event in November of 2004, the developer, Blue Devil Ventures, allowed a handful of artists to use vacant lofts to display their work, but no activity by artists residing in West Village was evident. A major explanation for the lack of artists at West Village and American Tobacco is the high-end nature of the rehabilitation work. The developers in both cases implemented impressive redevelopment plans that brought accordingly high residential demand for the new apartments and lofts. Prices, therefore, are usually out of reach of artists. Like American Tobacco, West Village has been filling up impressively and has plans underway to expand into yet another vacant warehouse.

While no one in Durham would dispute that all three major rehabilitation projects have been successful and have brought much needed activity and a new residential presence to the downtown area, there is also a sense that the uniformity of the projects’ targeted audiences misses an opportunity to address other areas of need in Durham. Providence’s mills were taken over by artists in many cases because the real estate industry missed an opportunity to develop higher value uses in them. Once the artists created a viable, informal arts district, the developers quickly recognized the opportunity and began buying mills, which has resulted in a struggle over the future of the district. In Durham, the developers got to the historic tobacco warehouses first and have since been working diligently to overhaul them into projects that yield high returns. Once a building has been fully rehabilitated, especially when the work is done at an extremely high quality that has been common in the Durham projects, it ceases to be a realistic option for artists. With vacant warehouses becoming less numerous in downtown Durham, regulatory



action may be the only way to reserve some of the available space for artists, and the city government has thus far shown no inclination to take this step.

Another shortcoming of the warehouse redevelopments in Durham is that almost all of them exist just outside of the loop, and the spillover effects have not yet been felt to any significant degree in the city's historic core. Perhaps following the lead of the larger projects, two smaller loft apartment rehabilitation projects have opened inside the loop in 2005, but these are similarly expensive. Nevertheless, given the emptiness of the loop after working hours, artists and all other business owners are likely to benefit some from the newly increased activity levels. Another benefit to the arts community of the historic buildings is the sense of authenticity and uniqueness that they bring to the city, regardless of the uses they house. For the most part, both the rehabilitated and untouched historic buildings in Durham have retained their historic character and therefore given Durham a sense of place that is truly unlike any other city. The massive, red brick tobacco warehouses provide a clear indication of Durham's rich and fascinating history and also provide the sort of gritty, urban atmosphere that can protect the city from seeming fake or overly manufactured once modern development becomes more widespread.

## **The Role of Location and the Struggle for a Critical Mass**

A common trait of almost all of Durham's most successful projects in recent years is that they exist outside of the traditional central business district. American Tobacco, and Brightleaf are within walking distance of downtown and could conceivably become part of a larger revitalization process that includes downtown, but the link is not yet in place. The benefits to loop businesses of the peripheral developments are also tenuous and in need of strengthening. JoAnne Worthington-Fitzgibbon (2005), owner of Joe and Jo's Downtown Restaurant and Pub

noticed a significant increase in her business on days when the Durham Bulls were playing at the DBAP until a new parking deck at the American Tobacco complex next door to the ballpark was constructed, at which point Joe & Jo's game day business dropped off almost completely. When given the option of parking within close proximity to the game, visitors started driving in just before game and leaving downtown immediately afterward. Joe and Jo's is less than a ten-minute walk from the stadium, but the proximity is apparently insufficient to bring in game day foot traffic without conscious attempts to steer people into the loop. Downtown business owners now fear that the recent pattern of development suggests that politicians and city leaders are unwilling to take those steps. Combined with Ninth Street, which is a thriving retail district near Duke University a fair distance from downtown, the most successful urban districts in Durham are all outside of the core. Further, the bulk of Durham's commercial activity exists in an ever-expanding series of malls and strip-malls that are being built on the periphery of the city. While the notion that any new activity is good activity in Durham is fairly common, the spatial challenges of redevelopment are fast becoming a source of controversy and difficulty. This development mirrors Providence's experience with the Providence Place Mall and convention center and suggests that, despite clear intentions to revitalize downtowns, cities have a difficult time getting major projects into their urban cores, where construction, rehabilitation and land costs tend to be prohibitive.

DDI's Bill Kalkhof believes strongly that the recent developments around the loop are crucial components of a critical mass of activity and residents necessary to revitalize the core. Now that potential customers are present in close proximity, he believes that now is the time to start aggressively pursuing new business activity for the loop, which still has the advantage of affordable real estate options. With over a thousand new residential units in place within reach of

downtown merchants, there is finally a viable market in place to support the sort of arts and craft based businesses that Kalkhof believes are especially well suited to the character of downtown Durham. Once the streetscape improvements designed to make the downtown loop more accessible to visitors are completed, the loop should be better positioned to thrive economically (Kalkhof, 2005). Caleb Southern, of the Arts & Business Coalition of Downtown welcomes the new activity on the fringes of downtown but also believes that, in the end, the element crucial to the development of new business inside the loop is simply the presence of existing businesses. If true, this means that downtown's best hope is to somehow attract a number of business owners who are willing to buck the economic odds and set up shop in the face of clear evidence that businesses have a hard time succeeding downtown. This, according to Southern, is an opportunity well-suited to artists and galleries, suggesting, in part, a lack of business savvy amongst this demographic, but also a propensity to take risks and pursue opportunities that fail to attract a more established and risk-averse business community (Southern, 2005).

An example of this sort of risk-taking, artistic entrepreneur is Roylee Duvall who recently opened the Through This Lens photography gallery in late 2004. Determined to open a gallery in Durham, but uncertain about the feasibility of downtown, Duvall discovered what he considers the roots of a potentially strong arts movement inside the loop along with rental prices that are 20-30% of those for comparable spaces in other parts of the region. Pleasantly surprised by the level of artistic activity in downtown Durham, Duvall has established a kinship with the proprietors of nearby businesses like the Peacefire Gallery, Main Street Art Supply, and SeeSaw Studios, and the growing coalition of downtown arts businesses has been working with the city's economic development department and DDI to organize events that bring more people downtown. While Through This Lens has seen strong turnout for a variety of special events,

Duvall concedes that the area often faces a notable shortage of potential customers. In spite of the benefits of affordable rents, businesses in the loop still face a significant challenge as they fight to attract a sufficiently large customer base.

### **The Fight Over the Performing Arts Center**

Though the city's plans to build a large performing arts center adjacent to the American Tobacco complex could plausibly be seen as a great victory for the arts community because it represents the only substantial component of the Durham Cultural Master Plan that has a chance of being implemented in the foreseeable future, the center has been an enormous source of friction between the arts community and the city's leadership. The initial distress signals surfaced when the city took bids to find a private operator for the theater. National media giant Clear Channel Entertainment was ultimately selected and city officials hailed the deal, which they believed would shield taxpayers from substantial financial risk should the center prove unsuccessful. Frustration over the selection of Clear Channel, though, was immediately obvious in the arts community and was likely an indication of differences in how different groups define the arts and their role in economic development. To city officials Clear Channel, established and experienced in event promotion, was a natural choice for major component of the downtown plan. To artists, however, Clear Channel, which is best known as a radio conglomerate that has rapidly been establishing national market dominance since deregulation in the late 1990's, is a corporate giant, out of touch with street-level culture. If grit and authenticity are crucial elements of an arts district, the performing arts center seemed unlikely to be a contributing part of the arts community. The issue became somewhat moot when Clear Channel pulled out of the agreement after a dispute over the terms, but the groundwork had been laid for a somewhat fractious

relationship between those executing the revitalization strategies and the artists in Durham.

Under the newest plan for the center, two firms, Nederlander and PFM will jointly run the facility with the companies assuming all operating deficits and the city would receiving 40% of revenues above and beyond operating expenses and management fees (Skalski, 2005b).

The biggest fight over the performing arts center, though, has involved its proposed location near the Durham Bulls Athletic Park and American Tobacco complex. Though opposition was not truly mobilized until after plans for the center had been set into motion, both the arts community and an informal conglomeration of businesses inside the loop have expressed great concern that Durham's new development projects are consistently bypassing the heart of the city. In the case of the American Tobacco complex, detractors have also argued that infusing more taxpayer money into a district that has already received millions in public support - and has show every indication that it will be successful - amounts to little more than corporate welfare. In January of 2005, members of the downtown community began contacting the city council - which was quickly moving forward with plans for the existing site - suggesting a new location on a vacant, city-owned lot inside the loop near the Durham Armory on Foster Street. In the alternate site, they argued, the performing arts center would combine with nearby Carolina Theater and Durham Arts Council, as well as several small galleries, to form the basis for a downtown arts district and serve as an engine for downtown development. Alan DeLisle, Durham's director of economic development and Bill Kalkhof of DDI both came out in favor of the first location proposal arguing that, in addition to the challenges of changing the location late in the game, the American Tobacco site is preferable because it offers abundant parking and a visible location next to the Durham Freeway which will aid efforts to sell naming rights to the theater. Because the alternate site was proposed by private citizens and never officially reviewed

by the city, its physical feasibility for the center was never fully established. Caleb Southern of ABCD, one of the most vocal opponents of the theater project, argued that over 4,700 parking spaces presently exist inside the loop and that they are overwhelmingly unused at night when the theater would be holding events (Skalski, 2005a). While the opposition to the theater location garnered significant press and was able to force a handful of new public meetings over the location, the city council eventually ruled in February, 2005 that the process was too far along to alter and plans are currently in place to build the performing arts center in its originally proposed location.

Roylee Duvall (2005) of Through This Lens was originally in favor of the alternate site, but says that he became convinced that the plans were in fact too far along for such a significant adjustment. Nevertheless, he is adamant that some action must be taken to ensure that the positive developments in Durham are able to translate to its core district. In addition to abundant parking near the ballpark and theater sites, Duvall cites the presence of railroad tracks and a large, unattractive jail building between the new developments and the loop as psychological obstacles keeping visitors out of downtown despite its location less than a mile away. Downtown Durham runs the risk of being perceived as the “wrong side of the tracks” if efforts are not made to better integrate the districts. It is possible that impending infrastructure projects just underway to improve the street grid pattern and traffic flow downtown will be a good first step toward accomplishing this desired integration.

### **Informal Associations and the Grassroots Arts Movement**

A significant side-effect of the performing arts center controversy is that it brought the emergence of the Arts & Business Coalition of Downtown (ABCD) as a vocal player in the city’s arts movement. The group was formed in 2003 as a loose association of downtown

residents, artists, and business owners and has continually resisted the urge to organize more formally. The ABCD website states that the coalition's mission is to "promote the creation of an economically diverse and culturally vibrant community in downtown Durham in which to work and live" (ABCD Durham, 2004). The most salient manifestation of the organization is an email list through which members share information, coordinate and promote events, and discuss and debate elements of the revitalization process. The footer of every message sent to the list reads that "ABCD is a conversation," and this seems to be the most apt description of the organization. Though informal leaders and spokespeople have clearly emerged from ABCD's unofficial membership, no true leadership structure has been established. Local activist and downtown resident Caleb Southern is commonly called on to serve as a voice for the group, though he is careful to point out that his viewpoints do necessarily speak for the majority of the membership. Some city leaders have cited the lack of a leadership structure as a major challenge to dealing with ABCD and responding to its criticisms. With no obvious point of contact, officials are often forced to join the fray and state their cases via the email list when defending their positions.

In spite of the lack of a formal structure, ABCD has been successful in garnering the attention of both the local press and the city's leadership. Alan DeLisle of the economic development department is in frequent contact with ABCD members as is Downtown Durham, Inc. The Herald-Sun, Durham's only daily newspaper, commonly seeks out ABCD's unofficial leaders for comments on developments downtown and they are rarely shy about voicing opposition to city efforts when relevant.

The coalition, which holds monthly meetings in a downtown storefront, began as an advocacy group pushing for incentives and programs to make it easier for small businesses and artists to locate real estate and support services in Durham. Another effort involves working to

improve the visual character of downtown by seeking permission of property owners to install art projects in vacant storefronts. Recently, though, ABCD's role has expanded to include offering a voice in a vast array of downtown issues. The performing arts center has easily been the largest rallying point for group members who have consistently and overwhelmingly expressed disapproval of the promoters selected by the city, the site chosen for the theater, and, at times, the entire project. Southern (2005) has argued that the theater, despite an enormous cost, will do little to advance the revitalization of downtown and that the same public investment would be better spent on a series of smaller projects that better target the heart of downtown and the individuals and businesses best positioned to lead a downtown renaissance. He cites the Cat's Cradle, a live music venue in nearby Carrboro with a capacity of 700 as the type of performance space that, in the long run, could bring a greater quantity of regular activity downtown without requiring substantial money from taxpayers. For far less than the cost of the performing arts center, Durham could potentially create incentive programs to aid the development of smaller, more independent, cultural amenities that might be more consistent with ABCD's vision for the city. When the debate over the location of the theater surfaced, ABCD's membership was instrumental in bringing the issue to the attention of the local press and forcing the city council to hold new meetings reconsidering the site selection. Though the effort was ultimately unsuccessful, the issue galvanized the ABCD membership and solidly established the group's role as a key player in downtown.

### **Filling the Need for Arts-based Leadership**

The rise of ABCD as an important player in Durham is important because the group has filled a leadership void on arts-based issues. In spite of fairly frequent friction and disagreement,



the ABCD mission is largely consistent with that of the city government and DDI, however the focus that ABCD places on organic, grassroots, and informal arts development is not a component of the more business-oriented approaches of the more established organizations. As is seen in the Providence case, the most effective developments in the growth of an arts scene usually come not from concerted governmental initiatives, but rather from creative individuals given the opportunity to act and innovate free from governmental interference. The Cianci administration in Providence was extremely adept at recognizing and aiding cultural developments underway in Providence - and this sort of assistance would surely benefit Durham – but the some of the greatest developments, such as AS220 and the rehabilitation of the mill district were nevertheless the product of the arts community. ABCD, with its rejection of traditional organizational systems, willingness to criticize the establishment’s efforts, and diverse membership of creative individuals, stands to be a innovative and powerful force in staking out a role for the arts in Durham’s revitalization process.

Implied in the need to informal associations to take the lead in cultural development in a city is the commonly voiced notion that government and business interests simply do not “get it” when dealing with artistic issues. While the performing arts center may seem to city leaders as a step toward advancing arts and culture in Durham, ABCD members tend to view the theater as an entity almost completely independent of the arts scene. Similarly, the Durham Cultural Master Plan commissioned by the city and county governments through the Durham Arts Council repeatedly mentions the need to develop “edgy” forms of entertainment without any attempt to define or understand precisely what this means. Even the supposed experts in urban artistic development seem to be conceding the true heart of a cultural movement lies outside the reach of governmental efforts, no matter how well intentioned. The most encouraging signs of positive

progress in Durham, then, may be that informal associations have risen up in the absence of clear civic leadership to claim a role in the process.

While ABCD is the most vocal and visible example of grassroots arts activity it is surely not the only one. Other examples include Man Bites Dog Theater, a non-profit theater company that purchased a 6,000 square foot building near downtown to serve as a performance space in 1997, and Ms. Films, a non-profit that seeks to empower women and girls through media and filmmaking and holds a film festival in downtown Durham every February. The Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, which is held every April in downtown Durham, has probably grown too successful to be deemed grassroots, but it is nevertheless an extremely successful artistic event that has consistently sold out screenings and brought many of the world's most influential filmmakers to Durham for special events. The Hayti Heritage Center presents a variety of performances and arts exhibitions, including annual film and blues music festivals, primarily created by African-American artists but clearly appealing to a much larger portion of the community. The center also produces exhibits on the cultural and historic heritage of the city and the larger region providing a much-needed educational service celebrating the contributions of African-Americans.

Another key component of the arts community is a series of studios housed on the second story of a retail building in the loop owned by Durham lawyer Dan Ellison. Ellison, who is an active participant in ABCD and initially joined the Durham arts community as a founder of an artists' cooperative in the 1970's, rents about a dozen spaces to artists at prices that range from \$50-650 a month including utilities. These rates are far below market prices and Ellison (2005) estimates that he could probably double his rental income if he opened the building up to other uses. In addition to providing an affordable space for local artists and therefore generating an

increased arts presence inside the loop, Ellison serves on the boards of the Durham Arts Council and the North Carolina Central University Art Museum and volunteers with North Carolina Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts. His role, therefore, is indicative of the type of informal, non-governmental leadership that can be effective in the development of an arts community.

Combined with ABCD as well as downtown artists, galleries and restaurants, many of these informal associations have frequently banded together to produce downtown events in hopes of bringing in new activity and exposing regional residents to the growing arts community in Durham. A culture crawl is held each month on a Friday evening during which open studios, gallery exhibitions, and special events and performances are held throughout the downtown area. Until 2004, the culture crawl received a small amount of financial support from the city, but that was discontinued due to budget shortfalls (Duvall, 2005). The event, which requires little in the way of finances, has continued and is evidence of the ability of the arts community to organize itself, however, some bitterness was created after the city's pullout causing some local artists to view the city government as an obstacle rather than a partner in the development of the arts.

### **The Durham Arts Council**

Though it does not fit neatly into the realm of grassroots arts organizations, the Durham Arts Council, a non-profit that receives financial support from the city government and private supporters is actively involved in supporting and promoting ground-level arts activity in Durham County. The Council provides grants and networking assistance for working artists and has onsite performance and exhibit spaces that are used to support local artists. Among the most successful of the Council's activities has been the annual Durham Arts Walk, which brings

thousands of visitors to a large number of galleries and exhibit spaces throughout downtown over a two-day period each November.

Durham Arts Council executive director, Sherry DeVries (2005), serves for Durham County on a community outcome workgroup devoted to “vibrant communities, aesthetic beauty, and cultural heritage.” The group, which covers far more than just the arts, but does work to convince the county commissioners of the importance of arts funding, has struggled recently with a request by the commissioners to suggest a quantitative indicator that can be used as part of an annual community report card measuring the county’s year-to-year progress in the development of cultural amenities. Though the Durham Cultural Master Plan indicated that the arts bring \$103 million in economic activity to Durham annually, finding consistent and reliable data on the arts is extremely difficult and DeVries has indicated that the county commissioners are predominantly interested in indicators that reveal a concrete economic effect of the arts rather than the less tangible benefits that are more commonly associated with artistic development. The challenge is a common one for arts supporters because the arts are particularly difficult to analyze from a strictly economic perspective. It is a credit to Richard Florida’s power of persuasion that he has been able to convince so many cities to adopt his ideas because he, too, has failed to make a clear and quantifiable case for development of artistic and cultural “scenes” as economic tools. At some point, it seems that city leaders simply need to believe that an improved sense of place is going to help the region economically, and Durham’s city and county governments do not appear to have reached that point.

## ***Conclusions and Lessons Learned***

The motivation behind the selection of Providence and Durham for case studies is primarily that they provide contrasting cases of how cities can use the arts as a strategy for urban revitalization. The two cities have differing sets of strengths and weaknesses affecting their predisposition toward a successful arts movement, they have very different political climates, and they have undertaken these strategies in different decades meaning that they have embarked into these efforts under the context of contrasting national and economic climates related to economic development and the arts. The way that Providence and Durham have responded to the challenge in light of these differences is valuable in increasing the larger understanding of what is and is not an effective means of furthering the arts and culture in an urban environment.

Durham, for instance, has responded to a relative lack of political leadership and willpower by cultivating a ground-up approach in which individual artists and supporters of the arts have banded together, attempted to reach something close to a consensus set of objectives, and proceeded to make noise until the government was forced to listen. By contrast, Providence's movement was in large part initiated by governmental leadership that actively worked to strengthen and mobilize the city's existing arts infrastructure and resources. Both cities have made admirable use of their history and historic architecture to provide a sense of authenticity and have utilized historic rehabilitation projects to create practical new spaces for the arts. Providence, though, has been able to capitalize on a waterfront in its revitalization process, albeit only after a remarkably creative infrastructure project succeeded in uncovering the city's lost rivers. Durham has no such waterfront amenities and therefore will need to rely more heavily on the bricks and mortar urban environment to provide suitable spaces for artists, exhibitions, and performance spaces. Perhaps most significant, is that Durham's municipal

government lacks the authority to institute tax incentive and abatement programs that have been extremely popular in Providence. Realistically, some of these tax programs have been of little consequence to the larger process in Providence and incentive offers like those in the Downcity Arts District went almost completely unused, but the regulatory prohibition is nevertheless a sizable limitation for Durham and all other North Carolina communities. By examining how two very different cities have attempted to complete a task that is fast becoming a top priority for countless cities throughout the country, we can begin to develop a more complete understanding of the tools cities have at their disposal and the conditions under which these tools are likely to be effective.

A more specific benefit of these two cases is that Providence has been a greatly praised success as a cultivator of the arts whereas Durham has much work yet to do. Bill Kalkhof of DDI believes that Durham is so well positioned for a full revitalization that downtown will be almost unrecognizable in five or ten years, and he may well be correct, but the shape and character of the future downtown is still very much up for grabs. After a thorough investigation of the conditions and efforts undertaken in both cities, then, it is possible to apply some of the lessons learned in the Providence case to Durham, or any other city that is interested in using an arts-based strategy as part of a revitalization process, offering a collection of potential policy and programmatic options that may be available to further the efforts. With that in mind, this report will conclude with four broad lessons that can likely be generalized to one degree or another to almost all urban cases.

## **Big Projects and Symbolism Make a Difference**

Looking back on the past two decades of change, some of Providence's most prominent success stories were not really all that successful. Most notable is the creation of the Downcity

Arts District, which was a total failure if judged by its ability to achieve what it was intended to do. Very few artists have taken advantage of the tax incentives offered by the city and the only successful arts uses in the district are relatively large scale developments that have not been eligible to take advantage of the incentives. All the same, the creation of the arts district was introduced with a sense of theater and a public relations campaign that sent a clear and powerful message that Providence valued the arts. With colorful cheerleading and salesmanship from Buddy Cianci, Providence developed a reputation as a creative, active city on the rise that was as important as any other factor in the turning around of downtown. The explicit commitment to the arts also gave the existing arts community the political capital needed to successfully pressure the city government into keeping its word and providing continual support for the arts. Similarly the rehabilitation and reinvigoration of the Providence Performing Arts Center, though clearly an important component of the process, has been celebrated and promoted relentlessly as a crucial early victory in the process. That Providence had in the early 1980's a dramatic and visible symbol of the rise of the arts positioned in the heart of its downtown core was a great benefit to the process of turning around the city's image. Though the actual value of the PPAC should not be discounted, the facility has taken on an importance far greater than its actual economic production or its role in the local arts community. Just like the arts district in which it is located, the theater is a symbol of change that has been ably used in the process of marketing Providence.

By contrast, the lack of large symbolic victories with an arts component has been a significant shortcoming of the revitalization process in Durham. Progress in small fits and starts is still progress, but for a true city-changing movement to occur, Durham will likely need to create a few large and visible victories that can serve as symbols of the transformation to the outside world. As much as the projects themselves, this issue may eventually be determined by

the actions of the city's leadership. Providence's key projects grew to take on great symbolic value in part because Buddy Cianci willed them to do so. Durham presently lacks a comparable level of energetic and charismatic leadership and it will be consequently difficult – though surely not impossible – to generate similar enthusiasm. In Providence, an overwhelming zeitgeist of arts, creativity, and renaissance contributed to a self-fulfilling process of revitalization. Some politicians with better credentials in the arenas of academics or ethics may have mocked Cianci as a cartoonish figurehead, but to large portions of the local population, and certainly to much of the rest of the country that had previously been slowly forgetting that Providence even existed, the mayor was instrumental in his city's rebirth.

Independent of the leadership issue, but still relevant for Durham, may be the proposed performing arts center, which is poised to be the largest and most visible arts-related project in the city's ongoing revitalization process. Artists in Durham are overwhelmingly opposed to the theater largely because they do not believe that it will, as presently conceived, contribute anything significant to the arts community. If the Providence case can be taken as a fair precedent, however, the theater may have indirect benefits that reach the street level arts culture in time. It may be able to send a message to the outside world that the arts are a priority in Durham setting a community standard, like that which resulted from the creation of the arts district in Providence.

## **Authenticity is a Must**

As the popularity of arts-based approaches continues to rise, so to does the likelihood that cities will attempt to use generic, one-size-fits-all approaches that are bound to be unsuccessful if they fail to provide the high level of authenticity and uniqueness that is absolutely crucial to a successful arts district. Cities may be successful in creating successful safe, tourist-friendly retail



districts with standardized approaches, but true cultivation of the arts, which can have more significant impacts on larger aspects of economic development, requires building on a city's unique identity. This of course indicates that arts strategies can only be generalized to a limited degree. Both Providence and Durham have thus far enhanced their chances of continued success by bringing their individual characteristics and strengths to the forefront of the process.

The issue of authenticity is also a probable explanation for the vehement opposition to the selection of Clear Channel as the initial operator for the performing arts center in Durham.

Though it is unknown if and how Clear Channel management might have differed from that of any other operator, artists understood immediately that Clear Channel was unlikely to recognize and capitalize on the traits of the city that are unique to Durham. An events center that is more or less identical in design and programming to dozens of other theaters throughout the country will do little to advance the sense of identity and authenticity on which the arts movement will be based. A project that makes use of the historic character of a city, like the mill buildings in Providence or the tobacco warehouses in Durham, on the other hand, can go far toward reinforcing a sense of identity that is highly compatible with arts development. Generally speaking, artists will prefer real over plastic, unique over commonplace, and gritty over spotless. Both cities have thus far done well to adhere to the values of authenticity, but as more and more cities take on arts strategies, one can expect to see this rule violated with increasing frequency.

### **The Public and Private Sectors Play Different, but Complementary Roles**

For all the legitimate credit directed toward the city government for its role in the transformation of Providence, one of its important roles in cultivating a thriving arts scene has been to simply to recognize and support arts developments that began in the private sector.

AS220, one of the most impressive and successful arts organizations one will find in any city,

was founded and developed by a small group of individual artists with little involvement from the city. Over the years, AS220 has received some important financial and regulatory support from the city, but the artists themselves have always controlled the organization and development. Likewise, the transformation of mill buildings into artist spaces began largely under the city's radar until a sufficient density had developed, and the growing scene became an obvious phenomenon. Again, the city is due a great deal of credit for recognizing the trend and quickly taking steps to support rather than inhibit it, but the initial impetus for these development occurred with little governmental involvement.

The lesson here is that when artists are left to freely and creatively seek out and develop a city's hidden districts and facilities, they are likely to be the best possible innovators of the urban arts scene. It is never reasonable to assume that a city government can better understand the needs and tastes of artists better than the artists themselves. Municipal support and protection is still crucial if these innovations are to flourish, but city action is often only feasible once the first steps have been taken in the private sector. An exception to this rule, and a key opportunity for government to make a difference early in the process, however, is through clear articulation of an explicit commitment to the arts as a revitalization tool. A pledge of support from the city can give artists, individuals, and small organizations the backing that allows them to work creativity toward non-conventional developments. The pattern emerging here is that successful arts development is often the result of a push-and-pull process between the public and private sectors. In Providence's success story, the original push came from the city's creation of a stated public goal which in turn facilitated a higher level of private sector activity. Given the existence of the goal, once private sector actions are underway, arts and arts organization are able to lobby the

government for support, calling on the city to bring targeted policy tools to its own commitment (Lowe, 2005).

The most obvious potential source for private sector actions and innovation in Durham is ABCD. The arts community in Durham appears to be growing larger and becoming more and more organized with ABCD existing as its primary source of communication. Real estate availabilities and costs, along with actual and suggested policy initiatives are everyday discussion points on the ABCD email list and the group's informal leadership has already begun to take an active role in policy discussions with government officials. City officials would obviously be foolish to begin blindly following the will of a group that lacks coherent structure and consensus on most issues, but it would be similarly foolish to fail to pay heed to this growing player in city politics. ABCD membership almost single-handedly forced the city council to reconsider the location of the proposed theater project after a member in the email discussion suggested a new location. The effort eventually proved unsuccessful, but it also served to alert both the city government and the group members themselves of the political power that ABCD possesses when members make a concerted effort on a given issue. If innovative policies or programs that work to advance development of the arts in Durham emerge in the coming years, it would not be at all surprising if ABCD is their source. Perhaps emboldened by the governmental endorsement of the DCMP and an increasing amount of political lip service directed at the arts, the Durham arts community is calling on the city government to back its words and begin providing policy support.

## **Development of the Arts is a Cyclical Process**

If artists seek out districts where real estate values are low, and the presence of artists serves to revitalize a district and consequently incite an increase in real estate prices, artist are

therefore doomed to be forever on the move, relocating to escape regional transformations of their own creation. From the perspective of a city, the increasing costs of real estate and subsequent displacement of artists is not necessarily a sign of crisis. If high-earning professionals move into a district previously inhabited by artists to take advantage of the newly vibrant and exciting sense of place, the neighborhood can then stabilize, left with a residential base with the requisite earning power to maintain active retail and office uses nearby, as well as a robust tax base that benefits the entire city. In a sense, this transformation fits the Richard Florida model of urban success perfectly – except that the artists eventually turn up missing. A district is then left with only the portions of the Creative Class that only Florida considers truly creative. The “super-creative core” moves on to find the next undervalued market.

The development of creative districts is therefore an ongoing process. If Downcity Providence was ever truly an arts district, it surely is not a reasonable residential location for artists today. Instead they have moved on to new opportunities such as the mill district, Pawtucket, or some other city. Recognizing the power of the arts community to lead a revitalization of previously blighted areas, the city government in Providence has actively supported artists wherever they go. As one might easily have predicted, the mill district is now becoming a popular destination for wealthy professionals and high-end loft apartments are popping up as quickly as the old industrial buildings can be converted. Also predictable is the fact that artists already fear being priced out of that market. In Durham, these processes are not nearly as far along, but several Durham property owners have suggested that real estate speculation has already become quite common in the loop as developers are beginning to anticipate a boost in the market. Expensive lofts are popping up all over downtown and while

retail spaces remain affordable, many believe that all real estate values are certain to start rising significantly.

If a city's goal is merely to turn a distressed district into a thriving one – and this is clearly a legitimate interest of government – then the process described here is not at all troubling. In an idealized sense, if properly supported, artists will continue to move around, leaving behind them a trail of economic improvement. Obviously the process is not quite that simple and many other factors are important to the process of turning around an urban area. Moreover, if one believes that artists and an arts community bring other benefits to a city than just the ability to attract firms and workers in growth industries, some protections are needed to ensure that artists are able to afford living in the districts the help to revitalize. All of the quality of place factors that are derived from the presence of artists and arts-based uses in a community may well be characteristics that a community wishes to preserve, even if it involves some economic cost. Consistent with its position on the cutting edge of policy, the private sector arts community in Providence has taken steps to protect itself in the Mill district by purchasing buildings and setting residency rules that require all renters and buyers to be practicing artists. Clearly, in the face of a sizable threat to the sustainability of an arts community, a proactive city government could place similar restrictions on specified projects if maintaining the vitality of the arts were a priority.

Under a wide variety of conditions, empirical evidence from a number of cities suggests that successful cultivation of the arts, culture, and a creative community is indeed a precursor to overall economic development. Providence is an important case to investigate because it was one of the first cities to make the arts an explicit component of its economic revitalization strategy.

Durham appears, at present, to be poised to make a similar commitment to the arts and its role in economic development. Whether or not that effort comes to fruition, and the precise nature of the strategies employed, are yet to be determined. Just as a case study investigation of some of the many other communities that are focusing on the arts would be an important step in advancing the existing body of research on arts-based economic development, it will also be interesting and helpful to see how the state of the arts in Durham and Providence change over the coming years. For Providence, the challenge will be preserving both the arts community and the economic progress that has resulted from it. For Durham, the challenge will be maintaining and perhaps accelerating the momentum as the revitalization process begins to pick up speed.

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## ***Appendices***

### **Appendix 1: Glossary of Acronyms**

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| ABCD  | Arts & Business Coalition of Downtown (Durham, NC) |
| DBAP  | Durham Bulls Athletic Park                         |
| DCMP  | Durham Cultural Master Plan                        |
| DDI   | Downtown Durham, Inc.                              |
| ICBD  | Industrial and Commercial Buildings District       |
| MIT   | Massachusetts Institute of Technology              |
| MSA   | Metropolitan Statistical Area                      |
| NAICS | North American Industry Classification System      |
| NEA   | National Endowment for the Arts                    |
| PCIS  | Partnership for Creative Industrial Space          |
| PPAC  | Providence Performing Arts Center                  |
| RISD  | Rhode Island School of Design                      |

## **Appendix 2: List of Interviews**

Bright, Erik. Founding member, Monohasset Mill Project and the Partnership for Creative Industrial Space. Telephone Interview. February 28, 2005.

Carnevale, Lisa. Founder and Executive Director, Partnership for Creative Industrial Space. Telephone Interview. February 22, 2005.

Crenca, Umberto. Founder and Artistic Director, AS220. Telephone Interview. March 4, 2005.

DeVries, Sherry. Executive Director, Durham Arts Council. Personal Interview. February 4, 2005.

Duvall, Roylee. Owner, Through This Lens gallery. Telephone Interview. February 15, 2005.

Ellison, Dan. Property owner, arts supporter. Telephone Interview. February 21, 2005.

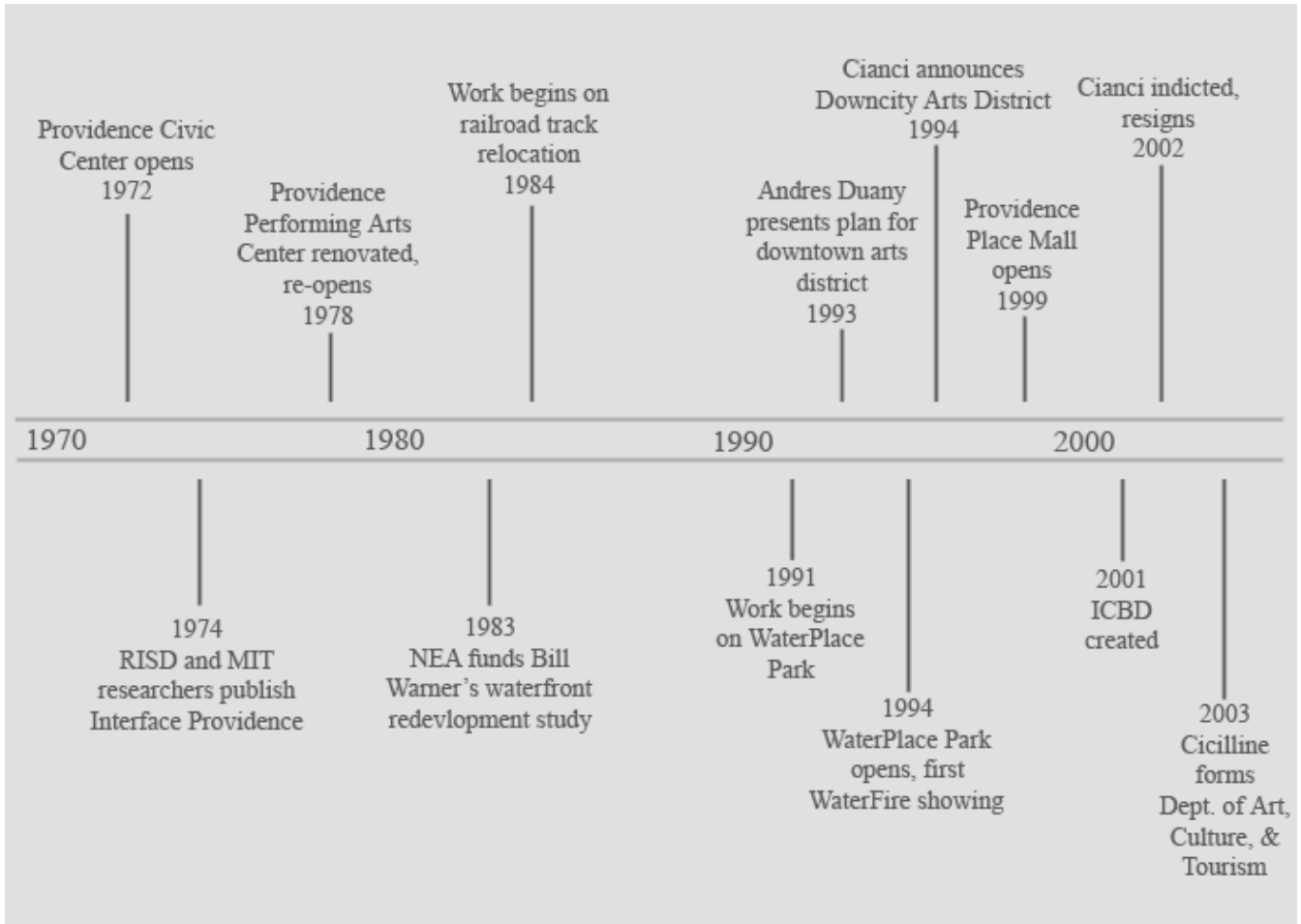
Kalkhof, Bill. Executive Director, Downtown Durham, Inc. Personal Interview. January 10, 2005.

Mills, Beau. Executive Director, North Carolina Metropolitan Commission. Email Communication, March 7, 2005.

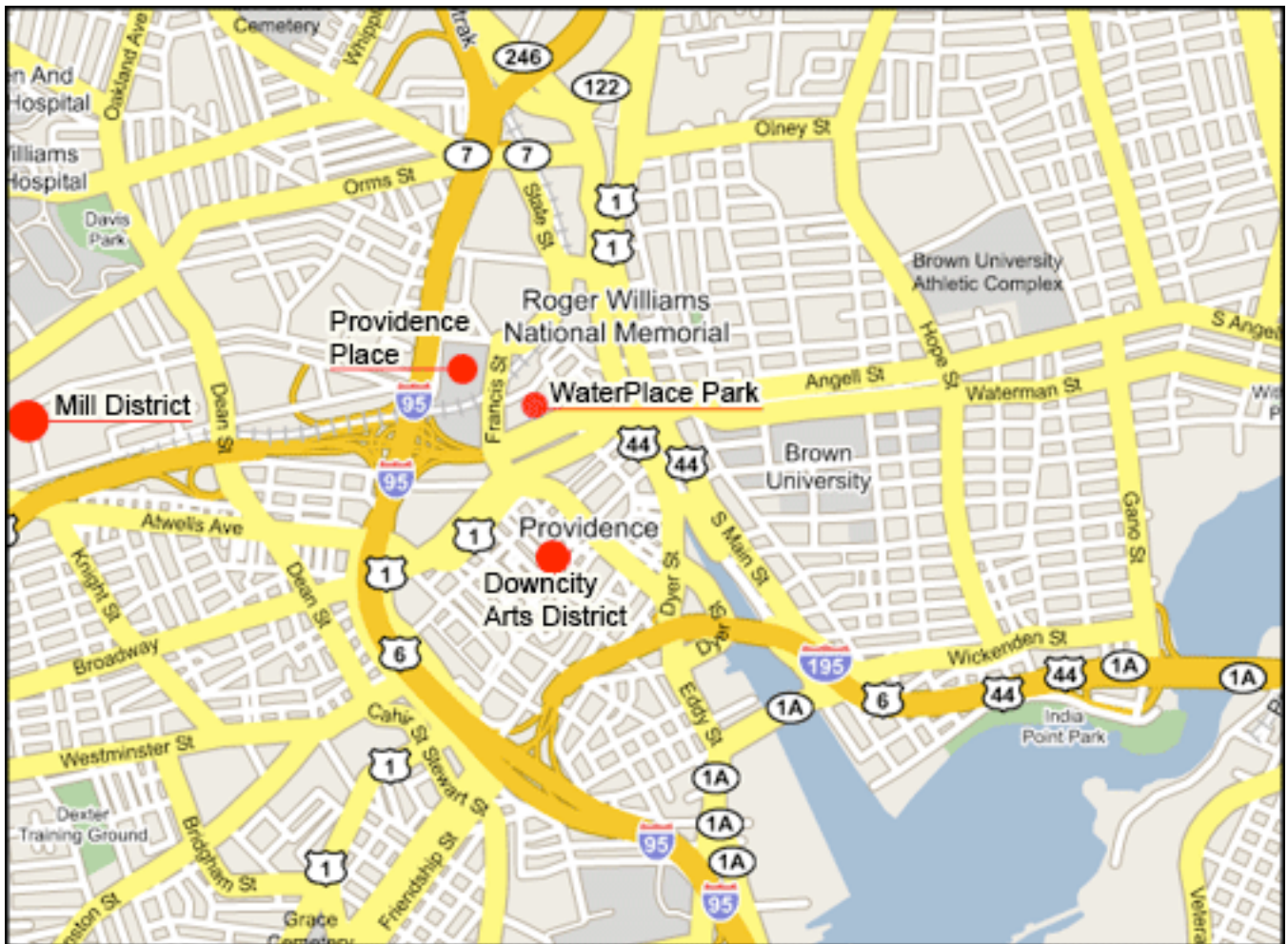
Sharpe, Alice. Downtown Economic Development Coordinator, Durham Office of Economic and Employment Development. Telephone Interview. December 15, 2004.

Southern, Caleb. Founding member, Arts and Business Coalition of Downtown Durham. Personal Interview. January 10, 2005.

### Appendix 3: Selected Timeline of the Providence Renaissance



#### Appendix 4: Map of Selected Sites in Providence



#### Appendix 4: Map of Selected Sites in Durham

