

MILWAUKEE JUNCTION CREATIVE CAMPUS

Envisioning Milwaukee Junction as a Creative Arts District for the City of Detroit

Abstract:

In the process of gentrification – the rapid class-remake of a neighborhood – the increase in land values and rents threaten the long-term presence of low-income residents and lower-yielding businesses. Among this group are artists and creatives, who rely on affordable housing and workspaces to produce their craft. As rents rise, artists and creatives are oftentimes displaced which is detrimental to cities because they provide a vital lifeline to urban communities, contributing to the city’s vibrancy, culture, and economy. Their development of “Third Places,” creative industries, and urban buzz offer critical synergies to urban economies that provide integral assets to urban life, including economic opportunities, identity, and sense of community.

As Detroit neighborhoods undergo significant urban revitalizations, the prospect of increased real estate values poses a threat to its lower income residents, including Detroit artists and creatives. It is imperative that Detroit proactively tackles this threat in a way that protects artists and creatives from their otherwise inevitable displacement, especially in the wake of Detroit’s urban revival.

This framework plan seeks to develop a preemptive response to gentrification in a way that promotes the long term residency of artists and creatives in Detroit, and their successful integration into the economic and cultural life of the city. Using the neighborhood of Milwaukee Junction as a case study neighborhood, this framework plan proposes physical land use and policy recommendations that offer residential and economic opportunities for Detroit artists and creatives that supports their long-term presence in the area.

Gentrification and the City:

Cities, similar to an organism, evolve through many changes and transformations. They shrink, grow, sprawl, and with these fluxes, experience changes in their physical and social attributes. One of the most significant urban transformations is gentrification. Gentrification, as a process, is the shift of real estate development from urban peripheries to previously disinvested urban cores. Neil Smith calls gentrification “a movement of capital,” (Smith, 2007) that transitions inner-city neighborhoods from a status of relative poverty and limited property investment to a state of commodification and reinvestment (Ley, 2003). When the profits from construction in previously disinvested cities become competitive with development in suburban areas, a substantial migration of capital investment begins to funnel into urban areas. This shift in attention also significantly affects demographic composition. Disinvested cities that were largely populated with low-income residents of color are soon replaced with an influx of white higher-income residents. The shift in capital, coupled with the shift in culture and perception, turn these cities into hotbeds for new and restorative development.

Gentrification looks good when it first starts: the local municipalities support the new development with improvements to public goods and services, and there are improved options for food, retail and leisure. Shaw and Hagemans describe the idealized vision of “positive gentrification,” a balanced social mix of people of different races and classes living within the same community (Shaw et. al, 2015). This scenario highlights the benefits of mixed income neighborhoods, that are socially diverse, and the common living standard is beneficial to all but largely supporting the wealthier residents.

However, with increased capital investment and attention toward these previously disinvested cities, the increases in property values and taxes add a new financial burden to the households that have been living there. The inflation in real estate values threaten the long-term presence of low-income residents and small businesses within these areas, who oftentimes have few other options besides moving away. The neighborhood’s revitalization begins to happen without its longstanding residents, benefiting only the wealthier newcomers and giving the poorer residents little opportunity to capitalize or benefit from the changes.

Gentrification operates at two extremes; it capitalizes on vulnerable neighborhoods and exposes the inequalities and polarizations between race and class. While there is a greater emphasis on private and municipal investment, improved access to quality goods and services, and economic development, there is a new price to stay. The neighborhood’s popularity becomes manifested in higher rent, property taxes, and increased costs of living that low-income residents cannot afford. This shift in demographics, and the association of capital improvements following residents of higher incomes and of different races spurs emotional feelings of mistrust, spite, anger and even racial bias (Shaw, 2015). It seems, the cost for improved living standards, economic investment, and city beautification often comes at the price of culture, diversity, and inclusion.

When gentrification sets in, the first to leave are the working class and/or low-income residents (Smith, 2007). Among this group are artists and creatives, a social group that provides a critical asset to urban communities through their contribution to urban vibrancy and significance (Ley, 1986). For urban communities, “artists” and “creatives” produce a major cultural component that keep cities interesting,

attractive, and economically powerful (Ley, 1986). They manifest from “alternative culture,” the marginal groups that use and create within the under-utilized areas in cities (Shaw, 2005). Iris Young defines these social groups as “a collective of people [that] differentiate themselves from or are differentiated by at least one other group according to these cultural forms,” (Young, 1990). The artist and the creative reject dominant culture, and this manifests in the “edgy characterization of their artistic contributions. They typically occupy space that is undervalued, if not neglected, by the mainstream urban fabric, generating a “breeding ground” for iconoclastic arts and culture.

The “artist” deeply invests in community development and relationship building, which oftentimes materializes in the occupation of physical space. Many times, in the artist’s execution, they occupy and create interesting public spaces for other residents to enjoy, convene, and interact with. Artists contribute to urban place making through “...the act of creation, the language of renewal, [and] the practice of redemption of a spent force,” (Ley, 2003). Some famous examples include the Heidelberg Project in Detroit, an outdoor installation that uses materials and relics from vacant and abandoned homes.

The “creative,” a term derived from Richard Florida’s “creative class,” produces work with an entrepreneurial focus. According to Richard Florida, “creatives” are the thought leaders that produce new forms and systems that can be widely made, sold and used within a modern, diverse and inclusive society (Florida, 2002). They use creative problem-solving techniques that diverge from the traditional method of business, and welcome social and intellectual diversity as part of their individual and collective identities (Florida, 2002). Because of this, the “creative” and the “artist” have an interesting symbiotic relationship: the “creative” can navigate between the dominant and alternative culture and is sometimes seen as the economic bridge between the two. The “creative” helps the “artist” engage in economic ventures, and the “artist” provides the authentic “urban quality” that the “creative” gravitates toward when considering residency.

Although there are some differences, specifically economically, artists and creatives should be considered together because of their collective contribution to urban vibrancy. They are creators of “cultural capital,”; the assets that they bring to cities - visual art, galleries, murals, nightlife, dance, music, technology and new media - provide multi-faceted and multi-generational entertainment that welcome residents and tourists to urban centers. They offer both tangible and intangible experiences that make cities memorable, enticing, and attractive to talent, businesses and investments. Artists and creatives are also the initiators and supporters of “Third Places,” (Ogdenburg, 1989) the neutral urban sites that offer flexible opportunities for impromptu experiences that diverge from the norm. “Third Places” are the venues - pocket parks, cafes, neighborhood gardens, and vacant lots- that allow for localized urban development, human interaction, and creativity.

This “cultural capital,” “Third Place,” development, and urban buzz are also socially and economically advantageous for cities. It harnesses other fringe benefits, such as tourism revenue, real estate value, and international prestige. Within a global context, culture helps cities create a brand and an identity. It attracts visitors, but more importantly, it invites talented young professionals to relocate. As talent gravitates toward the areas of concentrated arts and culture, businesses and capital follow, supporting new residents with job opportunities, goods and services, and other amenities that contribute to quality lifestyles. Because of this

relationship, there is a critical synergy between art and the local economy where arts and culture acts as an economic vehicle to strengthen local economies, attract jobs, and create wealth. The Cultural Secretary of the United Kingdom, Maria Miller, called municipal investment in the arts “venture capital” and furthered that “the value of the artistic sector could be leveraged to deliver economic growth,” (Thetford, 2013). A study carried out by the U.K. Center of Economics and Business Research:

“... found that arts and culture make up 0.4 percent of Britain’s GDP, a strong return on less than 0.1 percent of government spending. The cultural sector was also seen to have increased its contribution to the U.K.’s GDP since 2008, even as the wider economy contracted over this period,”

The report’s findings also highlighted the important role the arts sector played in supporting the commercial creative industries, which make up 10 percent of Britain’s GDP. The report concluded that ‘proximity to the arts and culture can translate to higher wages and productivity through innovation and diffusion of ideas,’ (Thetford 2013).

In some ways, artists and creatives catalyze their own neighborhood disappearance. It is the art and culture that they contribute that turn particular neighborhoods into “tipping points areas,” (Mercer, 2006). As they appropriate public space, and establish “cultural capital,” private developers seize adjacent spaces to leverage a lucrative real estate deal. Cities thrive on the culture artists and creatives develop, attracting more people who are interested in living closer to the action. As the area gets more attractive and the value increases, artists and creatives find it harder to stay at their previous affordability. The place that they made “cool” is now “too cool” for them.

For artists and creatives, affordable housing and workspaces are key elements in their long-term presence in urban areas, but is a seemingly fleeting component to capture. Over the past 25 years, the production of new affordable housing has shifted from the public to the private sector through tax credit incentives (Artspace, 2014). Furthermore, in the opportunity to capitalize on higher values and returns, many private developers remain disinterested in these incentives. Local municipalities prioritize infrastructural updates and tax-based incentives to accommodate and inspire more new development. The municipal focus shift contributes to property inflation, and artists and creatives find it more difficult to live and work in the neighborhoods they had lived in before. The displacement of this social group also displaces the critical synergy between art and economy, thus displacing long term benefits and sustained value for the city. However integral, these groups are forced into nomadic lifestyles as they struggle to find affordable places to live and work in the face of rising rents and increased costs of living.

5 Pointz illustrates a good example of a dismantled artist community that succumbed to real estate pressure. 5 Pointz was an internationally acclaimed live/work studio space in Queens, New York City, most famous of its graffiti-painted shell (McCormick, 2015). 5 Pointz offered residency programs for local artists and creatives, and was an anchor for muralists, dancers and residents. 5 Pointz also served as a community center for the surrounding neighborhood, centralizing local artistic and cultural programming and events. In the mid-2000s, the surrounding neighborhood inflated in real estate value and experienced a significant increase in renter income. In response, the owner evicted his tenants and demolished the venue for the

opportunity to build luxury condominiums in 2013 (McCormick, 2015). In this move, the owner removed the neighborhood important cultural anchor, the area's identifying fixture, and the very asset that made the neighborhood attractive in the first place. 5 Pointz is an important case study because it shows directly what happens when the housing and facility needs of artists and creatives are not protected. It also shows how vulnerable cultural and artistic hubs are within the midst of increased development.

While living in the urban margin can be useful for incubating "alternative culture," it can also pose a threat to artists and creatives who are disenfranchised as renters. In some cities, artists and creatives look for affordable housing rent from landlords who elude building codes and violations in order to profit from their vacant property. The living conditions are oftentimes substandard and pose several threats to the health, safety and well-being of their tenants.

In December 2016 in Oakland CA, the Ghostship fire – a fatal warehouse accident – killed up to 40 people in an electrical fire (Karlman et al., 2016). The victims were artists and creative workers that were living in a converted warehouse space that was not up to building code (Karlman et al., 2016). This devastating event has catalyzed a new look on artists and creatives in the Bay Area, who are "living in warehouses and other unconventional spaces, often skirting zoning laws while those who collect rent turn a blind eye," (Karlman et al., 2016). Although not ideal locations, "they offer a cheap alternative to pricey apartments in the booming Bay Area... and they're often a place where minorities and people who feel they're on the outskirts can find a sense of belonging," (Karlman et al., 2016). In response to the fire, many landlords that had allowed artists and creatives to occupy their spaces for years began evicting them to avoid criminal charges, lawsuits or similar catastrophes. The Ghostship Fire is an important case study because it shows the rights limitations artists and creatives have as renters. In cases like this, artists and creatives risk personal health and safety in search for affordable housing, which makes them more susceptible to displacement. Furthermore, they are often treated like nuisances and threats when in fact they are being exploited. Because artists and creatives are the keepers and makers of cultural capital, their vulnerability as tenants extends to their cultural contributions.

In identifying these trends, the foreshadowing of the negative implications associated with increased rents and high-end residential development looms over Detroit. Currently, Detroit is undergoing a significant urban revitalization that is perpetuating real estate development and inflating property values. Concurrently, the creative scene is becoming more prevalent and visible. Since 2010, Detroit has experienced an influx of artistic institutions moving into the urban core, from both the periphery and out of state, because of the affordable real estate. (DeVito, 2015). Famously, The Red Bull House of Art opened as a live-in artist residency and gallery in Eastern Market in 2012, (DeVito 2015), and the Galapagos Art Center announced their move from Brooklyn, NY to two large vacant warehouses in Highland Park and Corktown in 2014 (Gallagher, 2014). Additionally, the emphasis on local culture in Detroit has led to a population growth of young urban professionals moving to Detroit, thus attracting other businesses and investments. In 2010, Quicken Loans migrated their headquarters from Birmingham, Michigan to Downtown Detroit, bringing 3,100 young employees to the city (Gallagher, 2016). The synergy between art and the local economy in Detroit is already in motion.

For artists and creatives, where affordable housing is key, these are patterns that can lead to displacement,

pushing these social groups to more marginalized places within the city, until there is ultimately no place for them. Currently, there are no local municipal strategies to protect artists and creatives from gentrification. A large portion of municipal focus is on infrastructural updates and economic development in Downtown, Midtown and other commercial corridors throughout Detroit.

In identifying the trends of gentrification as a systematic diagnosis, and understanding the importance of affordable housing, it is pertinent for Detroit to have a strategy to protect artists and creatives by providing ample affordable housing and commercial space. Artists and creatives have contributed, if not catalyzed, the City's rebirth through grassroots initiatives, and the loss of this social group removes cultural capital, and limits the symbiotic relationship between art and local urban economies that Detroit can harness as it migrates away from a Fordist economy (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2012). Although the City does not have any formal initiatives to protect artists and creatives, the artistic community has been able to utilize philanthropic funding to anchor themselves within several different neighborhoods in Detroit. Through the development of community arts spaces, artists and creatives have been able to have a neighborhood presence that supports small scale commercial rehabilitation and business development. Yet, more work needs to be done.

Detroit, as a comeback city, has a lot of opportunities to avoid what other cities in the United States got wrong. With development and infrastructural opportunities, Detroit can look to other cities that failed to accommodate critical social groups within their planning – thus failing to capitalize on all sorts of tangible and intangible urban assets. In understanding the true value artists and creatives have brought to Detroit, before, during, and after its economic collapse, it is imperative that there be a plan to include this social group in future planning processes to promote their long term residency in the city, and the long term resilience of Detroit.

Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus:

Milwaukee Junction is an historic industrial neighborhood in Detroit, nested between the North End, New Center, Midtown and Poletown East. Although located geographically in the middle of the city, Milwaukee Junction operates as a marginal neighborhood, and in its long term vacancy, has become an alternative culture breeding ground. Today, Milwaukee Junction is home to some of Detroit's most riveting murals and installations. The vacant land, unused buildings and boarded commercial facades provide a viable landscape for artists to create large bodies of work, both in quantity and in scale. The Russell Industrial Center, a refurbished industrial complex, is one of the largest and densest artist communities within Detroit, and is often considered to be the heart of the artist movement in the city (Pinho, 2015).

see **Figure 1:**

Neighborhood Boundary and Creative Industries

In the midst of all this organic alternative growth, there has been an increased attention on Milwaukee Junction from both the private and public sector. According to the 2015 Wayne County Tax Foreclosure Auction, the majority of Milwaukee Junction properties were sold, and are currently under private ownership (DeVito, 2015). With most of the developable land in private hands, affordable housing and

creative support spaces might not be at the forefront for their real estate portfolio and that can pose challenges to artists and creatives looking to remain in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, this neighborhood stands in the path of Detroit's newest light rail system, with a stop at the corner of Woodward and Milwaukee Avenues (Regional Transit Authority, 2016). This new transportation addition has spurred new construction opportunities looking to capitalize on the convenience of expanded mobility. However, for artists and creatives in the area that require affordable housing and workspaces, these developments may price them out by demanding higher residential and commercial rents, and inspiring new and existing facilities to do the same. With projects like these already underway, artists and creatives become increasingly more vulnerable to displacement. While these new developments are important and necessary, they do nothing to protect the artists and creatives from the growing real estate market.

Milwaukee Junction is growing, with both transit-oriented development and an increase in activity from the artistic and creative community. However, these two neighborhood activators may compete for space and presence within the area over time. Based on the outcomes in other cities, the transit-oriented developments along Woodward Avenue are bound to drive real estate values up, resulting in higher rents and residential displacement. Private developers have more financial leverage than local artists or creatives to impact the neighborhood in their liking and can easily turn the neighborhood unaffordable. The prospect of luxury multi-family apartments, and "loft-living," (Zukin, 1983) may threaten the long term residency of the present artists and creatives, forcing them to migrate to a different neighborhood in Detroit – or to leave Detroit altogether.

Displacement of artists and creatives poses an equity problem; with less affordable housing opportunities, their disappearance becomes inevitable. The displacement of this group also poses an economic problem: the loss of a significant economic driver that helped to catalyze the development there in the first place and the loss of future gains from economic synergy. Milwaukee Junction has a special opportunity to capitalize on and support the existing creative community while providing windfall benefits for the new transit-oriented development opportunities identified within the neighborhood.

The Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus can be a creative arts district that hosts creative activities and practices in Detroit. In co-locating these activities, the internal synergy will work similarly to a "campus" by connecting like-spaces and resources to further the creative development of the area. By aligning with the local agendas, Milwaukee Junction has the opportunity to better integrate within the larger fabric of the surrounding neighborhoods, and offer amenities that make the neighborhood a viable place to live, work and create. Because of the critical synergy between art and the local economy, Detroit has a significant motivation to use Milwaukee Junction as an economic vehicle to strengthen its economy, attract jobs, create local wealth and support local business by establishing a district that encourages artistic and creative enterprises. The Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus can be a nucleus of new creative ideas and industries that help to diversify Detroit's local economy, as well as a well-identified zone for urban arts and culture. The Campus can generate tourism, and still play an integral part in community development and local investment. Most importantly, the Campus can be Detroit's opportunity to protect artists and creatives from the displacement associated with gentrification through economic strategies and land use policies.

See Figure 2

Milwaukee Junction Land Use Framework Proposal

See Figure 3

Creative Industrial with Sculpture Park on Beaubien Street

See Figure 4

Proposed Green Buffer and Greenway at Rail Line

See Figure 5

Live/Make space on Milwaukee Avenue

See Figure 6

Expanded Residential Housing with Art Park on Harper Avenue

See Figure 7

View of the Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus from Interstate 75

Policy Recommendations:

Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus embraces the organic growth of the neighborhood as both transit-oriented development and creative activities continue to expand. However, in order to break the link between development and displacement, several policies must be put in place to support the physical development of the Creative Campus. For artists and creatives, affordable housing is a key element in their long-term presence in urban areas, and rising rents are the primary catalyst for their displacement in gentrifying neighborhoods. Therefore, there should be guidelines and policies that guide development in the Milwaukee Junction neighborhood.

The City of Detroit can set partnerships and agreements with developers to require affordable housing. In 2015, Mayor Duggan announced a commitment in reserving 20 to 40 percent of all residential units within the City of Detroit for lower income renters. He described this effort as a “project-by-project” basis that would be required as part of the negotiation and approval process for residential development in Detroit (Gallagher, 2015). Similar developments in Milwaukee Junction can benefit artists and creatives looking to move to and remain in the neighborhood long term, while incentivizing developers with financial subsidies.

Live/make spaces are critical spaces that support the livelihood of artists and creatives within cities. Live/make spaces integrate personal living space with commercial interfaces, commonly characterized as bi-level lofts or studios. However, the construction of these spaces require stricter building codes that diverge from traditional residential or commercial space requirements. (Khoury, 2014) Because of this specialization, there should be amendments to the local zoning code that incorporate live/make spaces more easily. This is a great way accommodate small businesses, convert the industrial buildings within the Milwaukee Junction neighborhood, as well as support a variety of mixed uses.

Similarly, there should also be similar measures to protect and maintain affordable commercial space. While live/make spaces provide a special opportunity toward affordable housing and workspaces, it is not conducive for all business types. High commercial rents threaten the long-term presence of small and local businesses that provide affordable services and operations, accessible small office and incubator space, and culturally relevant goods and services (ILSR, 2016). As the cost of space rises, local businesses become displaced and replaced by national chains (ILSR, 2016). This becomes a problem as it creates barriers toward entrepreneurship and economic dynamism, which can be especially important to offset the high-valued transit-oriented development in the Milwaukee Junction area. Because of this, there should be subsidized space allocations for local businesses in new development projects.

Non-profit financing may also be a tool to finance the development of live/make spaces, affordable housing and commercial spaces. Artspace is a non-profit organization that uses real estate development to create affordable places for artists to live and work (Artspace, 2014). Through non-profit ownership, Artspace can ensure that their spaces remain affordable and accessible to artists and arts organizations. To date, it has grown to be a leading developer of arts facilities in the United States (Artspace, 2014).

Private interest might also be a financial tool for the development of these spaces. Proximity to the arts increases value, and for the investors and business owners that know that, preserving spaces for artists and creatives to stay long-term can be in their best interest as well. This strategy is not so much a financing tool, but a reliance on the private market to support the symbiotic relationship between the arts and the economy; it allows businesses to exploit artists to improve their value, while providing opportunities for artists to be patronized and recognized. The Wynwood Walls in Florida are a great example of this relationship. Tony Goldman and others invited artists – locally and internationally – to install large-scale murals on the walls of their buildings. This concentration of street art became a significant tourist and cultural attraction, bringing millions of people every year (Caplan, 2015). Adjacent retail and commercial businesses became especially profitable, and artists around the world seek the Wynwood Walls as a milestone in their careers. Similar patrons in Detroit can have a similar effect on Milwaukee Junction.

Conclusion:

Because of the critical synergy between art and the economy, the Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus has an opportunity to play a significant role in Detroit's urban revitalization. The Campus can operate as a hub of arts and culture, contributing to Detroit's vibrancy and identity while tackling the challenging issue of displacement due to gentrification. The Campus can also host creative and artistic enterprises that contribute to Detroit's economic resilience while supporting the makers of "cultural capital." The Milwaukee Junction Creative Campus offers an important framework and precedent for responding to a vulnerable social group before they are affected by the negative implications of gentrification. For Detroit, and for cities around the world, artists and creatives bring an important quality to urban life - and that is worth protecting.

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