

Office Hours with the Commissioner  
Cultural Heritage and Neighborhood Preservation

02/17/2017

Downtown Art

- Being part of the LES Community of Artists, Arts and Culture organization community, the things we needed the most was a "HOME." Finding a space on E 4<sup>th</sup> Street as part of the collective community of artists building this space together.
  - » Interactions in place, all on the artistic, creative, political, activist culture to thrive sharing space/ collaboration is key to this community's culture to persevere, thrive.
- At LES – Alice (disabled artist of color) is stuck at the nexus of geography and transportation and affordability of transit. Infrastructure is inadequate for artists with disabilities to even access.
  - » Transportation addressed frequently for lots of communities to thrive and create. Disabled artists, outer borough, immigrant enclaves.
  - » Provide access to artists with disabilities. Not always more/new programs. Arts/cultural orgs provide programs and spaces via auxiliary programs and infrastructure. Partner with small organizations to provide these resources and then we can take on the running of programs ourselves – fully resourced.
- LES in the face of all kinds of struggles, this community is a model of civic engagement & people collaborating for cultural thriving. South Bronx too! Gentrification did not lift these spaces /communities/neighborhoods out of poverty or into thriving. We did that ourselves.

- » Citywide agency coordination (human contact & responsibility & access) needs to address NOW these communities (people) who have been systematically underserved/neglected. Cultural heritage needs to be about the people in which these communities who have knowledge – not only the spaces/places in which they live. Define thriving in place for people, directly.
- Need government agencies to do better coordination so we can better / more efficiently use the NYCHA/Cornerstone spaces for our programming (university settlement) – e.g. DYCD/DCLA/DOE >> incredibly cumbersome to navigate the bureaucracy and procurement rules. Background check, artist wages, etc. that end up with lots of underutilized spaces and program potentials (TRUST!) How does this issue get “fixed” – building relationships and having more porosity?
  - » Recommendation on how to change bureaucracy? Better utilize resources? What are the ideas from DCLA?
- Cultural preservation about the arts – artists / orgs need to be part of the conversation about affordable housing / zoning / etc.
  - » Model/case study: downtown Baltimore-development with artists as part of process
  - » Recommendation-professional development for different scales of orgs learning from one another
- Community Anchors – sustaining them – not always non-profits, how to access funding?
  - » The arts councils each should have a funded help desk folk art/special arts services funding @ DCLA
  - » Commercial Rent Control – target + bespoke, choose like landmarks

- Preservation being in the people – historical, racial inequities, how to address? Only exacerbated through NOT addressing
  - » Tie funding to diversity of leadership
  - » Loisada’s loss of cultural resources – monitor and lend political support in moments like this
  - » Artists perceived as un-embedded, tool of real estate, change the narrative, broaden to include the whole ecology
  - » This is a part of larger phenomenon – small businesses, etc.
- Unintended consequences
  - » recognize power dynamics that spur efforts at “preservation” and “diversity” – these are framed by those with power and in response to their exercise of power, you must recognize your privilege and then plan to give power to others
  - » redress historic inequities, use as filter to drive funding allocations
- Incentivizing diversity encourages game playing and does not normalize true reflection of our residents and their cultures; our communities ARE diverse and we HAVE culture, they are just not financially supported
- Get arts programs back into schools because the arts are a compliment and path to all thriving and sustainability in education and the future
  - » Fundamental to this is a right to quality, sequential arts education. How can this be a symbolic relationship between schools/students and artists/local community?
  - » Focus this on local issues and what’s already thriving in neighborhoods

- » Using art to discuss things happening in personal lives of students, ex. Asthma in south Bronx/hunts point – art @ activism can address this if we support it to do so. In schools. In students.
- Marcus Garvey – We do this because we work in the public realm and can have these conversations we public in these spaces. Created public art residency, very small, mostly volunteer, working with local artists, POC, women
  - » what we need is capacity building, to help artist partners, grand funding to artists, operational / admin support and professional development.
  - » Our organization had to forfeit applying for grants from Arts Council so our artists can apply for grants directly, we are competing against our own, how can we fix this – expand, different kinds of grants for orgs and artists?
- This is the first time we've heard "racism" mentioned top-down since launch event. Not the case in others' minds. Structural inequity, diversity, access, other words, but not racism.
  - » Center an anti-racist narrative on plan explicitly, you moved into access and equity language (cultural agenda fund grantees)
- What made possible on 4<sup>th</sup> St to stay and dig in as an arts space, learning to organizing. FAB became a hub. All of us learned to collaborate, work together, and organize community land trust, digging in, relying on each other
  - » Fund organizers for community based arts groups, build with the network and recognize the value of organizers in community anchoring and thriving
  - » HPD arts and culture RFEI for community land trust
  - » Cooper square committee as anchor for other local groups / arts groups here and precedent for others

- Building in LES, three groups working together to get 99 year lease (sunset period) but nothing happening, we need support in sitting together with owner to make owner work with community
- Hire consultants that do not address single issue, but intersectionally. Think across identity issues, geography, culture, ability, organizational structure, how can we trust you to think outside boxes and systems of oppression and limitation of oppressive structures which do work intersectionally as opposition?
  - » Moving intersectionally from theory to policy. What does it take to do this? Take this risk? Sit down with other organizations/ agencies to collaborate, use personal, professional, political capital to make others work with you/us!
  - » Get very specific and bring it to scale. Infuse social justice energy in other government, Not infuse, CREATE policy that demands this. DCLA needs to be the cultural community advocacy leader on behalf of artists.
- Advocate with in the government across SILOS
- Real Estate industry must be regulated
- Grants to individual artists and other forms of support model after other countries like democratic socialists funding schemes
  - » Not project based, but sustaining
  - » No protections for project based workers
  - » For grants, payments, getting into affordable housing, etc.
  - » Mediate between diverse and local stakeholders
  - » NYCHA-Prenevr as model
- Developers need education on community stakeholders

- » Connect communities to each other
- » Do research before developing model into which communities must fit, make city efforts neighborhoods more dialogue in process
- » PS109 is a model, open to families / low-income groups, etc.
- » The neighborhood should be the governing body of community programs
- » Outside consultant model not often efficient or helpful, all programs should have an anti-oppression framework via community organizing
- El Puente Greenlight District: we gave ourselves the greenlight as the community
- What is the next step on July 1st? What is the response /plan for DCLA as community as artists to make this plan active, as an advocacy call to action
  - » Every Community Board should have art and culture committee OR arts and culture advocate should be on every CB committee.
- Cultural Plan CAC (10 yrs w/ review every 2 years) – long term proposition follow along with us as agents of the NYC Cultural Community / ecosystem.