



Focus Group Meeting #7 – Artists and Creative Professionals

July 10, 2020

Summary

OVERVIEW

The seventh and final meeting in a series of Focus Group meeting for the Charlotte Center City 2040 Vision Plan was convened on July 10th, 2020. Focus Group #7 focused on artists and creative professionals and participants reflected various art and media disciplines and businesses in Center City.

The meeting was conducted via Zoom and was facilitated and recorded by MIG.

INTRODUCTION

Following opening remarks from Michael Smith of Center City Partners, Mark de la Torre, Project Manager of MIG, Inc., opened the meeting with a brief project overview. The PowerPoint presentation, projected via Zoom's screen share functionality, provided an overview of the project, including community engagement activities, main objectives and goals, draft vision framework elements and focus areas, and a synopsis of the impacts and consideration of COVID-19 on plan outcomes. Immediately after the presentation, Mark de la Torre facilitated a discussion with the meeting participants. Discussion topics focused in on the draft plan Vision elements, Goals, and emerging strategies but were also wide-ranging and encompassed an array of subjects, concerns, and ideas. Discussions were documented in real-time through a digital recording projected to attendees through Zoom.

This document summarizes the information and ideas covered in the meeting, organized by topic. The Project Team will use the feedback collected during this session to revise the Plan Framework and inform draft plan recommendations. An image of the graphic notes recorded at the meeting is included at the end of the document.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

Vision and Goals

- Inclusive: Charlotte has negative history in this regard and needs to address inclusivity moving forward. An example is Rail Trail and original South End planning.
- Black residents and people of color have been pushed out and excluded.
- Often, communities and people of color are invited to participate in too late in the planning processes to meaningfully contribute.
- We need to break legacy of housing discrimination.
- Equitable growth is desired. It needs to be different than how things were done in that past.

- Be intentional.
- Re-envision this planning process and facilitate good growth in an inclusive way.
- Amplify community voices that have been historically neglected or ignored.
- It is hard not to be skeptical.
 - If we want to be truly inclusive, acknowledge current and past exclusion.
 - What are those in power willing to sacrifice?
 - Create “fertile ground for seeds to grow”. Right now, it feels like throwing seeds on fallow ground.
- “Fertile ground” is a great metaphor.
- There are regulations in place that prevent growth and good work.
- Who is making the decisions? Communities are invited to the table too late and rules are in place already.
- Planning is not including people who are going to use these spaces.
- Flexibility and inclusion are important. Think beyond what we have seen to date.
- Historically, there has been too much talk and not enough doing in Charlotte.
- Help Black-owned businesses and creatives to thrive.

Public Spaces

- Planning is about public space but currently people of color feel that they are reminded that they “do not belong” and artists do not feel empowered to use public spaces. Be intentional about changing this.
- Build ownership and include people in the planning process in projects/public spaces.
- Don’t push projects onto the community.
- There is a lack of sidewalks, green spaces, creative spaces, places to exercise, to gather. The current urban fabric is tight and constrained.
- Need more meeting areas and common ground in the form of physical spaces. This issue is currently compounded by COVID-19.
- Strengthen the public realm and make streets more walkable and vibrant.
- Active storefronts, more creative spaces, and better pedestrian facilities will improve the urban fabric.
- Ensure that public spaces are available and design for all!
- Streets are shut down for running races, why not other events?

Affordability

- Charlotte is becoming increasingly less affordable for artists and creatives, even more so for those of color. Rent for both housing and studio space is expensive and many artists are forced to work out of their homes.
 - Owning commercial space(s) creates a power imbalance that artists and creatives of color are left out of.
 - The current system caters to out-of-town companies and investment.
 - Acknowledge current and past exclusion and make changes, compromised and sacrifices.
 - Give more decision-making power to communities.
- Many artists have left Charlotte to go work in Atlanta, LA or NYC which are super expensive, but the jobs and projects are there to make a living.
- It is very difficult to get resources for studio space. Many creatives and artists work out of home studios.
- Charlotte has a legacy of housing discrimination. The Brooklyn neighborhood was demolished.
- Inability to access wealth and housing equality rooted in the destruction of this neighborhood.

- Nonprofits limited in their capacity. We need a fundamental shift in housing provision.
- Rising rent is a huge issue, as is cost of living across the board. There are not many ways to address this.
- Creatives need spaces to work that are low cost, especially due to housing inequality.
- Access to studio space is a huge issue. The traditional rental model (e.g., five-year lease) is outdated and obsolete.
- Charlotte has many under-used buildings that could be dedicated as arts space for 20 years.

Strategies to Support Artists and the Creative Economy

- Opportunities for creatives are limited and there is not a strong market for a diverse body of work within Charlotte.
- Nurture a vibrant art and creative industry within Charlotte. Many artists and creatives currently leave to find work in more active markets (NYC, LA, Atlanta).
- Invest in local arts and the creative industry in Charlotte to create local opportunities, including:
 - funding for exhibitions
 - studio spaces
 - collaborative relationships.
- Tap into the creative economy that is here.
- Cultivate an interest in the local art and creative scene and prioritize these cultural resources over outside influences.
- Preserve, restore and showcase history rather than letting it become paved over by new development that pushes people out of neighborhoods.
- Owners of commercial spaces in the city hold more power than the arts community.
- African American creatives and entrepreneurs need representation.
- Create an image of Charlotte being a center for arts and culture.
 - Charlotte lacks have a cultural identity. In media, television, depicted as: "devoid of culture." During the Amazon HQ competition, a New York Times article cited a lack of vibrant arts scene in Charlotte as a strike against us.
- Many artists do not qualify for public development opportunities.
- Address how the creative economy is being tapped into in Charlotte.
 - Artists are creating murals and not being financially compensated (e.g., along the Beatties Ford corridor).
 - Need a "culture shift" in how we treat artists and public art.
 - Other cities offer examples of how to engage professional creatives (e.g., Chicago).
- Find opportunities for creative collaborations with local institutions to promote and elevate local artists.
 - Look at NYC and Chase Bank's collaborations with artists, demonstrating a well-done and positive example of a "power player" working with local talent.
- Make arts a priority and not an afterthought.
- Allocate a percentage of new development dollars towards arts (e.g., murals, installations).
- Push for strong leadership and allyship from the private sector at the local and state levels.
 - Currently, Charlotte-based banks and "power" players do not interact and engage with local creatives. The arts community has no real relationship with capital.
 - Chase Bank in NYC is a good example of a positive collaboration of a bank working with artists to co-create media.
- There is no real interest in the arts community if it is not profitable. For example, when NoDa gentrified,

artists were pushed out and the City did not fight for them.

- No vested interest in artists who are already here. Instead, there is excitement directed toward outsiders with money. People are coming in for land grabs and financial opportunity and are paving over history, stories, and cultures.
- We need to protect artists when developers and capital come in. We are like teachers!
- Mandate a percentage of development dollars for the arts applied to private development. ASC has power.
- An ordinance that dedicated funding to arts and culture would be pivotal.

ALL IN 2040 CENTER CITY VISION PLAN

ARTISTS & CREATIVES

vision elements

Thriving	Inclusive	Memorable
Resilient	Sustainable	Loved

- ENGAGE VOICES AND HEARD
- MEET NEEDS HOUSING
- MAKE THE CITY WORK FOR A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE
- PROGRESS: EMPOWER MORE THAN A FEW

1. ARTISTS AS PART OF THE PLAN	2. PUBLIC SPACES FOR ARTISTS	3. AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ARTISTS	4. CULTURAL DISTRICTS
5. ARTISTS AS PART OF THE PLAN	6. PUBLIC SPACES FOR ARTISTS	7. AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR ARTISTS	8. CULTURAL DISTRICTS

- ADDRESS GENTRIFICATION
- CHASE BANK IN NYC → FORWARD THINKING COLLABORATIONS W/ CREATIVES
- BANK OF AMERICA; WELLS FARGO NOT ON SAME LEVEL DISTRICT
- POWER COMPANIES ARE NOT BUILDING COMMUNITY IN CHARLOTTE → BLACK CREATIVES HAVE LESS EXPOSURE AS A RESULT (SOCIAL MEDIA)

STEP 1: ARE WE EQUIPPED TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES?

ARE WE READY TO DO WHAT'S BEST?

MAKING SACRIFICES FROM GROUPS PREVIOUSLY MARGINALIZED IN CHANGE

EQUITABLE: RECOGNIZE & RESPECT DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES & POWER

1. Engage artists in the planning process	2. Create public spaces for artists	3. Afford housing for artists	4. Create cultural districts
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METER OF SUCCESS: HOW DO WE MEASURE PROGRESS?

FERTILE GROUND: HOW CAN WE CREATE BASIC STRUCTURE(S) FOR LIFE IN CHARLOTTE?

PHOTOGRAPHER'S PERSPECTIVE: LITTLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHOTOGRAPHERS IN CHARLOTTE → EVALUATION & GROWTH IN CHARLOTTE: WHERE IS THE WORK BEING DONE?

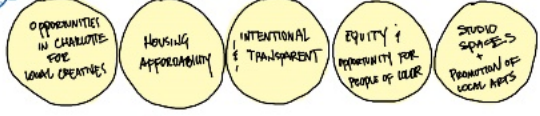
% OF PRIVATE DEV. → CREATE ART

ART SCENE → NEEDS MORE EXPOSURE W/ OUTSIDE CHARLOTTE

2040 PLAN → TAKE INTENTIONALITY TO THE NEXT LEVEL

MAKE IT HAPPEN HERE! "FRESH & FRESH" REINVENT CULTURE

CREATE THE BRIDGE → CULTIVATE → DEMANDS LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT → "HOW WILL WE DO THIS?"



emerging focus areas

Coker Park	Shelby & Main Line Crossing	Tryon Street in Uptown	Medical School Opportunity	East Trade / Government District	North End	Second Street	West Trade Corridor	South End Gateway
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EMPTY SPACES IN CHARLOTTE → ACTIVATE

- USE THEM
- POP UP SHOPS
- SPACES IN CITY
- BLM MURAL ON TRYON

RISING RENTS

- HOUSING AFFORDABILITY
- EQUITY
- CREATIVE SPACE
- CULTURE SHIFT

HOW TO ADDRESS: NEED THE QUALITY OVER QUANTITY → USE RECYCLED 2040 → REDESIGN: RESIDENTS, BUSINESS, SUPPORT, MORE BUSINESSES → NEED A LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL SUPPORT