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## Survey shows high artist interest in Arts on Gaines

### Officials: Project looks good on paper but financing an issue

By Julian Pecquet  
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

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For the past decade, wood-carving artist Steve Fox has been using his Brookwood Drive basement as a creative workshop.

But he says he'd be ready to give it up to move into a proposed development where artists would live, work and exhibit their creations, a place where they could share their views on everything from art to marketing.

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"A place like Arts on Gaines would be interesting because it would be a community," Fox said. "Right now, we're scattered all over the city and the county."

Fox is vice-chairman of a committee formed four years ago to look into creating a space for artists. He is among dozens of artists interested in moving to the site, which would mix affordable housing

with studio workspace.

Proponents say it would help revitalize Gaines Street, and they're hoping results from a recent survey will convince Tallahassee leaders to turn over a 4.5-acre, city-owned parcel at Gaines and Gay streets.

But city redevelopment officials, who have been counting on businesses to build retail space on Gaines Street, received a \$4.1 million offer for the site on Thursday from a residential developer. And city officials don't know how much support it can offer because of anticipated budget cuts.

"We need to make a decision soon, just for everyone's sake," said City Commissioner Mark Mustian.

The survey, commissioned by the Council on Culture and Arts, was completed by 332 artists. It showed that half are interested in relocating to a multi-purpose arts facility. About two-thirds expressed interest in renting studio or workspace.

"The responses were incredible," said Peggy Brady, the council's executive director. "It really solidifies what this group of citizens has been doing for the past three years working towards this point."

Based on the survey, Minneapolis-based nonprofit Artspace, a national leader in real-estate development for the arts, is proposing up to 55 affordable-housing units and 30 studio spaces.

Artspace is set to present the survey's findings 7-9 p.m. Tuesday at the Marriott Residence Inn at Gaines Street and Railroad Avenue. Earlier that day, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will make an announcement regarding a grant request for the project. COCA is seeking a \$225,000 grant to help get the project going.

"There's been conversation now for 20-some years about turning Gaines Street into an arts and entertainment district," said Mike Pate, the

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I agree. Gaines St. needs Art Space. By creating Art Space first the city's land in the area will only increase in value. The city needs to be true to its vision of creating a destination for the community.

Tennessee St. could do for some nice housing retail development across from FSU's campus. That is by far the worst corridor in the city. Our community should be focused on this area as well as part of our core improvements.

Posted by: **RedHillsNole** on Mon Jan 21, 2008 12:18 pm

At least do the math correctly. \$4.1 million for the property= minimal economic impact to the local economy. Arts Space's project=for the citizens and visitors alike with documented evidence that projects like these translate into economic development. This Arts Space project addresses both the city's stated interest in affordable housing and its goal of creating a sense of place on Gaines Street-with the added result that more and conducive development will follow. Take the \$4.1 Million and say hello to Tennessee or Pensacola Streets II primarily for FSU students. Do we want to continue to be a city known for its lack of follow through on its vision?

Posted by: **upstatedown** on Mon Jan 21, 2008 11:17 am

Do the math. \$4.1 million or a "symbolic" \$1? Our local politicians would probably go for the \$1 since it would feel good.

Posted by: **Buggerall** on Mon Jan 21, 2008 8:47 am



**Buy this photo** Mark Wallheiser/Democrat  
Steve Fox is shown Jan. 9 in his woodworking shop in the basement of his home on Brookwood Drive.

Artspace will present survey findings on the Arts on Gaines project 7-9 p.m. Tuesday at the Marriott Residence Inn, located at Gaines Street and Railroad Avenue.

Multimedia downloads:

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foundation's local program director and former publisher of the *Tallahassee Democrat*. "What we have now is some things actually coming to fruition."

Proponents say Artspace can be built within three years. It would include an "incubator" space to house the Boys' Choir of Tallahassee and the Tallahassee Ballet. It would also have rehearsal space for rent and performance/convention space for 300 to 500 people.

The project's cost isn't known, but COCA expects to have to raise at least several million dollars from the private sector. COCA also hopes to get a \$100,000 grant from the Legislature.

It's also not clear how much might be paid for the site. Local governments in most communities have turned over land for a symbolic \$1, said Wendy Holmes, vice president of consulting and resource development for Artspace.

Artspace, with work in 15 states, has completed 21 projects. It has 13 in the works, including Arts on Gaines. Artspace projects have helped redevelop communities, from Pittsburg to Buffalo, NY. Holmes said. The latest project, in Broward County, opened last weekend. Its 37 units are already full, and 200 artists are waiting to get in.

"Artists can help to be catalysts for economic development," Holmes said. "They're willing to be pioneers and go to areas that other people wouldn't consider, because they're so desperate for space, and they end up making an area hip and desirable."

The site at Gaines and Gay streets is considered ideal because of its proximity to the warehouses, workshops and galleries at Railroad Square arts park. The two sites could be linked with a pedestrian bridge.

"In combination with Railroad Square and this project, we now will have a cultural district," Brady said.

However, some still have questions and concerns.

Mustian said the project looked good on paper, but if Artspace isn't ready to make a large payment for the site, the city will have to find money elsewhere for planned Gaines Street road improvements.

"The demand (for Artspace) seems to be solid," Mustian said. "It's just in this budget climate, do we have the resources to subsidize it to the exclusion of other things?"

Atlanta-based residential and student-housing developer Cortland Partners has offered \$4.1 million for the site at Gaines and Gay. The city bought it in 2004 for \$3.5 million.

Even if the site isn't made available, Brady said, the community will come up with an alternative place for Arts on Gaines.

"We have absolutely no reason to think that this is not — after the survey, after all the due diligence that's been done — a project that this community needs and wants," she said. "It's going to happen."

✉ Contact reporter Julian Pecquet at (850) 599-2307 or [jpecquet@tallahassee.com](mailto:jpecquet@tallahassee.com).

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