



WICKFORD ART ASSOCIATION
A VISION FOR THE FUTURE
September 29, 2016

OUR MISSION

The purpose of the Association shall be to educate, encourage and inspire its membership, the local arts community and the general public and to promote fine arts in the community.

OUR VISION

Since the “birth” of the Wickford Art Association (WAA) in 1962 the organization has seen many changes. We have grown from a small group of artists to a full membership organization with a Board of Directors and staffers who organize art classes, juried art exhibits, free community events, the nationally famous Wickford Art Festival, and so much more. Our gallery facility at 36 Beach Street, Wickford, RI has served us well, but is now too small to accommodate all of the programs and events we host today, and those we plan for our future.

In response to this need, the WAA Board of Directors has voted to have the Building Committee explore possible options within Wickford Village for expansion/relocation of space for their gallery, exhibits, programs, classes and events.

The Wickford Art Association has expressed an interest in the Annex building. The Town’s Asset Management Commission has recommended that the Town Council agree to enter into discussion with the WAA relative to their interest in leasing or buying the Annex building. The Council, voted on September 25, 2016 to enter into a Memorandum of Intent and Understanding to “negotiate conditions” for the sale or lease of the Annex Building (55 Brown Street) and certain adjacent property for a period of five years or more, and to negotiate terms for a short term tenancy while long term negotiations take place.

The Town Hall Annex was originally the North Kingstown Free Library. Constructed in 1898, the library was made possible by a bequest from Mr. Caleb Allen Chadsey. Chadsey was a native of North Kingstown, born here in 1822. Orphaned when very young, he spent his early years in such adventurous occupations as Gold Rush “forty-niner” and sea captain. He eventually became a businessman with his business on Main Street and a fine residence on Brown Street. He was immensely successful in life and prior to his death in 1894, bequeathed \$10,000 and a portion of his land on Brown Street to the Town of North Kingstown for the construction of a library for the enjoyment of the people of the community he loved.

The WAA recognizes the opportunity to occupy the Town Hall Annex building as a solution for not only a sorely needed larger venue for the organization's own programs and activities, but also as a way to have a positive impact on the vitality of a struggling downtown Wickford by preserving an important historic building in the heart of the Village. The Wickford Art Association will utilize the building for events, exhibits and shows, and for offering educational opportunities such as classes and presentations for youth and adults, thereby enhancing revenues for Wickford merchants, and providing a center of cultural edification showcasing the arts, for townspeople and visitors of all socio-economic levels.

The organization's present location affords only 1,200 square feet of gallery space in a room that also does "double duty" as classroom, office space and event hall. There are also a little kitchenette, one bathroom and two small closets. The gallery is utilized for 12-plus exhibits per year, 47 -50 classes held year-round, free monthly community events, as well as meetings of various art and community groups. The annual Wickford Art Festival, which has become a nationally known event and is currently ranked (by Sunshine Artist Magazine) as the 17th best fine art festival in the country, is also organized out of this small venue. Though plans had begun in 2014 for construction of a larger structure at the 36 Beach Street location, the unfeasibility of those plans became apparent and the plans were abandoned.

The year 2016 has seen many changes in the organization. A new Board President and a new Board of Directors with a number of new Board members, have named a new Gallery Director. A revitalized organization has emerged, focused on expanding organizational capacity in a sustainable, incremental manner. In the words of the WAA's Board President, "Our goal [with the new location] is to provide improved class schedules, exhibits, shows, community events and our annual Festival in a larger, more centrally located facility. We remain committed to sustaining our high standards in the arts community...". Renovation and revitalization of the historic Town Hall Annex building will be undertaken as a five-year phased-in project with an estimated total budget of \$645,545.60.

PLANNING

VENUE

The Town Hall Annex is in need of renovation and repair. Mindful of its historic significance, the WAA seeks to maintain the character of the building. Immediate repairs to the building exterior will be concentrated on rebuilding the front entrance and significant repair of the back wall of the structure, all the while maintaining the period details and appeal of the building. The Town has hired an architect to conduct a structural inspection of the Town Hall Annex and has agreed to make all improvements identified in the inspection prior to any lease or purchase agreement.

One of the creative strategies encouraged by the American Planning Association (*How the Arts and Culture Sector Catalyzes Economic Vitality*) for improving economic vitality is “implementing the reuse of existing sites or buildings for arts and culture purposes”.

The suitability of the Town Hall Annex to house an arts organization, specifically one that will be exhibiting fine art, as well as holding cultural events and educational classes, is evident upon reviewing the floor plan of the structure. The first floor comprises an area that more than doubles the square footage of the space currently available at the WAA’s 36 Beach Street facility. Quite coincidentally, the windows in the space are placed high off the floor. When the building was utilized as a library they would have been located purposefully above the high book shelves. This arrangement provides ample wall space for hanging artworks and other displays, so the expense of window replacement is not an issue, and will not necessitate making any renovations that would disturb the historic character of the structure.

The back wall of the building overlooks Wickford harbor. The renovation and repair of the back wall of the structure will incorporate glass French doors to provide ambient light and provide a clear view of the harbor. This entrance will provide access to a large deck which will be utilized for public functions such as “wine and cheese gallery nights”, and picnics for children’s art classes. There is wheelchair access to the building at the rear entrance which meets ADA compliance. The front entryway is large enough to accommodate an art library and perhaps a small gift shop. The second floor affords ample space for staff offices, meeting rooms and storage.

REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN

Project for Public Spaces (PPS) is the central hub of the global Placemaking movement, connecting people to ideas, expertise, and partners who share a passion for creating vital places. According to PPS “Quality of Life is a key economic driver. Factors ranging from good health care, vibrant public spaces, and recreational opportunities are crucial in attracting a skilled labor force and desirable employers.” (How Your Community Can Thrive Even in Tough Times – pps.org). Consider the potential for growth of the manufacturing hub at Quonset/Davisville and the attraction a vibrant, culturally stimulating Wickford center could have on potential employers and the employees who would relocate to such a community.

William H. Whyte, author of *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, noted that “pedestrian friendly, active spaces are safer, more economically productive, and more conducive to healthy civic communities”.

In “5 Ways Arts Projects Can Improve Struggling Communities” (pps.org) the PPS states; “Participation in cultural activities connects people to each other and to their community institutions, providing pathways to other forms of participation. Thus, arts and culture can create opportunities for political expression, community dialogue, shared cultural experiences and civic work. Community-based arts practitioners bring members of a community together to solve problems, build relationships, and get involved in ways that rebuild social capital.” They also

note that, “Nonprofit arts and cultural organizations are employers, producers, consumers and key promoters of their cities and regions. Most of all, [they] are valuable contributors to the business community”.

In an effort to assure transparency and to involve our community in the realization of our vision for our future, the WAA has reached out to the Wickford Economic Development Advisory Board who, at their September 12, 2016 meeting, voiced their unanimous support for our potential move to the Annex building. Our Gallery Director and a member of the WAA Board have also met with the Wickford Village Association who added their support for our occupancy of the Annex.

INCREASED REVENUES FOR WICKFORD BUSINESSES

The American Planning Association, in their publication “How the Arts and Culture Sector Catalyzes Economic Vitality”, states “The recognition of a community’s arts and culture assets (and the marketing of them) is an important element of economic development. Arts and cultural activities can draw crowds from within and around the community. Increasing the numbers of visitors as well as enhancing resident participation helps build economic and social capital.” Locating the WAA in the historic library building (now the Town Hall Annex), within walking distance of the many shops and restaurants on Brown and Main Streets will add foot traffic comprising both local residents and out-of-town visitors. For example, the Wickford Art Festival, which is ranked as one of the “Top 100 Shows in the Country” by the Harris Poll; and by Sunshine Magazine as “The No. 1 Fine Art Festival in New England – No.17 in the USA”, boasts over 40,000 (North Kingstown Police Dept. estimate) visitors over its two-day schedule, and events such as “Poetry and Art” – an exhibit featuring original poetry written to reflect works of fine artists – had over 350 visitors just at the opening reception, a number that was restricted due to the small size of the gallery at the WAA’s Beach Street venue.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The WAA hosts 47 - 50 classes annually led by professional, juried artists serving approximately 300 students over the course of a year. These are paid classes intended for artists, and aspiring artists, seeking professional instruction in painting, drawing, photography and textiles. There are also monthly Community Events, free and open to the public, offering the opportunity for any-and-all to view works of fine art and learn about the artists in a comfortable, light and welcoming setting. It is the intention of the WAA to utilize the larger space afforded by the Town Hall Annex to provide improved class schedules, exhibits and shows, and free community events for greater numbers of people.

The National Endowment for the Arts did a study in 2012 exploring why some states showed a higher rate of attendance at arts and cultural events. They determined that “children who visited an art museum as children are nearly five times as likely to visit art museums as adults”. With arts attendance this closely related to arts exposure in youth, the WAA is strongly committed to

providing opportunities for children to view, learn about and participate in the creation of art. A community with an arts and cultural facility at its center, a building of historic significance, within walking distance of schools, a major playground facility, shops and residences offers those opportunities to all, regardless of socio-economic status.

The WAA has a scholarship program, supported by a raffle of fine art works donated by member artists that provides \$5,000.00 annually to Rhode Island high school seniors who have been accepted at a fine arts college - artists supporting artists to ensure cultural sustainability.

COMMUNITY CULTURAL ENHANCEMENT

The new WAA facility will be designed to be a comfortable place, a place that will be welcoming to people, where they will want to spend time; a place that will be accessible to all. The new facility, a building of historic significance, will put forth a superior image, one that will instill a sense of pride in the people of the community, and will be a focal point that will draw visitors both from the community and from out of town, enhancing the image of Wickford Village as a “destination” for travel and tourism.

Creating a cultural center in the community has been proven to be a “draw” for today’s workforce. The American Planning Association’s research has shown that people exploring places they wish to live and work as seeking “places with entertainment options, public interaction, lively streets, recreational and educational amenities, along with arts and culture activities and amenities”.

The new WAA facility will be that place; where people from all walks of life are welcomed and encouraged to immerse themselves in the arts and in the beauty of their culturally rich community.

SUSTAINABILITY

In order to fund the repairs and renovations needed to transform the Town Hall Annex into an arts and cultural center for the Wickford Village, The Wickford Art Association will be seeking grants from numerous sources. We have a meeting scheduled for September 29, 2016, with The Rhode Island Foundation regarding the establishment of an endowment fund. This fund will be designed to provide sustainable income to ensure the support and maintenance of our new facility in perpetuity. We have submitted a grant application to the Centreville Savings Bank Foundation to fund needed renovations. We are currently working on a Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA) grant request which we plan to submit on October 1, 2016, to help fund a five-year, phased-in renovation plan.

Foundations and other funding entities look carefully at an organization’s ability to not only complete the project(s) for which they seek funding, but also to sustain that which is accomplished. Members of the Wickford Art Association Board of Directors believe stewardship of the historic library site to be of utmost importance to that effort. The board has

discussed how to approach maintenance of a historic building and believes that participating in a proven maintenance program, one that will ensure the building's integrity and historic significance, will be of great importance as the organization explores funding opportunities for needed improvements. We have received notification of the support of Preserve Rhode Island, who will provide the stewardship needed to assure preservation of this historic building.