

4 Promote Local Arts

The arts helped to redefine the identity of Wicker Park and Bucktown. Although the arts scene has changed significantly, the identity of the area as a creative community has remained. The creative vibe is one of the aspects that makes WPB unique, serving as an attraction for residents and a benefit to the local economy. But while the arts are an indelible part of WPB, much remains to be done to celebrate and support the arts community, much of which goes largely unnoticed. Promoting local arts is about maintaining WPB's identity – about helping artists remain in the community, marketing their presence, and putting them to work on a range of community projects that will help to further distinguish WPB as a creative and creating hub.

Create Arts Space

Once home to a strong and stable community of artists drawn to the area for its grittiness, space, and affordability, WPB has in recent years suffered from an exodus of visual and performing artists who can no longer afford to live and work in the area. Defined in large part by the creative community that helped initiate the neighborhoods' revitalization, Wicker Park and Bucktown must strive to retain remaining artists and attract creative newcomers as well. The following recommendations outline strategies for developing or recovering affordable live and work spaces – both temporary and permanent – for artists within the SSA's boundaries.



Photo Booth suggestion from WPB Open House.

["By the early 1990s, Wicker Park had more artists than any other zip code between New York City and Los Angeles."] *Quote from WPB Open House Storytelling Booth.*



["Wicker Park Bucktown would not be Wicker Park Bucktown without the artistic and creative community."] *Quote from WPB Open House Storytelling Booth.*

Figure 77. Promote Local Arts Overview Diagram



4.1 Collect and track arts-housing and workspace data.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Dedicate a portion of an SSA staff member's time to collecting and tracking local arts-housing and workspace data.

The public outreach process for this planning study collected much anecdotal evidence and many perception-based comments concerning the affordability issues faced by local artists in WPB. Such input is no doubt based in very grave realities. In order to appropriately respond to these concerns, however, the WPB SSA must first accurately quantify and measure the severity of the arts-affordability issue. To do so, the SSA should dedicate a portion of an SSA staff member or intern's time to creating and continually updating a database of artist housing and workspace resources within the district.

To compile this database, the SSA should begin by reaching out to area arts organizations and tapping their knowledge about artist housing units and studio space in WPB. The database should include information on unit use (live, work, or both), unit facilities and amenities, square footage, pricing – current costs as well as those of previous years if possible, tenure, owner contact information, and whether the spaces are dedicated for arts' use in perpetuity.

The information compiled in the database should be supplemented with the information documented in the cultural audit as well as any data made available by local arts organizations reflecting the average incomes and profits earned through the sale of artwork of neighborhood artists. Taken together, the SSA will be able to gauge the need and discrepancy between the cost of living and working as an artist in WPB and what the average actively producing artist can afford.



Preserving artist housing in WPB will require crunching some numbers...

4.2 Provide housing counseling for Do-It-Yourself renovations.

ACTION > Advocate

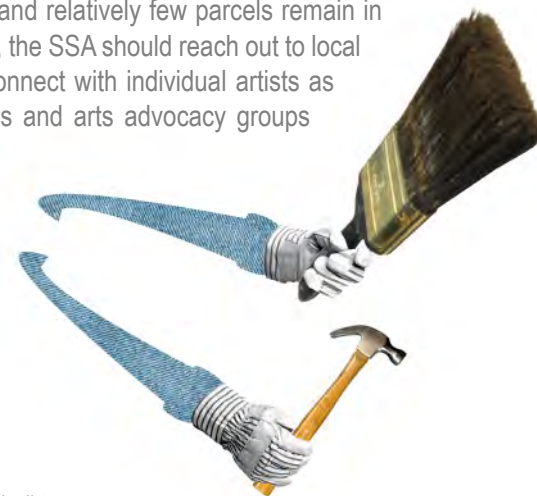
Reach out to local arts organizations to connect with artists, artist collectives, or other creative people on a budget who are interested in renovating live-work space in Wicker Park Bucktown.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

(If possible, enlist volunteers or) hire a team of skilled numbers and finance people, home renovators, designers, contractors, and/or tinkerers to conduct a series of DIY housing counseling classes tailored to people who like hands-on projects.

The cost of newly constructed live-work space along WPB's corridors is beyond the reach of most working artists. The costs of rehabbing existing structures can be equal to or greater than new construction, but a DIY rehab process can result in significant cost savings, removing the cost of labor from the equation. Artists and craftspeople, people with an eye for design, adept at working with their hands, and in control of their own schedule, are good candidates for DIY renovations provided that they have the know-how or access to the know-how needed to navigate the process.

The WPB SSA should sponsor a pilot housing counseling program tailored to artists and craftspeople for DIY renovations. Rather than focusing solely on the home purchasing process, the DIY renovation class would cover not only financial literacy, savings, loans, and property acquisition, but also the permitting, demolition, and reconstruction steps for new home or studio owners. Because the cost of real estate in WPB is high and increasing and relatively few parcels remain in need of major overhaul, the SSA should reach out to local arts organizations to connect with individual artists as well as artist collectives and arts advocacy groups interested in tackling larger-scale projects with pooled skills and resources.



... as well as getting your hands dirty.

4.3 Convert vacant ground floor retail space into Live-Work space for artists.

ACTION > Advocate

Reach out to property owners and interested artists to explain the benefits and constraints of the proposed initiative.

Partner with property owners to pursue an administrative adjustment at the Department of Zoning to change properties zoned B3 in specified districts within the SSA to B2.

Assist artists and building owners in navigating the process for obtaining special use permits and having their taxing designation changed from commercial to residential.

The current zoning classifications that govern most of the SSA reward the dedication of ground floor space to retail uses by allowing an additional floor of residential space above. In recent years, a large number of buildings have been erected under this bonus, resulting in a significant increase in retail space along street frontages throughout the SSA. Much of this space has remained vacant since completion, awaiting the movement of suitable tenants beyond existing retail areas. The result is pleasing to no one: sidewalks drained of life, “For Lease” signs plastered across storefronts, and expensive new construction producing no revenue.

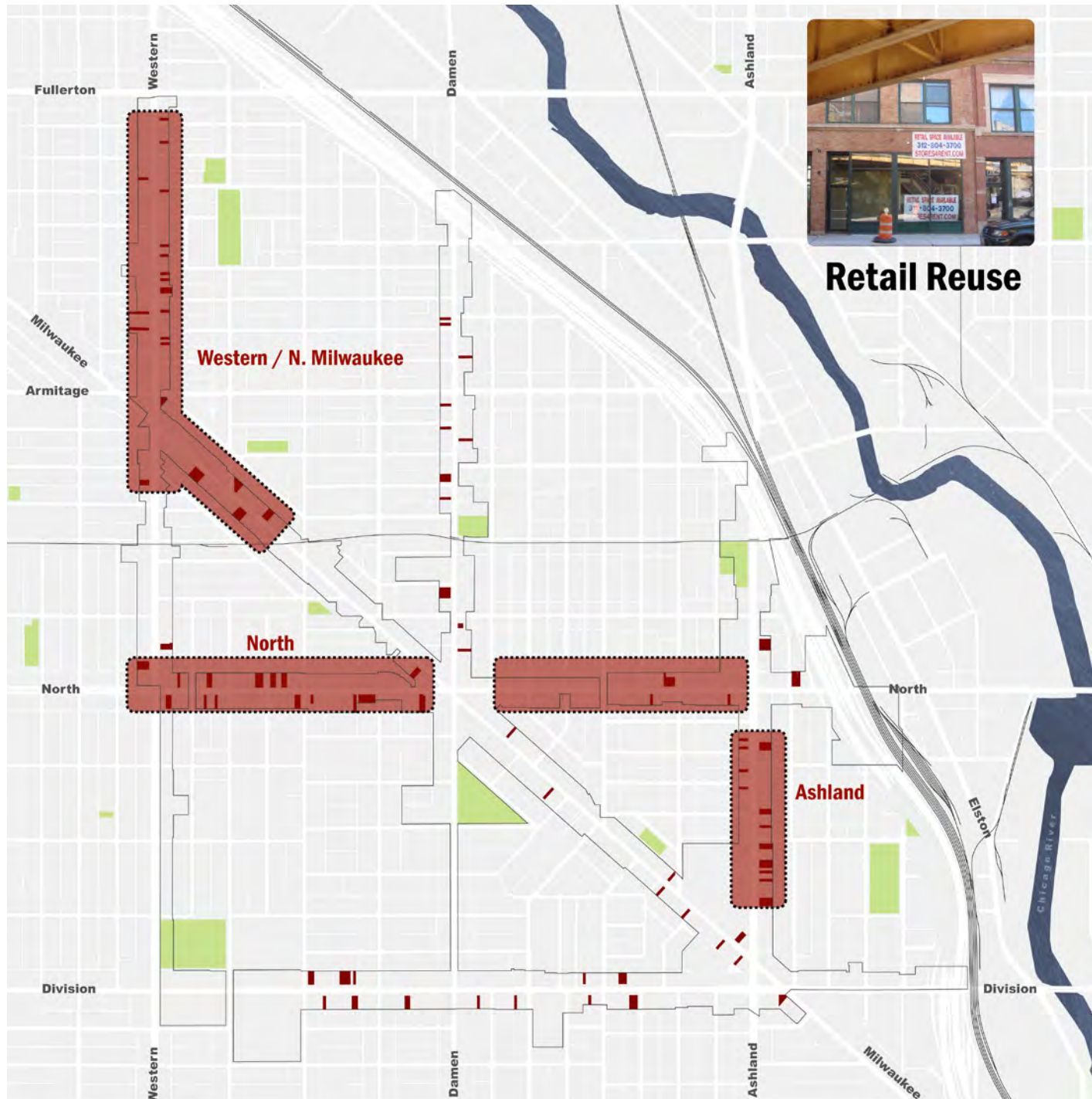


Vacant retail space on Milwaukee informally showcasing the work of a local artist.

[“...was impressed to learn that if a retail storefront is empty more than a month the owner is required to pay for posters that cover the windows that have random Wicker Park Bucktown neighborhood facts. very cool!”] *Quote from WPB Open House Postcard from the Future*

As demonstrated in the retail market analysis, the retail trade area surrounding the SSA is currently meeting local demand for most retail categories, particularly those with small space needs that can easily fit into these shallow first floor spaces. As a result, we do not foresee simple market forces leading to the widespread leasing of these unused storefronts in the near future. This is especially so along the corridors west of Damen Avenue throughout the SSA. Though the coming years may see an expansion of retail vitality west along North and northwest along Milwaukee from the Milwaukee-North-Damen core, this process will take some time and may never fully occur.





For this reason, we recommend that the SSA advocate for the conversion of storefronts to artists' gallery, studio, and, where appropriate, live/work space in three zones: North Avenue to the east and west of the six-point intersection, Milwaukee Avenue between North and Western, and Ashland Avenue. The addition of gallery, studio, and live/work space would achieve a number of positive goals for the SSA:

1. The arts community in Wicker Park Bucktown will be reinvigorated by the expansion of affordable space, preserving the most treasured aspect of life in the community.
2. Viable businesses on streets that are currently deadened by empty storefronts will benefit as artists replace "For Lease" signs with original works of art and generate additional foot traffic in harmony with the character of these streets.
3. Building owners will begin to realize a modest return on their investment in extensive ground floor retail space and, as traffic increases, attract the conventional retail and service tenants for whom the spaces were originally conceived.

Figure 78. Proposed New Arts Districts

Two substantial obstacles stand in the way of realizing this vision:

Zoning: While current zoning allows gallery and studio uses, conversion to live/work space for artists will require a special use permit from the City for lots zoned B3 and are excluded from those areas which are zoned commercial or manufacturing. For this reason it is recommended that these districts be rezoned to have a B2 designation which will allow live/work units on the ground floor by right. By seeking a comprehensive zoning change, the SSA will assure the City that these changes are part of a carefully conceived and monitored program for neighborhood renewal.

Cost: Newly constructed retail spaces were created at substantial cost and, to date, developers and building owners have demonstrated reluctance to lower rents to meet the current market demand. Moreover, the installation of kitchen and bath facilities to meet building codes will require a modest investment in any unit converted to live/work space.



Figures 79a., b., and c.: before and after renderings of vacant commercial space as advertising space for a local retailer, as art installation space, and as inhabitable gallery space.



These commercial units currently come with a higher tax rate than if they were residential units. However, once the zoning is changed or a special use permit is issued, the tax rate should switch to a residential rate, which would alleviate the costs of having a higher tax burden.

We believe the SSA can play a substantial role in overcoming these obstacles by providing the leverage to request a zoning change or special use permit and providing both building owners and prospective tenants with a path to follow to achieve the goal of replacing vacant retail spaces with live-work space for artists. The SSA should lead this effort by recruiting interested artists and land owners in an effort to match the two. The SSA must take an active role in educating building owners about the opportunities and limitations of the program. They must understand that such adaptations and permits will do nothing to limit their rights and prospects. By bringing in artists today, owners will finally begin to see income from these spaces and will increase the value of their overall investment by reinforcing the cultural value of living and working in Wicker Park Bucktown.

This effort could begin modestly with the hopes of gaining two or three live/work spaces in the first year which will require modest personnel resources with the hopes of growing the program as experience is gained, lessons are learned, publicity is ongoing, and as resources are available.

Finally, the SSA would do well to solicit the active participation of area arts groups, including Chicago Artists Resource (CAR), in support of the program. These groups can leverage networks to recruit artists from around the City in order to draw from as large a pool as possible. For the program to be effective and fair, there will need to be a legal agent or agreement in place to ensure that the converted spaces are, in fact, being actively used as live/work studio spaces in which artists are creating and producing.

4.4 Develop affordable arts space in the upper floors of mixed-use buildings.

ACTION > *Review*

Work with the Aldermen, local arts organizations, and developers to encourage the creation of affordable arts space in the upper floors of mixed-use buildings.

ACTION > *Advocate*

Reach out the property owners along Milwaukee Avenue to prompt the conversion of underutilized upper floor spaces into live and/or work space for artists.

Local arts organizations like the Near NorthWest Arts Council (NNWAC) are already at work developing affordable artist housing and work space in WPB. Currently, NNWAC is in the process of transforming historic St. Paul's on North Avenue into a hub for the arts, converting the sanctuary into a performance space and reprogramming the remaining spaces for classes. The SSA should support such grassroots arts initiatives and work with the Aldermen in the review of new construction or conversion projects within the SSA's boundaries to encourage the creation of affordable arts space in the upper floors of mixed-use buildings as well.

Along Milwaukee Avenue where some upper floor spaces are underutilized, the SSA in partnership with the NNWAC or another arts organization should reach out to property owners to investigate the possibility of converting unused or underused space into affordable arts space.



Source: <http://artistscondos.com>

4.5 Support arts programs in the local schools and celebrate new spaces for arts instruction and incubator studios.

ACTION > *Advocate*

Support and market the strength of existing arts programs at local schools as one means of improving perceptions about local educational resources.

Support and celebrate the creation of new spaces for arts instruction, like St. Paul's on North Avenue.

Education is an issue in Wicker Park Bucktown primarily because perceptions about local public schools lead young parents to relocate when their children reach school-age, resulting in high turnover among neighbors and a lack of commitment and grassroots drive to effect change and improvements within the schools. Given the creative roots of the community and the talents harbored within many local families, it follows that several area schools have strong arts programs, offering a unique educational asset to WPB youth.

As a voice for the community, the SSA should make sure that people know about and take advantage of the arts education opportunities at Pritzker Elementary School, the Hans Christian Andersen School, the Midwest Arts Academy, and the Pulaski Fine Arts Academy. In marketing the local arts education resources, the SSA should also advertise other spaces for creative exploration, including St. Paul's on North Avenue that the Near NorthWest Arts Council is currently converting into a center for the arts.

While developing a WPB arts school with studio incubator space so that students could witness artists at work on a daily basis is likely outside the scope of the WPB SSA, evaluating the potential for such an institution is completely in keeping with the SSA's objectives. In the future, should a local arts organization, educational institution, or other party indicate interest in forming such a school in Wicker Park Bucktown, the SSA should join the advocacy and capacity building effort as a local partner and a supporter of the project and the future artists of WPB.

Market What You Have

WPB has a great foundation of the arts to build on but to retain and assist local artists, marketing is necessary so the world (and residents) know what is in the community.

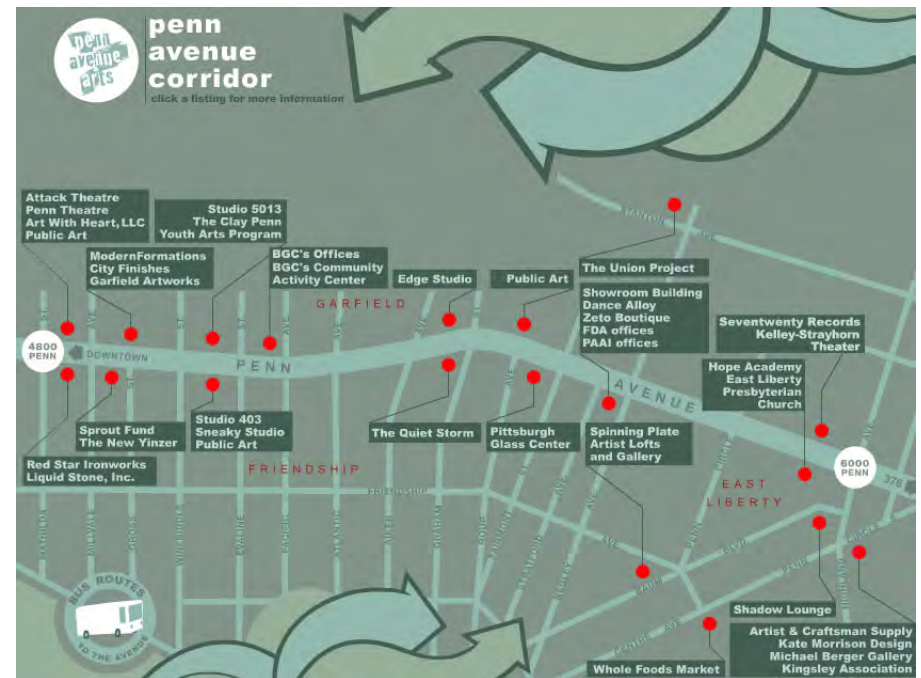
4.6 Create an interactive on-line map of arts resources.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Commission a digital web artist to design an interactive online map of arts resources in WPB.

Place the map on the WPB SSA website and send out an email blast and press release announcing its presence.

In conjunction with the marketing efforts described in Recommendations 3.2 (developing an online storytelling component of the SSA website), 3.3 (developing an online directory and calendar of events), and 3.5 (marketing to tourists), the WPB SSA's website should become a marketing tool for local artists and arts events. The SSA should commission a digital web artist to design an interactive map of arts resources in WPB including historically significant art-related locations, artist housing hubs, artist studio locations and links to personal web pages, galleries and opening notices, festival locations and dates, nearby museums, neighborhood murals, public art, installations, and street furniture, arts organizations, art classes and schools, frame shops, art supply stores, theaters, and live music venues. The map should be prominently featured on the SSA website, and an email blast and/or press release should announce its launch. To remain relevant and usable, the map's contents must be updated and current. Great examples of this initiative have been completed across the country; check out Pittsburgh's Penn Avenue Corridor (www.pennavenuearts.org) and Philadelphia's Frankford Avenue (www.frankfordavenuearts.org).



Source: www.pennavenuearts.org

4.7 Hire an arts district manager dedicated to promoting local artists and crafters.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Hire an arts district manager to act as a liaison between the SSA and local artists and arts organizations, to promote local artists and crafters, and to promote WPB as an arts hub.

WPB is on the map as an artsy and creative community, but with real estate prices on the rise causing many artists and galleries to relocate, many are concerned that the area's future as an arts hub is in jeopardy. The WPB SSA should hire a full time arts district manager dedicated to promoting local artists and crafters and promoting Wicker Park Bucktown as an arts hub. The district manager should serve on relevant SSA committees, representing the interests of local artists as well.

In addition to providing artists with information on upcoming open shows and competitions, recruiting new gallery owners to locate in the area, supporting area arts and craft festivals, and spearheading many of the initiatives described within this section (Section 4), two initial projects that the arts district manager should undertake include:

- Joining gallery owners and art collectors associations and encouraging them to have meetings locally; and
- Organizing an “Art for the Cash Poor” event in which local artists display artworks for sale for less than a given amount (\$150 for example). Philadelphia’s Art for the Cash Poor event draws art appreciators, and creative people from all over the City.



Source: www.inliquid.com

4.8 Create a talent pool of “second-order” creatives, WPB’s design professionals.

ACTION > Advocate

Recognize “second-order” creatives, or design professionals, as an important part of WPB’s artistic community, and tap their skills and talents as the plan moves toward implementation.

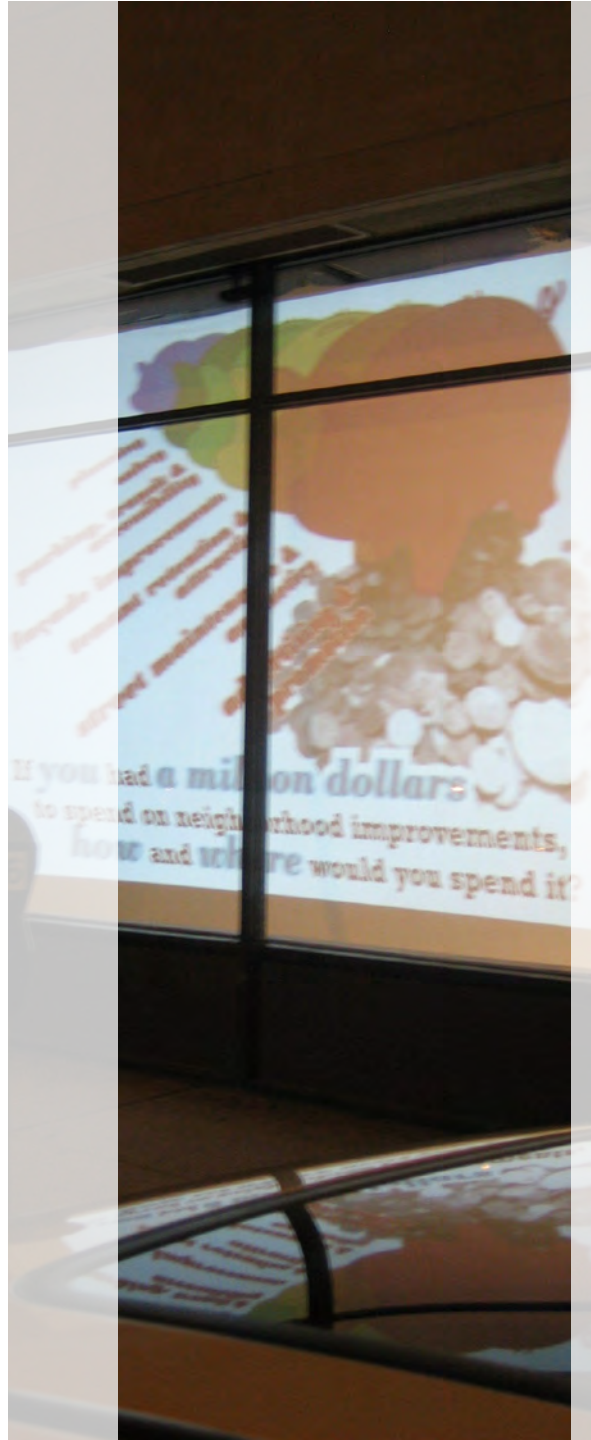
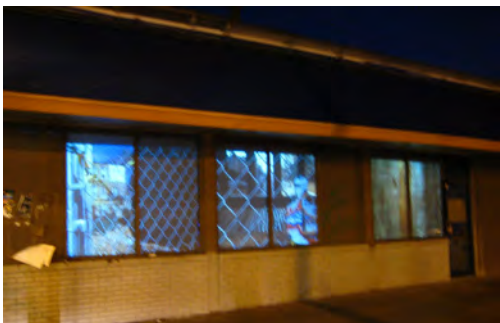
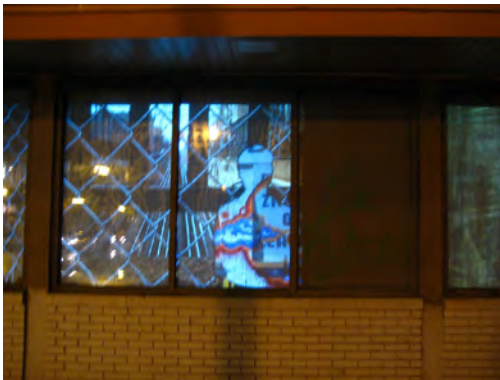
Compile a list of local design professionals and distribute a How Can I Help questionnaire (or volunteer survey).

Often times a focus on local arts excludes those not traditionally viewed as artists. Architects, landscape architects, graphic designers, web designers among others are growing in number within WPB. These “second-order creatives” are motivated and talented individuals that could play an important role in implementing components of this plan.

In fact, some have already helped to create conceptual plans for Mautene Court and guide the development of this Master Plan. The SSA should consider compiling a list of these local individuals and help to organize networking events to introduce them to each other and to this Plan.



Don't forget to take a look in the mirror.



4.9 Use your video projector.

ACTION > *Spend the Budget*

Work with ground floor property owners or tenants along the corridor to establish a roving video art installation in WPB. Commission video and animation art by local artists or students.

The SSA purchased a nice projector to help support the public outreach process for this master plan. It was first used to project a video animation created by Interface Studio in a storefront window on Milwaukee Avenue for three weeks during the time the WPB Open Houses were taking place. Now that the projector is secured, the SSA should put it to regular public use. The SSA should establish agreements with landowners to make use of underutilized storefront windows for temporary video installations by artists and students. The cost is minimal, but night time presence significant. Don't forget to plug the SSA in each video animation.

*Far Left: Photos of artist video installation at the vacant Burger King in Wicker Park. Source: WPB SSA
Left: Image of Interface Studio video installation for the WPB Open Houses.*

Bring Art to Commerce and to the City

The commercial corridors in WPB owe much of their success to the area's reputation as a hub of arts and creativity. Many of the shops and entertainment venues cater to customers who share a common aesthetic and appreciation for art and design. The following recommendations are intended to make the relationship between local artists and businesses more explicit and reciprocal.

4.10 Create a sign rebate program using local artists as designers.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Develop a program to subsidize the design and installation of store signage.

WPB is already characterized, in part, by its mix of antique-y and quirky signs. Many of these add significant value to the experience of walking through WPB and make for great photographs to boot. To help maintain and expand this aspect of the community, the SSA should create a program to merge the talent of local artists with the needs of local retail businesses. The SSA should consider paying 50% of the costs (up to a maximum amount) of designing, fabricating, and installing new signage for those businesses participating in the program.



Local signage.

4.11 Create roving galleries by integrating art in local stores.

ACTION > Advocate

Poll corridor banks and businesses to determine their interest in displaying artworks made by local artists and designers on the walls of their bank, shop, salon, restaurant, office, etc.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

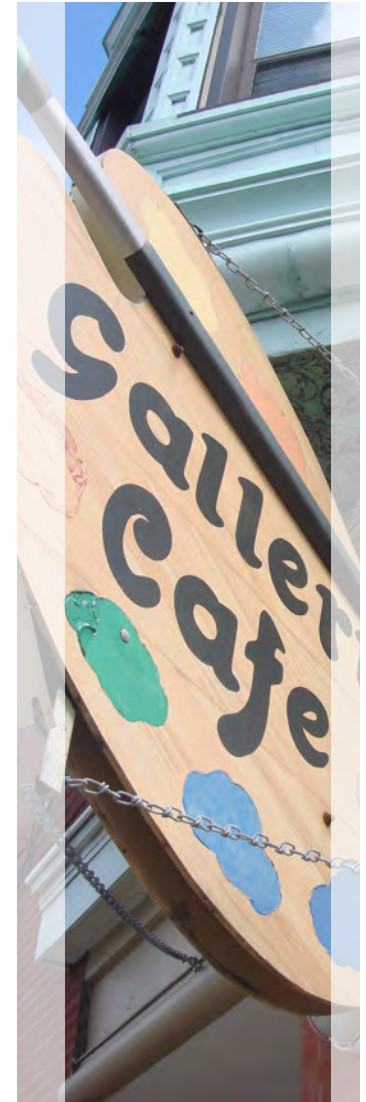
Formalize the relationships between businesses and artists by curating rotating exhibits in these new "galleries."

Market regularly occurring opening nights or gallery walks from space to space.

Several WPB businesses – cafes, bars, and restaurants, in particular – already enjoy partnerships with local artists. Others, banks included, would do well to follow their lead, inviting artists to populate the business's interior with contemporary local artworks that add color and interest to the walls. In return, the artists would claim a bit of gallery space in which to display these pieces for sale.

Such mutually beneficial arrangements should be encouraged, formalized, and marketed, and the WPB SSA should play a role. After surveying banks and business owners, the SSA should compile a list of those interested and distribute the list among neighborhood arts organizations, encouraging local artists to contact the SSA if he or she finds such a "gallery" opportunity appealing. The SSA would then work with local arts organizations to curate and coordinate the creation of a series of such "galleries." Once the "galleries" are established, the SSA should organize and market a regular opening night or gallery walk among these spaces, welcoming neighbors and visitors to view the art, meet the artists, and perhaps enjoy a happy hour cocktail, a bite to eat, or a special sale depending on the venue.

Local signage.



4.12 Enhance the Flat Iron as WPB's arts hub.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Financially support the efforts of the Flat Iron Artists to promote the local arts, hold events, and reinforce the Flat Iron as the center of WPB's arts vibe.

ACTION > Advocate

Partner with the owner of the Flat Iron Building (or that of another large, arts-related building) to create a publicly-accessible hub for arts within WPB.

In the wake of Around the Coyote leaving the Flat Iron, a new group of artists have mobilized to fill the void, organize festivals, and promote the local arts. This group's efforts should be supported to help promote WPB's arts scene. The SSA should consider financial support with the long term goal of making the Flat Iron the central location for all publicly-available information about the local arts. A publicly-accessible space could take the form of a room that serves as an arts information desk, a home base for promoting local festivals, or a rooftop art garden that will bring WPB's art scene to a new level - literally.

A community that celebrates artists and art, greenery and green-thinking as WPB does would benefit from a publicly-accessible rooftop art garden to showcase the best of the neighborhood. While the iconic Flat Iron Building, located at the nexus of WPB and highly visible from the Northwest Tower proposed for redevelopment as a green hotel (Recommendation 5.9) is a prime candidate, all of WPB's large arts-related buildings should be evaluated for their potential. The rooftop should include a green roof to help manage stormwater, a sculpture garden, a plaza and seating area, as well as some surface murals. The elevated garden space should be open during the day for those seeking a different kind of public lounging space and in the evenings for gallery-style opening events and parties. The view toward downtown will be fantastic.

["... was here to see all the fabulous artwork at 'Around the Coyote.' It is fantastic the way they have upgraded the Flat Iron Building... Now there are artists studios/residences on the second and third floors and a fantastic rooftop patio for outdoor exhibits. The main floor is strictly retail - that is, artists' work on display and for sale (year round). Rents are extremely low due to a subsidy from the City. The building looks fantastic and is truly the gateway to the WPB area!"]

Quote from WPB Open House Postcard from the Future.



* example designed by NIP paysage, Montreal

Figure 80. Rendering of the potential for a roof garden on top of the Flat Iron Building.



4.13 Introduce new public art.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Introduce new works of public art that are cost effective but make an impact at critical locations within WPB.

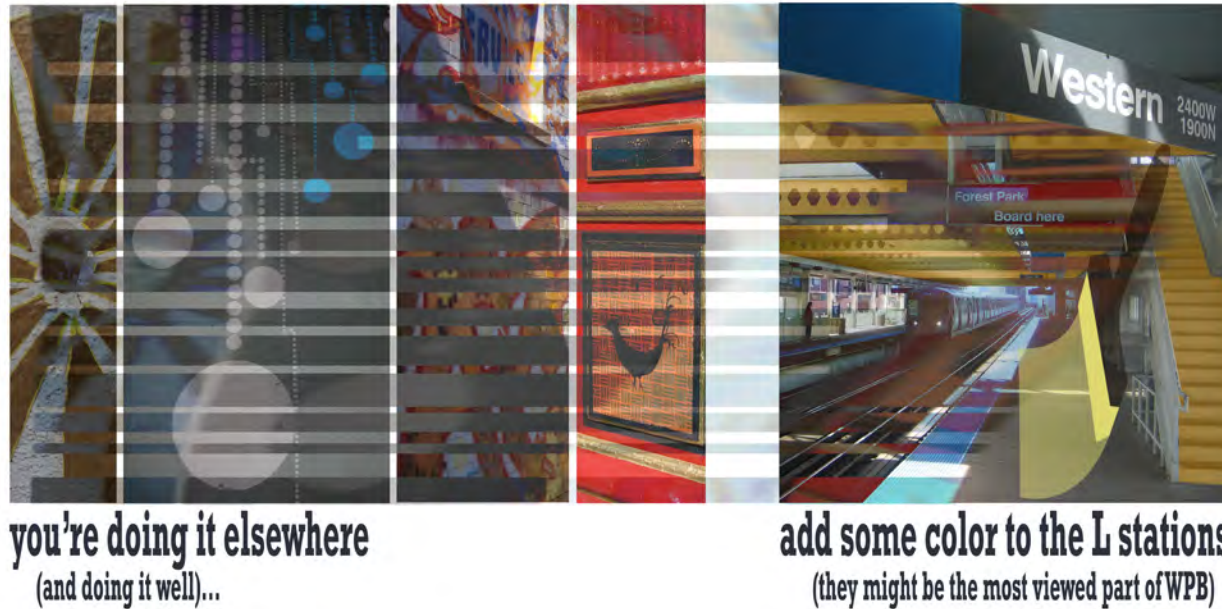
Public art can make a significant impact on the perception and use of space. WPB's current public art offerings primarily comprise of a variety of wall murals – some official, others not. Given the size of WPB, new public art should be considered in those locations where the impact and visibility are the greatest. These include:

CTA “L” Stations – Add some color to the “L,” brighten the daily commute, give passersby something to look at, and help visitors recognize that this is WPB. The adopt a station program by the CTA as well as “arts in transit” initiatives started along the Brown Line are local resources to build on to make each “L” station in WPB unique to WPB. (Also see Recommendation 7.31)

Ashland Avenue – Leverage the movement of the cars along the street by integrating kinetic sculptures into the median, and developing playful signage tailored to the car to encourage those stuck in traffic to reconsider Ashland’s islands. (Also see Recommendation 6.6)

Intersection of Western and Division – Improve the intersection at Western Avenue to create stronger gateway to Humboldt Park and soften the edges of the adjacent institutions. (Also see Recommendation 3.1)

Under the Kennedy – Brighten the underbelly of the Kennedy at Ashland, North, and Division as gateways to WPB with reflective murals and new lighting. (Also see Recommendation 7.8)



brighten your daily commute



give passersby something to look at

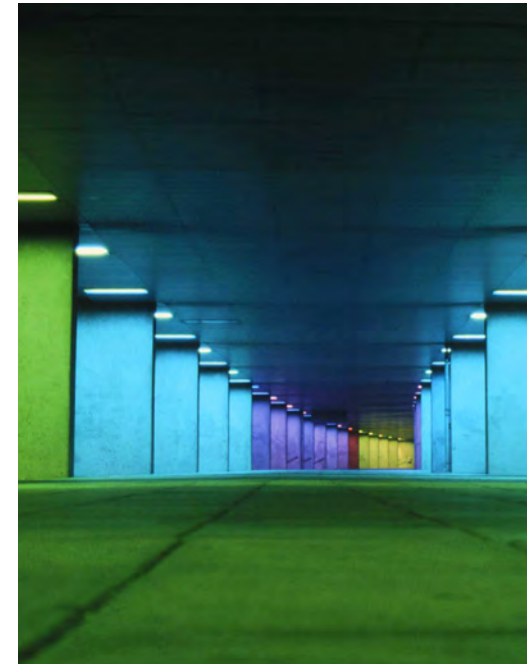
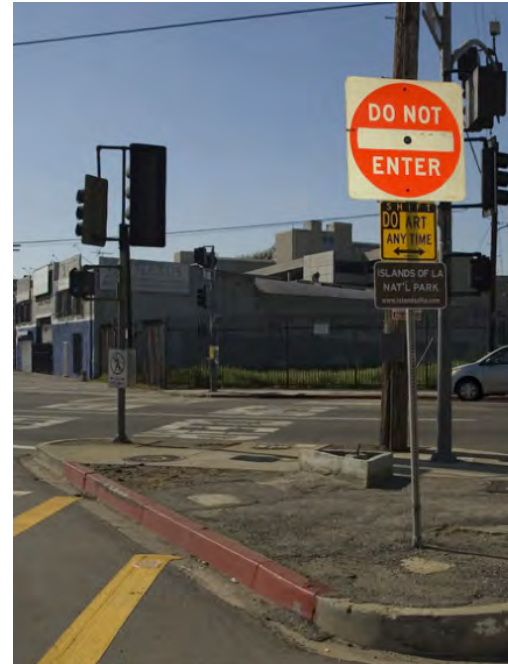


help visitors recognize that this is WPB

Figure 81. Dress Up the “L” Stations Diagram

Construction Sites – Redefine expectations for construction fencing and scaffolding to include opportunities for temporary public art. (Also see Recommendation 7.7)

New public art in WPB should also reinforce and promote the community's "green" identity by integrating water elements, energy, and wind through kinetic sculptures that engage and enrich the natural environment.



Top: Kinetic sculpture installation along Chicago's Magnificent Mile. Source: www.themagnificentmile.com
Lower: Islands of LA National Park conceptual art installation. Source: www.islandsofla.com

Top: You Are Beautiful, Chicago. Source: www.flickr.com
Lower: Islands of LA installation. Source: www.islandsofla.com

Top: Scaffolding and signs temporary art installation, NYC.
Lower: LED light installation.

4.14 Merge streetscape design with local arts talent.

ACTION > Spend the Budget

Commission new streetscape furniture from local artists.

ACTION > Advocate

Work with the Alderman's office and City departments to facilitate implementation and permitting.

New streetscape elements including benches, trash cans, signs, lighting, shelters, news stands, and bike racks are valuable amenities for mixed-use neighborhoods such as Wicker Park and Bucktown. Instead of purchasing these elements from catalogues, however, the SSA should commission these elements from local artists. Successful examples of this type of program exist in New York, Philadelphia, and Amsterdam among other cities. With SSA support, WPB could be a national model for merging the arts with streetscape design while keeping dollars in the local economy. The first pilot project should be to commission and install 10-20 new bike racks along Milwaukee Avenue. Close coordination will be necessary with the City and Alderman's office for location, installation, and permitting.



Functional public art, Rochester, NY.

Art racks in Louisville, KY (bottom) and elsewhere.