

On October 25 - 27, 2016 a series of four focus group meetings led by theater consultant Don Hirsch were held to solicit comments, ideas and suggestions about the potential development of a creative arts facility in South Burlington's emerging City Center district. Those attending the sessions included a mix of local and regional arts organization representatives, South Burlington City Staff and City Councillors, members of the Library and Recreation committees, other interested residents, business owners and educators.

Four questions were posed to participants. The questions were:

1. **Describe a successful South Burlington City Center for the Arts? What can it be and do for the community?**
2. **What are the challenges to development of a creative arts facility in City Center?**
3. **Who would the stakeholders be? Who could benefit from it?**
4. **What might go on in a South Burlington City Center for the Arts? What kind of programming, activities, etc.?**

Found below is the collection of responses to the questions given by those in attendance. Answers were grouped into categories and consolidated when appropriate to remove duplication. As much as possible the participant's actual language has been retained in an attempt to avoid any mischaracterization.

Describe a successful South Burlington City Center for the Arts? What can it be and do for the community?

- Identity/Place
 - It would help create a different identity than what is already in South Burlington. Something that isn't box stores or a strip mall. A different reason to come to the city, art space.
 - Give a sense of identity.
 - Makes us unique by providing something that we don't have now. It would fit well in our community.
 - Give South Burlington some more cachet, can give City a bigger quality of life quotient which is one of the things that drew us here.
 - Something like the Flynn but more like what South Burlington is, with our stamp on it.
 - A place to see concerts (like the ones at the Library now - but with better seating.)
 - Architectural concept of such a center - if the design of the space is not inspirational and unique we are giving up a big opportunity for attracting people - Vuitton Cultural Center in France has a performance space that can be divided into 5 spaces. The design of the building

is, in itself, a tourist attraction.

- Economic Sustainability

- Increase tourism
- When people make choices from out of state to visit somewhere - they often make choices based on art related experiences-- people would want to come here because of arts and events they would like to participate in or have exposure to. Sometimes the entire summer season for a particular area is driven by the arts.
- It would be a destination, to create vitality. South Burlington needs to provide a reason for people to come here, to visit.
- It would benefit the restaurants and hotels.
- Artists could have a place to hang their art.
- It would be great for arts patrons, but also for businesses.
- If well done it would attract people from all over.
- It would be an economic engine of sorts.
- Go to theater, eat dinner or go for a drink after.
- South Burlington can be a destination.
- It would be a magnet and draw for City Center.
- Has an opportunity to attract people due to ease of access compared to Burlington.
- It will have same effect as sports fields. "If you build it, they will come."
- Creativity / arts zones attract high technology businesses and talent, the two reinforce each other-- better retention of talented millennial high tech workers.
- Good performing arts center draws good workers because of greater livability.

- Enrichment

- A location that inspires people to get involved in the arts, another location to perform in, unique design and unique attention.
- Education/educate the public.
- Provide something that doesn't exist right now, whether for artists already engaged in the arts, or for schools, library programming,
- Like Burlington City Arts pottery studio, people of all different ages - it could be a mixing point for all different mediums, whether stage, or music, visual, etc.
- A place where arts could interact and exchange resources (a place for cross-pollination)
- Benefit area artists who would have a place to do their thing, I'm a musician it would be great to have a place where people would have rehearsal space and come together.)
- Example, Middlebury Frog Hollow is a place where people can go to learn take classes, do preschool.
- This would attract people with a certain type of vibe, people who are innovative & creative.
- Space for small theater groups.
- World class stuff and local stuff.
- Connect to educational system- enliven and enhance fine arts efforts.
- Space that kids could be brought into and let them be kids.
- Freedom to let artists do things their way.
- Low cost or free events and performances
- Subsidized opportunities for students / low income patrons that ensure accessibility to the arts for all.

- Community
 - Destination spot, vibrant, alive with energy, exciting events, bring the community together to share in the arts.
 - Community spirit - I think that is one thing that South Burlington lacks. We need places to pull people together to develop community spirit and a pride.
 - Multi-disciplinary community effort which brings together people with a wide variety of interests.
 - Involve high school which has a great performing program.
 - Connection to outdoors with outdoor events.
 - Community events like Bikes and Bytes.
 - If you create interesting events, people will come.
 - Shared community space in municipal building to address common needs.
 - Afternoon at park. Good public facilities and activities for a family so they can feel comfortable staying the day in City Center.
 - To be a complete community, we have to give the arts more attention in South Burlington.
 - Gives a community personality and identity.
 - Food and art build community.

What are the challenges to development of a creative arts facility in City Center?

- Sustainability
 - Long term financial viability can it pay the bills?
 - Something affordable. Can't only cater to high income people.
 - Can it be structured so that it isn't held hostage to the city budget? Can it pay for itself?
 - Competition locally - size and capability? Can we sustain one on our own? Is there a real need?
 - Competition - Flynn is close by, other facilities and presenters, Lane Series, UVM, Arts Riot,
 - Competition - Arts community development at South End of Burlington.
 - Some said that raising taxes to pay for a performance arts facility is something they'd gladly support if necessary.
 - Planning must demonstrate that it would be sustainable.
 - Meet the needs of everyone - maybe have phases/flexibility because it might fill up super fast.
 - How do you make something that is both viable but has room to grow and change.
 - Fundraising private funds to support it- build it, design it and sustain it.
 - Have a powerful board- fundraising will be important.
 - Recognize there may be a funding dynamic with Flynn/participants and donors.
 - Programming it in a way that does not compete with other arts organizations
 - If we were to go with 600 seats then there would need to be a way create an smaller more intimate space of 3-400 seats. Perhaps by not using mezzanine seating for particular events.
- Achievability
 - What size? Size might make a difference. (we don't know yet.)
 - Parking!
 - Traffic!
 - Sewage limitations.

- Acquisition of land .
- Looking at where the funds would come from.
- Communication - Public needs to clearly understand the project in order to support it.
- The process of getting it to happen- peoples fear connected to change.
- Who is going to run it and maintain it and program it? People will want to know that.
- How to build and maintain without raising taxes.
- Making sure it's the right size.

- Relavancy
 - Is it compatible and consistent with the priorities of the average SB resident? If not, voters will reject the concept.
 - Is it compatible with the identity we already have in SB?
 - Can the space be versatile enough to meet everyone's needs?
 - How versatile can it be without losing a focus?
 - Quality of programming may be a challenging for a City of our size. How do you maintain standards high enough to attract tourists and investors while ensuring accessibility to a wide range of participants?
 - Demographics may be a challenge i.e. "old geezers" to young people - orienting so that it attracts young members of the community
 - Enough diversity in the programming but not so diverse as to be archaic. Programming must have a wide range of appeal.
 - How do you make something that satisfies current needs but has room to grow and change?

Who would the stakeholders be? Who could benefit from it?

- South Burlington
 - Taxpayers if it is revenue positive.
 - Every resident of the City.
 - Families.
 - Social groups.
 - City property values would improve which creates community wealth.
 - By improving quality of life, improves professional businesses ability to attract quality employees who value arts.
 - Students who are visiting colleges and want a place with a strong arts community.

- Creative Artists / Facilities Workers
 - Artists of all stripes. Such a facility would be a morale booster.
 - Anyone who is working there (employees - janitors, managers, teachers, stagehands).
 - Regional or national names that are looking for a nice place for them to come to.
 - Organizations that produce local content that could be broadcast.
 - Local TV stations.
 - Musicians that want performance and recording space.
 - Create pieces/incubate together and if it gets to a certain point- the nonprofit will benefit from the finances.
 - Be able to show off their work to the community.
 - Local theater groups for rehearsal or performance space (Very Merry 20-30 shows a year),

Vermont Stage (maybe? They are very connected to Burlington), Girls Nite Out has already expressed interest.

- Orchestras/music festival planners
- Chamber Music- There's nothing the right size - 300-500 would be good

- Patrons / Arts Consumers
 - People who travel distances to see quality performances.
 - Anyone who values the experience of arts and wants to experience it in a high quality environment.
 - Education Community.
 - Some local schools don't have adequate performance spaces. Size too small, equipment challenges, accessibility, etc.
 - Impact on kids - young people of having learning / performing / mentoring / working opportunities.
 - Educational initiatives that fill gaps: movie making, music recording, theater

- Business
 - There would be a ripple effect on businesses in and around City Center.
 - Restaurants.
 - Leaf peepers.
 - Business community- attract patrons: eat, gas, shop.
 - Can be a regional attraction that come from other communities, not just South Burlington.
 - This could help establish City Center as a strong regional destination.
 - Business, particularly hospitality during rentals from conferences, etc.
 - Northern Vermont- regional impact
 - Business for local suppliers/construction both during building phase and during regular operation
 - High tech millennials attraction and retention.

What might go on in a South Burlington City Center for the Arts? What kind of programming, activities, etc.?

- Performing Arts
 - Musical theater
 - Dramatic Theater
 - Comedians
 - Local Groups
 - Touring Groups
 - Professional Resident Companies
 - Hosting a theatre festival.
 - Opportunities to perform for more highly skilled adults- semi-professional theater (there are 36 little theater companies within a drive from here)
 - New works development
 - Community theater
 - Summer theater
 - Film / TV / New Media

- Visual Arts
 - Sculpture garden
 - Gallery
 - Program - Rotating restaurant showings.

- Music
 - Superior acoustics for concerts, concert hall
 - Practice rooms for musicians
 - Recording Studio space that people could use as a learning lab and do their own productions)
 - Professional, amateur and student music groups perform--chamber music, etc.

- Education
 - Teach creative arts classes.
 - Dance studio.
 - Visiting artist and residency program.
 - Endless workshops in any of these areas! Provide one or take one related to performances arts, songwriting, poetry writing, lectures.
 - CVU has a great continuing ed - knitting, foreign languages, etc. in the winter would be great to have place nearby, for arts classes, generator type space.
 - Yoga Studio.
 - Children's museum.
 - Offer opportunities to address wide range of ages and skill levels
 - Education opportunities/presentations in multimedia ready room. Distance learning / teaching.
 - Artist in residence opportunities.
 - Programming that fills needs that aren't being addressed by the schools.
 - Student Internships.

- Business / Hospitality
 - Video conferencing.
 - Business/organizational use: conventions.
 - Media events/screen.
 - Cafe or restaurant in the theater/art space.

- Arts Commerce
 - Live multi-camera media feeds to anywhere.
 - Host a remote Met opera site.
 - Gallery space for local or touring art.
 - Rehearsal space.
 - Be able to rent the facility.
 - A building that is open to outside like Place des Arts which is really open to the outside even in the winter - mix tourism and the arts with all the amenities.
 - Partner with local colleges to provide an alternate venue as needed.
 - Artist housing? Collaboration with local hotel? Walkable.
 - Dance recitals.
 - Office Space for Resident Companies.

- Emerging / New Media / Other
 - Maker space.
 - Shared coworking space for making art.
 - Book readings, poetry readings, spoken word, Moth, readers theater.
 - Speakers / Lectures.

- Non Profit
 - Fundraisers

- Civic
 - Host large city meetings

- Event Space
 - Use of outside space? Outdoor concert space? Fashion show?
 - Commercial kitchen that people could use.
 - Events (with catering kitchen).
 - Having a space where you could have dinner performances.
 - Weddings, etc.
 - Themed festival - movies, yearly week of something (like Burlington's Jazz Festival).
 - Could have a flat space that is grass in the summer and ice/fire pits in the winter.
 - If it is outdoor: space to install a tent if there was an outdoor event, power for full field kitchen if there isn't one outside.
 - If it is inside: infrastructure for storage of equipment (delivering equipment, china glassware, linen, dining stuff), a kitchen for caterers- a place to bus dishes to- that type of thing.
 - Event hall that could be divided (5000-6000 sqft might be a good size- only other option similar is hotel conference rooms).