

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Cleveland, OH Cultural District Profile: Gordon Square Arts District

Overview:

The Gordon Square Arts District (GSAD) leverages vibrant arts and culture to foster economic growth and collaboration. Seven years after its founding in 2007 by three non-profit organizations located on the near west side of Cleveland, Ohio, GSAD completed in 2014 a \$30 million capital campaign that funded neighborhood beautification, added parking, created a campus for Cleveland Public Theatre (CPT), reopened the long-shuttered Capitol Theatre, formed the first Special Improvement District in Cleveland beyond downtown, and is building a fully accessible, passive-design theatre for Near West Theatre (NWT), opening in Spring 2015.

Within a neighborhood in decline for decades, the section of Detroit Avenue between W.45 and W. 80th Streets has become a lively, vibrant regional destination of galleries, restaurants, retailers, artists and artisans. GSAD is attracting and retaining young professionals, families, and empty nesters while spurring retail, residential, and commercial development. GSAD has become a national model of how to use the arts to boost economic development and job creation through preservation and renovation of historical buildings and complementary new construction. A product of successful public/private partnership, GSAD demonstrates a positive and inclusive way to revitalize local neighborhoods.

Background:

Once a bustling area, by the 1950s population had begun to decline and industry to move from the Detroit Shoreway neighborhood. Formed as a grassroots group in the 1970s, the Detroit Shoreway Community Development Organization (DSCDO) tried to halt the trend. They purchased the Gordon Square Arcade, saved the crumbling Capitol Theatre within it from demolition, and converted the building to subsidized, low-income apartments and offices.

By 1990, the once-thriving neighborhood had a 40% poverty rate. Manufacturing plants had long been shuttered, long-time residents were fleeing to the suburbs, and the average sale price of a home slipped to \$16,000.



Detroit Ave. at 64th prior to the renovations.

Neighborhood leaders had discussed creation of a consortium of arts groups for capital fundraising as early as 1994. Looking at cities where arts and culture had successfully helped to attract investment and

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



create neighborhoods of choice, they envisioned doing the same, with the theatres as anchors. However, theatres themselves didn't have the ability to individually raise the kind of funding the project needed.

In 2004, CPT, DSCDO, and NWT, with leadership from Cleveland City Councilman Matt Zone, worked out the basics of what would become GSAD. They agreed to mount a joint capital campaign to raise funds to renovate/build their respective theatres while revitalizing the neighborhood's commercial center with streetscape beautification and parking improvements.

Meanwhile, strong volunteer leaders including Richard Pogue, Albert Ratner, Larry Schultz and Tom Sullivan had become involved, later joined by David Doll who today is Chairman of the organization's Board of Trustees. They believed the area's assets coupled with planned lakefront development nearby created an unusual opportunity to contribute to Cleveland's revival. A Board of Directors was formed, and in 2007, GSAD was granted 501(c) 3 status and entered into a formal Mutual Reliance Agreement which outlined the specifics of the relationship.

A Unique Collaboration:

GSAD worked in collaboration with the theatres, DSCDO, area residents and businesses, artists and arts organizations, civic and community groups, and government entities throughout Northeast Ohio to tell the story of Gordon Square, attract interest, and engage support.

GSAD was the lead entity for fundraising strategy and related marketing, events, and outreach. Donors included individuals, corporations, foundations, and government entities including the City of Cleveland and State of Ohio.

Each of the three founding organizations had a seat on the GSAD Board, comprised of representatives including area residents and merchants along with people with a variety of backgrounds and expertise throughout Northeast Ohio.

As the district was being formed and evolved, GSAD hosted community meetings, involved artists in the streetscape project, and sought input and advice from a range of stakeholders and influencers. Community groups and a very engaged Merchants Association are active participants in the revitalization, doing everything from volunteering to staging events.

The Projects:

The \$30 million Campaign for The Gordon Square Arts District funded 5 capital projects:

- **Capitol Theatre renovations:** (<http://gordonsquare.org/capitol.html>)
The Capitol Theatre, a grand 1920s movie palace located in the heart of the neighborhood, had been shuttered for nearly 25 years. The Theatre was renovated and restored. In 2009, the Capitol Theatre re-opened with three state-of-the-art screens, offering a unique mix of first run, arts and culture, classic and special interest films, and opportunities for groups, including schools, to experience and discuss themes together. The Capitol now attracts some 60,000 visitors each year, further strengthening area economy.

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Capitol Theatre had chipped paint and plaster falling off the walls.



Capitol Theatre after renovation



Capitol Theatre Marquee

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



- Streetscape improvements: City and State government were major investors in streetscape beautification, including new lighting, artistic paving, plantings, bus shelters, and signage. Completed in 2008-2009, these improvements have combined to make a safe, attractive, welcoming neighborhood that has helped reverse flight.



Streetscape art

- Parking expansion: Three new surface parking lots were added to accommodate both residents and the increased number of visitors to the neighborhood.
- Renovations at Cleveland's Public Theatre (CPT): (<http://gordonsquare.org/capitol.html>) Cleveland's leading stage for adventurous theatre and education programs for inner-city youth, CPT was operating since the '80s in a cramped and ancient space. The Campaign undertook significant renovations, including replacing roofs and stabilizing century-old buildings; adding air conditioning to performance-spaces and upgrading heating through installation of a hyper-efficient HVAC system; acquisition of nearby buildings to create a campus; asbestos removal; accessibility and ADA compliance improvements. They also now have a \$1 million capitalization fund.

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



Cleveland Public Theatre after renovations.

- Construction of a new Near West Theatre (NWT): (<http://gordonsquare.org/nwt.html>)
A beloved 37 year old Cleveland institution, NWT operated out of a third floor ballroom of a Catholic clubhouse. The \$7.3 million, fully accessible, passive-design, state-of-the-art performance center will be the organization's first permanent home. The theatre opened to the public on February 28, 2015, with its first main-stage production scheduled in April.



Design for NWT, Richard Fleishman + partners Architects.

Outcomes:

Physical improvements made through the Capital Campaign helped create a real arts district with real results. 80+ businesses have been attracted, a mix of arts, culture, artisans, and entertainment. They create new jobs and foster entrepreneurship, and bring a revitalized community energy and pride. Area merchants approved the first Special Improvements District (SID) outside downtown, which provides

NATIONAL CULTURAL DISTRICTS EXCHANGE



maintenance, security, and ambassadorial services. A Neighborhood Responsibility Fund mitigates residents from increased SID property taxes.

With creation of an arts district, beautification, safety, and added amenities and attractions, population has stabilized, bucking the trend of loss in much of the rest of Cleveland. More than 500 new housing units have been added over the past decade, with hundreds more underway. There's an increase in both young professionals and young families. In 2014, real estate firm Keller Williams named Detroit Shoreway the #1 housing market in Cleveland.

Cleveland's Waterfront District Plan, announced more than a decade ago, is now becoming a reality. In September, 2013, Governor Kasich visited and joined with Mayor Jackson to announce \$20 million from the state to complete funding for the Lakefront West Project, designed to increase access to Lake Erie, improve park space and biking and walking paths, spur nearby development and simplify connections. Public investment in this area shows commitment to the revitalization that's begun.

<http://gordonsquare.org/shoreway.html>

In addition to the three theatres in the Campaign, the district has acted as a creative incubator, and attracted Talespinner Children's Theatre at the Reinberger Auditorium and the Blank Canvas Theatre in the 78th Street Studios. The Studios themselves house some 50 arts-based businesses, now the largest fine arts complex in Northeast Ohio.

The revival has generated national and international recognition. *The {London} Economist* said, "Cleveland's Gordon Square Arts District has essentially applied economic shock paddles to an entire area." After a visit, National Endowment for the Arts then-Chairman Rocco Landsman said, "I wish I could transplant what is happening in Gordon Square all around the country, because not only are they engaging their own artists and their own artistic ethos, but they are transforming a neighborhood, a community. And that kind of model is what we want to highlight and showcase and bring all across the country to every community that we can."

In 2014, GSAD completed the campaign and began community planning to steward the investment and look to the future. A new Master Plan creates a framework for strengthening the Detroit Avenue core, connecting with the lake and nearby neighborhoods, maintaining focus on the arts, and taking the neighborhood to the next level of success.

Map of the Gordon Square Arts District:

http://gordonsquare.org/docs/2013_GordonSquareMerchantBrochure.pdf