



Albany Barn, Inc.
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MISSION

Albany Barn is dedicated to providing a sustainable creative arts incubator and community arts center in Arbor Hill— a place for artists to live, work, and inspire.

VISION

Community renaissance catalyzed through creative collaboration.

Sheridan Hollow Creative Placemaking and Cottage Industry Opportunities

Summary

Albany Barn worked with Siena College's Dake Research Fellowship program to conduct research into national best practices in creative placemaking as well as to facilitate local focus groups, individual meetings, and online surveying to determine the needs and interests of current residents of the Sheridan Hollow community, the region's creative artists and makers, and college students preparing for graduation.

A neighborhood focus group yielded 15 participants with varying roles in the community including as employees of non-profit organizations based in Sheridan Hollow, members of the Community Engagement Unit of the Albany Police Department, owners of local businesses, and neighborhood residents – both home owners and renters.

A focus group of creative yielded 37 participants representing arts administrators, visual artists, performing artists, culinary artists/hospitality professionals, and multimedia artists. A small selection of attendees also represented residents of the Sheridan Hollow community – all of whom were renters.

Online surveys yielded more than 40 results and collected information on specific features of residential and commercial amenities, as well as safety and quality of life issues attractive to creatives in seeking out live/work space and community.

One-on-one meetings were held with 10 artists/collectives with specific project-oriented goals. These individuals were predominantly culinary artists, performance artists, multimedia artists, and individuals with an interest in improving the footprint of community-driven public art in the City of Albany.

Findings

Neighborhood residents, stakeholders, and creatives alike seemed to champion large, flexible gathering spaces – both indoor and outdoor – to accommodate a variety of events from intimate gatherings of friends and family to performances and community events. Sheridan Hollow has a number of surface lots which would support parking for mid-sized events and performances, and these lots are mostly unused after normal business hours. The addition of flexible event spaces would benefit existing community members, as well as attract visitors to the area.

Flexibility in developed spaces is paramount. A venue that boasts large open space and acoustic treatment could serve as a make-shift sound stage for video production, gallery space for visual art exhibitions, and rehearsal and class space for performance groups such as theatre collectives and dance troupes.

In addition to large, flex-use space, additional housing development would support neighborhood's goal of increasing population density,

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while simultaneously answer a well-documented need for affordable, quality live/work space for creative artists. Albany Barn has a wait list of approximately 100 individuals, which does not include individuals who have applied, but been removed due to ineligibility based on income or family size. The Barn/Academy Lofts has only studio and single bedroom apartments, so the development of multi bedroom housing with open concept floor plan and affordable, flexible, rental options would be beneficial to creatives who have families.

When surveying artists' needs in living and working space, the most frequently requested features were:

- **Affordability**
 - Workspaces priced at \$10-\$12.50/sq. ft. annually, with needs ranging from 150 ft – 1000 sq ft.
 - Housing priced between \$400-\$600 for a single bedroom, and \$800- \$1000 for units with 2-3 bedrooms.
- **Flexibility**
 - Flexible lease options
 - Six- and twelve-month leases, or leases that allow for early termination with advance notice (30-60 days).
 - Ability to access private workspace, as well as shared workspace
- **Walkability**
 - Perceived safety was either very important, or not important at all, with very few respondents rating this as “neutral”
 - Community Ambassadors program was recognized as an asset, and made more than half of respondents feel they would be somewhat more likely to live or work in a neighborhood with an ambassador program.
 - Proximity to other creatives and spaces for arts and culture programming was rated as somewhat important by most respondents to our artists' survey.
 - A concentration of creative people was seen as positive by neighborhood residents who thought creatives could:
 - support beautification and
 - improve access to programs and events for existing residents
 - offer retail options that would serve the neighborhood such as clothing, accessories, and décor and furnishings.

Because Sheridan Hollow and neighboring Arbor Hill are food deserts, there was significant interest in facilities and programs that would improve access to healthy food options. In addition to addressing the need for residents to access food and nutrition education, supporting the culinary arts in the Sheridan Hollow community, would connect the neighborhood with larger developments in the City of Albany and Albany County.

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A culinary arts incubator would need to include a full commercial kitchen that could accommodate cooking and baking as well as facilities for packaging and shipping/receiving products and ingredients. Additional meeting and/or classroom space would also be beneficial to culinary artists and the community. Locally, there are 2 “food court” style establishments – Troy Kitchen in downtown Troy, and Galleria 7 in Latham, which provide space for emerging or expanding restaurants. Troy Kitchen limits occupants to a one-year lease and offers services to help restaurants transition into a downtown brick and mortar location. The Galleria 7 caters more to existing restaurants wishing to expand into a satellite location without the major overhead of a full-scale second location. In addition to the two existing food court style establishments, a third is planned to open in Albany’s warehouse district by 2018. A kitchen incubator could assist local culinary artists prepare for participation in a food-court style operation, which could help them to scale up affordably before making the leap to a full brick and mortar location. Educational programs bringing in partners like Capital Roots and/or Albany Medical College, and even hydroponic community gardening could be supported as well.