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Humble building on Madison's East Side could become neighborhood art studio

GAYLE WORLAND gworland@madison.com Jan 15, 2018



Under a plan to provide more programming in parks in the Darbo-Worthington-Starkweather neighborhood, this building in Thurber Park would be turned into a neighborhood artist studio.

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Madison planning officials hope the city can lease a humble metal building located in Thurber Park and convert it to a lively studio for an artist-in-residence to help energize that corner of an East Side neighborhood.

Under the novel proposal, the city would rent the unusual-shaped building at 3325 Thurber Ave., which is owned by the town of Blooming Grove, and hire an artist to provide neighborhood programming there. The artist, in place for up to a year, would also use the space to create a permanent public art piece for a city building project.

The idea grew out of input from neighbors and officials crafting a new Darbo-Worthington-Starkweather Neighborhood Plan, which was finalized in September. Several parks in the area, including Thurber, were identified as public spaces that could benefit from more activity “for the betterment of people living there,” said Linda Horvath of the city’s Planning Division.

The art studio idea “is one piece of the puzzle,” she said.

The year-round building most recently housed offices for the Waunona Sanitary District. Before that, it served as the town hall for Blooming Grove, said Mike Wolf, administrator for the town of Blooming Grove, which also owns Thurber Park.

“I think (the art studio concept) would be a good fit for the neighborhood,” Wolf said.

It’s unlikely that the blue and gray metal structure would hold appeal for a for-

profit business, he said.

Probably built in the 1930s or '40s, "It's functional. It's utilitarian," he said. "That's how it was built, not for aesthetic reasons."

The town recently upgraded the structure's heating and plumbing systems, and generally those who rent Thurber Park for special events get a key to the building for access to its restrooms, Wolf said.

The Darbo-Worthington-Starkweather neighborhood straddles Rethke Avenue, with the city of Madison on the west and the town of Blooming Grove on the east, said Wilder Deitz, who lives in the area and is active in the Worthington Park Neighborhood Association.

That division really splits the area into what feels almost like two separate neighborhoods, Deitz said. And a project like the artist studio might bring people back and forth across that imaginary boundary more often, he said.



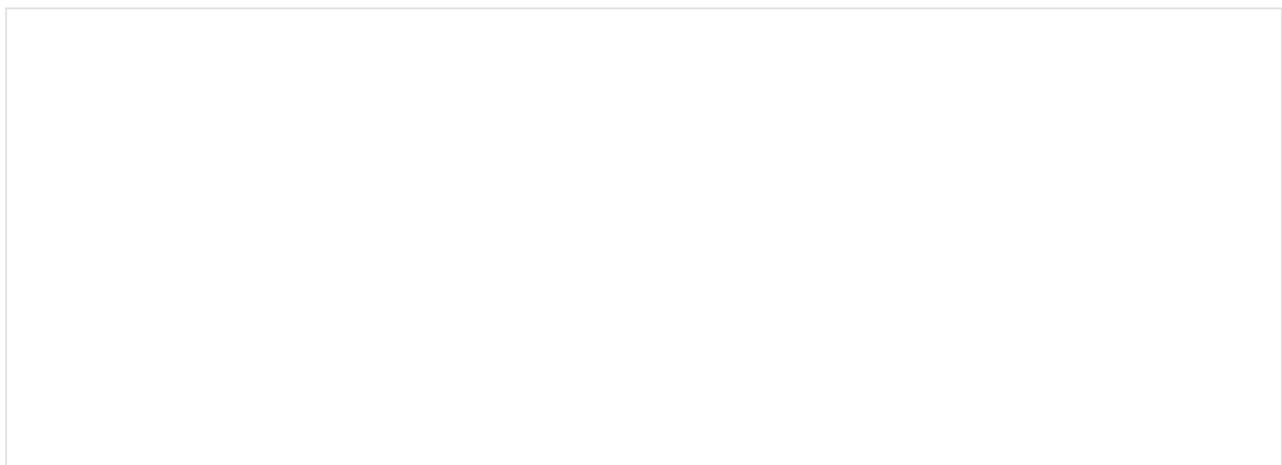
To create the artist residency, the city would partner with Madison Public Library, whose Bubbler program has worked with many artists-in-residence, said Madison arts program administrator Karin Wolf. A more detailed proposal, including a possible name for the art studio and the amount and source of an artist stipend, is due to the Madison Arts Commission in February, she said.

No lease has been signed, but the proposed annual rent for the building would be around \$2,400, with estimated monthly utility costs of \$200. Those costs would be covered by the city's Municipal Art Fund.

The project still requires a conditional use permit from Dane County, and eventual approval by the Madison city council, said arts administrator Wolf. Once a lease is secured, she hopes to put out a call for artists and assemble a jury to select the first artist-in-residence to begin work at the site later this spring.

Identifying the shed-like building's potential as a center for creativity was sort of an "aha moment" for Horvath's colleague Jule Stroick of the Department of Planning & Community & Economic Development, Horvath said.

"She really has an eye for seeing opportunities like this," Horvath said. "But really, we work with the neighborhood, with the residents, the other stakeholders to find out what is really at the heart and soul of what people want and need in these public spaces."





City considers three proposals for public art project on East Side

Gayle Worland | Wisconsin State Journal

Gayle Worland is an arts and features reporter for the Wisconsin State Journal.

