

Find low-cost artists' studios on Queen St. W., group urges

By Jim Byers Toronto Star

The finishing touches are being put on a city plan to help artists find low-cost studios in industrial buildings near vibrant — but pricey — Queen St. W.

A committee of artists, city officials and business people is expected to recommend that Toronto City Council set up a group to lease space and rent it out to selected artists for several years. The non-profit group would then raise money from the private sector to help pay for the leased space, bypassing the need for city grants.

Increased rents

Officials say this plan would keep artists from being forced out of the Queen St. W. area because of increased rents, and would keep the street from becoming another Yorkville.

“I think it's an excellent proposal,” said Rita Davies, executive director of the Toronto Arts Council, a non-profit group that advises the city on arts issues. “Prices are becoming more expensive along Queen St., and artists need to be downtown.”

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Toronto Alderman Dale Martin said the plan, formally called Toronto Artspace Inc., would help keep the arts active in Toronto. It would provide also long-term tenants, undermining developers' attempts to turn the area into an office centre, he said.

It is similar to a plan to provide subsidized space to high-tech industries in the King-Spadina region so they can get a start in the marketplace.

The studios would be available for three to five years to needy

artists selected by a jury of their peers, Martin said. The talk centres mostly on painters, sculptors and other visual artists, but Martin said it could provide rehearsal space for performing artists.

Corporations would be asked to sponsor individual studios, perhaps for as little as \$2,500 a year.

The corporations would have their names advertised outside the leased buildings and could write off their donations on their taxes.