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Alderman Dale Martin

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City Hall, Toronto, Ontario M5H 2N2 Telephone 947-7911  
Ward Six

PROPOSAL FOR AN ARTS INCUBATOR

Background

The idea of incubating fledgling industries, particularly high tech industries, has become a very popular one in recent years. The "incubating" usually takes the form of cheap or free space in which fledgling industries are set up for a specific number of years after which it is assumed that the industry will be well enough established to pay its own way. In some cases, management and technical assistance is also provided to the new business during this first phase of development.

The City of Toronto has taken considerable interest in the idea of incubating industry. We are currently engaged in trying to set up an incubator facility near the downtown aimed at more traditional industries. During the discussions around this incubator, there was agreement that the incubator approach would probably be effective in the arts community. Hundreds of artists find it difficult, if not impossible, to produce their art on a full time basis because of the prohibitive cost of studio space as against the possible income that their art generates during the more formative years.

Although the typical process for setting up an arts related incubator could be followed. This would necessitate a series of reports and approvals from the provincial government as a pre-condition to securing the funds necessary to buy a building as space for the incubator. As an alternative, it is both possible and desirable to open an incubator for the arts in the Queen/John area with very little in the way of government financial commitments. The idea would be to establish the "incubator" as a demonstration project of three to five years' duration after which a permanent facility or facilities would be acquired.

#### Corporate Form

The proposal is to organize and establish a non-profit corporation. The corporation would be responsible for the operation and administration of an arts incubator. The board of the corporation would be appointed by the Council of the City of Toronto and comprised of artists, arts educators, patrons and arts administrators.

#### Proposal

1. The corporation would lease space in a building on the eastern fringe of the industrial district, south of Queen in the John Street area. The space would be sub-divided into appropriate studios and let, either free of charge or for a nominal amount, for a pre-determined period of time (either three or

five years) to visual artists selected by a jury of their peers as being in need of this kind of support. The criteria for selection would be established by the board in consultation with artists working in the area.

2. The total amount of space leased and thus the number of studios available would be dependent on the corporation's ability to raise funds to cover the lease for the incubator. The best approach is probably for the corporation to set a six-month or one year time period within which funding for the first phase of the incubator's activity would occur. Its success would then determine the gross amount of space to be leased. The initial activity of the incubator would seem best targeted to visual artists because of the more limited size of studio space that would accommodate their needs and the relatively low costs of acquiring the space in the garment district. However, there is no reason why both the amount of space or the type of arts incubator could not be expanded as funds became available. In fact it would seem most appropriate that such things as rehearsal space for performing artists become part of the arts incubator's activities as quickly as possible.

#### Zoning and Related Matters

Establishing an arts incubator in the area south of Queen around John Street has appeal for a number of reasons beyond the

simple and direct supporting of artists in need of this kind of support. This section of the King/Spadina industrial district is in close proximity to the Queen Street West artists community, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Ontario College of Art. John Street is itself the north-south spine which links the institutions and activities. Establishing an arts incubator in this location anchors the arts community and establishes its legitimacy and claim to that area of the City in an important way. Given that artists studios are a permitted use in the industrial area, the incubator will also serve to undermine the attack on industrial zoning by landlords interested in upzoning to high level uses such as commercial or modified industrial. This is an important step in reinforcing and stabilizing the existing garment industry uses in the area.

#### Role of the City of Toronto

Support of the incubator by the City of Toronto could take a number of forms. If financial support was raised for the studio space itself (on a net net basis), then the City of Toronto could be asked to support giving the incubator a property tax exemption. A nominal charge for the studio space to the artists would then cover the remaining costs of electricity and administration. Further City support could be secured through ongoing participation by the Planning Department, the Toronto Arts Council and the Arts and Tourism sub-committee of the Economic Development

Committee. The return to the City from this modest participation in the project would be dramatic and substantial. The main appeal is the reinforcement and growth of the arts community in that area of the City together with the very low cost to the public sector of establishing an arts incubator during the developmental phase of the incubator itself. This will allow most, if not all, of the "bugs" associated with operating such an incubator project to be worked out long before any significant public commitment is made.

#### Fund Raising

The project is seen as a self-financing one based on individual and corporate subscriptions and donations. It will be extremely attractive to many corporations to support an entire studio of say 500 to 1,000 square feet and be formally recognized for this support by naming the studio after the corporation. The particular appeal of such an approach is the low cost of rent for such a studio. It would be supportable for as little as \$2,500 to \$5,000 a year at current garment district lease rates of \$4.50 to \$5.50 per square foot. This would also allow individual donors and corporations to develop a patronage relationship with the particular artist who works in the studio bearing the individual's or corporation's name.

Process

The proposal itself will be refined through discussions with people in the arts community and the Planning staff. Potential members of the board of directors of the corporation will be identified and approached. Simultaneous with this, further work will be done to locate appropriate space and develop the corporate form of the arts incubator. The full package will then be presented to a meeting of prospective board members for consideration and discussion. A steering committee will be struck to begin the task of developing what amounts to a prospectus of the corporation for fund-raising purposes. A six-month fund-raising period should be identified and targets set. Jurying committees will then be set up and invitations for applications from prospective artists solicited. The entire proposal will then be brought to Council for consideration and support.

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Dale Martin

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