

CROSSROADS ARTS DISTRICT: A CASE STUDY OF CULTURAL DISTRICT  
DEVELOPMENT

by

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A REPORT

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## **Abstract**

Community leaders have substantial interest in fostering the local cultural economy as the arts attract both businesses and residents. Because art and creativity are regarded as spontaneous, organic processes, most researchers recommend planning initiatives that capitalize on a community's existing cultural economy rather than producing contrived elements of creativity. One strategy that fits the framework of such recommendations is the concept of cultural district development. These districts typically evolve naturally to some extent, due to pre-existing urban form and cultural activities. Because this revitalization strategy does not demand large public investments, it is attractive to public leaders. However, revitalization strategies may have unanticipated results at the detriment to those "urban pioneers" who initially improved the area and catalyzed the districts' reinvestment. While such districts rely on the collaborative efforts of community members, local governments and public organizations can play a pivotal role in allowing them to address such threats with effective policies. This master's report investigates the process and effects of cultural district development through a case study of the Crossroads Arts District in downtown Kansas City, Missouri. This illustrates how this particular district evolved, why and how planning initiatives formalized the district, what processes and players were involved, and the resulting changes to the area. As the Crossroads Arts District is becoming increasingly formalized, this report will explore the past, present, and future of the neighborhood with insights drawn from interviews and supplementary historical document review. Through a case study of planning activities, through the scope of cultural district development, this report illustrates the organic nature of creative synergy, the importance of community associations, the relationship between the arts and revitalization, the role of public planning in addressing citizen needs, and the dynamic character of communities.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this Master's Report to my parents Andy and Carol McKennan for their constant love, support and wisdom.

## Preface

My first visit to the Crossroads Arts District was a First Friday event in November of 2008. This was also my first time visiting downtown Kansas City, Missouri. In fact, as an “outsider” to the metropolitan area, it seemed to me that the J.C. Nichols Country Club Plaza was the more celebrated community space and the downtown did not draw many visitors. When I heard about First Fridays, it seemed like a worthwhile two hour drive from Manhattan to experience Kansas City’s own version of creativity; and yet, I was surprised at how few of my Kansas City friends had ever been. Sure, they had heard of it, but they just were not interested in spending time in the urban core.

When I got there, I was pleasantly surprised by the large crowds, especially considering how cold it was. At the time, I was completely unaware of just how large the district actually is, and enjoyed the sense of gallery concentration within the confined area I thought made up the district. I loved how many people were simply out walking around. It felt, in certain aspects, like the Italian *passaggiata* ritual, where people of all ages dress up to stroll along the main streets as the evening falls, and I loved being a part of it. Instead of ancient Italian piazzas, however, I was in the midst of old industrial buildings, whose fading painted ghost signs revealed their previous uses. The unique buildings appealed to me because of their old-fashioned, historical appearance, which boldly and pleasantly contrasted with their current use.

Stepping inside the The Leedy-Voukous Gallery was, and still is, a charming contradiction of a gallery experience. Its high ceilings, expansive rooms, and separate corridors made it very suitable for showcasing the work of several artists. Yet, the building’s quirky features - creaky floors, narrow staircase, exposed pipes - lent the gallery a relaxed, informal,

and more “lived-in,” feel than a typical gallery. There was even a live quartet playing in the basement as visitors enjoyed free wine and beer.

The basement display featured oil paintings from local artist Joshua Rizer’s “The Big Top” series<sup>1</sup> (pictured below). Although the art certainly attracted a large crowd, it was very difficult to actually view the paintings. In fact, the art almost appeared to be a secondary draw, with the primary being purely social. Certainly from an outsider’s perspective, the overall First Fridays experience - from the variety of art, to the large crowds, to the interesting venues - was enough of a reason to go, even if participating in the creative exchange - purchasing, reviewing, learning, selling - was not a priority.



**Figure 1-1: Painting from Joshua Rizer's "The Big Top" series**

I went back a few weeks after my First Fridays experience on a Saturday morning to photograph ghost signs on the buildings. It felt like an entirely different place. There were very few people, and I began to notice just how vast the area is. Because I drove around the area

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<sup>1</sup> Rizer is a Kansas City native whose works “are realist and surrealist at once, blending fairy tales, archetypes and literary figures into everyday scenes.” After viewing his artwork at the gallery, it was hard to believe that the self-taught artist had only begun painting a year before.

instead of parking and walking, I was able to see the huge variation among different parts of the district. I also began to understand the context of the district and its relationship to surrounding neighborhoods. I have to admit that it was not just the Crossroads that felt slightly unwelcoming, but the downtown core as a whole.

Since then, there have been many changes to downtown Kansas City, Missouri. A new entertainment district, Power and Light, has been a huge draw for many suburbanites and the investments are continuing. While my familiarity with Kansas City overall has expanded, my initial enchantment with the Crossroads District left me intrigued to know exactly what was happening in that particular area. My interest was fuelled more by a frank enjoyment of the arts, creativity, and cultural expression than a vast knowledge of cultural district development and economic growth. Thus, the resulting paper is not an attempt to quantify the district's value, or measure its impact. Rather, it has been my hope to tell the Crossroads Arts District story by learning from people most connected to its evolution.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

The importance of public planning efforts may be difficult to explain as many different actors, particularly local citizens, often play a larger role in the overall planning process. Urban development patterns often reflect natural trends and private development decisions, which are not necessarily the result of any public plans. This is particularly true concerning cultural districts as seen in cities across America. The trend of artists moving into abandoned neighborhoods, making the area interesting, attracting development, and subsequently becoming priced out, has attracted the attention of economic developers, city planners, and arts advocates. While it is clear that cultural districts often form without public planning initiatives, city planners may play a necessary role by facilitating policies that address their unique needs. By examining a case of planning activities, through the scope of cultural district development, public planning may be understood as the goal to amplify the collective voice and passion of citizens to create better communities. Through a case study of the Crossroads Arts District, this report will illustrate the organic nature of creative synergy, the importance of community associations, the relationship between the arts and revitalization, the role of public planning in addressing citizen needs, and the dynamic character of communities.

### **1.1 Planning for Community Development**

Planning activities, ranging from gathering information, analyzing needs, making collective decisions, and policy recommendations, are undertaken by many different actors in a community. While urban planning is typically thought of as a comprehensive, formal process

carried out by local jurisdictions, private individuals, firms, and voluntary groups regularly plan for land development as they pursue their best interests. Actors choose to engage in planning activities, whether formal or informal, to learn more about the environment of decisions, the decisions of other actors that may affect them, and their own available alternatives. Real estate developers and property owners, for example, may plan individually to help guide strategic decisions about investments. By gathering and analyzing information about current and future local urban development patterns or policy impacts, these individual actors are better prepared to successfully invest in urban development projects. Such investments, whether large or small in scope, are weighty decisions that are interdependent on the actions of other individual or collective actors. Collective actors, including community organizations and local governments, plan to address uncertainties about future development patterns or to provide a collective benefit. Both individual and collective actors engage in planning activities that can shape a community's future.

The Crossroads Arts District, in Kansas City, Missouri, is an example of a community where a variety of individual and collective interests, at times conflicting, led to planning activities that have clearly altered the neighborhood's patterns of investment and urban development. While historic patterns of development continue to influence the area, this research focuses particularly on changes to the Crossroads since the 1980s. Though actions were not always intentional or formal interventions, a variety of planning activities has allowed the burgeoning arts community to address uncertainties, particularly the increasing threat of gentrification. The involvement of key individual actors, as well as the collective interest of the Crossroads Community Association, has resulted in public policies and plans that will continue to shape the neighborhood. In order to understand why this particular cultural district has been

of particular interest for all actors involved, we must first explore the motivations behind cultural district planning initiatives.

## **1.2 Culture and Community Development**

Asking the basic question, “Who cares about art?” is a necessary starting place towards understanding why the development of an arts district warrants planning activities. Many individuals may personally enjoy viewing art, or engaging in cultural experiences, but what benefit do developers, residents, or property owners gain that warrants the cost of planning activities to support them? Moreover, what interest do collective actors have in their local arts scene? Of course private organizations may be charged with supporting the arts, and individuals may take a personal interest in culture; but why would public actors or a local government, with a variety of other needs to address, consider supporting cultural district development? While several key actors were motivated to participate in planning activities simply because they valued art, motivation from a collective standpoint is much more complicated. Thus, the following section attempts to capture the essence of arts and culture as a community asset.

A community’s cultural resources can be key assets for community development. Like physical capital and environmental capital, cultural capital must be viewed as a valuable resource for communities to protect and promote. If culture is considered a system of meanings that are learned within a society, “cultural capital represents forces such as family background and educational qualifications that can be converted into economic capital and help to explain the structure and function of a community,” (Bourdieu, 1986). For communities, cultural capital refers to their unique histories, celebrations of new cultures, cultural goods, and mechanisms to

produce and celebrate material objects and media. These elements are beneficial in their own right, but are perhaps more valued for their contributions to other forms of capital. Not only does cultural capital add to a city's authenticity, identity, and overall quality of place, it contributes to social capital and economic development.

For the purposes of this research, creative industries will be defined as economic activities that generate new information, ideas, or knowledge. The system through which these industries operate is referred to as the cultural economy. The cultural economy includes a broad range of creative occupations including design, fashion, film, visual arts, performing arts, music, advertising, architecture, and publishing. Creative industries and the cultural economy are of particular concern as their promotion is considered, "one of the most powerful means of enhancing the City's identity and distinctiveness, while simultaneously creating employment and generating social capital," (Landry, 2008). The generation of new ideas and frequent human interaction are valuable characteristics of the cultural economy.

A challenge in understanding the relationship between culture and economic development is that it is highly variable and difficult to quantify. Thus, while cultural resources are well-valued among communities, the role of art and culture does not fit traditional models of economic growth. In fact, the cultural economy is often considered a "spillover" effect from other successful industries within a community. But as our society increasingly demands creative lifestyles that merge economic and social endeavors, community leaders have substantial interest in fostering the local creative economy. Because art and creativity are regarded as spontaneous, organic processes, most researchers recommend planning initiatives that capitalize on a community's existing cultural economy rather than creating contrived elements of creativity.

One strategy that seems to work with such recommendations, and has consequently sparked interesting discussion, is the concept of cultural district development. While each cultural district is dynamic and unique, for the purposes of this report, a cultural district is understood as a distinct area with a high concentration of culture that fuels related social and economic activities. Because pre-existing urban form and cultural activities often cause such districts to evolve naturally, cultural district development is considered an ideal revitalization strategy for communities.

The Crossroads Arts District illustrates motivations behind cultural district development strategies from both the private and public sectors, as well as individual and collective perspectives. Recognizing that all communities are inherently complex and dynamic, this district exemplifies the range of formal and informal planning activities which reveal the organic nature of creative synergy, the importance of community associations, the relationship between the arts and revitalization, and the role of cities in addressing citizen needs.

## Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

Much literature on cultural district development is written with policy-makers and community leaders as the target audience. Whether written as a warning against the artist gentrification in other communities, or to tout the potential economic gains of creativity, much literature on cultural district development reviewed for this study seeks to capture the essence of culture and the arts and explain why communities should care about supporting them.

The relationship between place and culture is not a new phenomenon, and neither are cultural districts. However, the connection between urban culture and economic development became increasingly apparent during the 1980s as evidenced by “place marketing and the exploitation of heritage for economic gains,” (Scott, 2004). Since then, arts and culture have become increasingly widespread elements of community economic development strategies, largely perpetuated by Richard Florida’s argument that “regional growth is powered by creative people,” (Florida, 2002). The essence of his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, describes members of the “Creative Class” as economic drivers due to their high capacity for innovation. This class is further characterized by Florida as highly mobile, giving priority to cultural and recreational amenities when choosing where to live. Thus, communities should focus on creating high quality places that attract members of the creative class, and consequently grow economically.

Florida argues that high quality places involve environments conducive to creative lives; high levels of diversity and interaction - cues that anyone will be accepted and able to make a life in the community; and finally, vibrancy and opportunities for “active, exciting, creative endeavors,” (Florida, 2002). Although Florida’s argument has been criticized for overgeneralization and lack of causal evidence, his work has sparked a number of case studies to

better understand what exactly attracts members of the creative class. A case study of Portland found the community's "multiple opportunities and entry points across the spectrum of the creative sector," was highly valued by allowing many "ways to be involved and interact with other creative's in seeking expressive outlets and interesting experiences," (Bulick, 2003). From a community development perspective, opportunities for diversity, interaction, and boundary-crossing, can be increased through key infrastructural attributes.

Key infrastructural attributes for the creative economy are density, places to network, and affordability. Portland's "land use and urban growth policies, zoning codes, and an early commitment to public art have yielded a compact, human scale, pedestrian-oriented urban form," (Bulick, 2003). Florida also speaks to the importance of density, explaining that the concentration of talented and productive people, or "clustering force," ultimately makes them more productive. Florida argues that "walkability" and informal "third places" are key to cultural clustering as they increase social interactions. Third places are any place that facilitates interaction outside of one's work or home, such as "coffee houses and cafes - the meeting places of creatives," (Bulick, 2003). These meeting places help facilitate easy access and participation in the cultural economy. Creative industries, "very much depend on the ability to have face-to-face contact and dense networks of both collaboration and competition among a diverse network of different specialized workers and firms," (Currid, 2007). Clearly, urban development patterns play a huge role in fostering creative interactions.

Affordability is arguably the most essential infrastructural attribute as low barriers to entry are necessary for a place to allow new labor pools to cultivate the cultural economy. Depressed rents and flexible gallery space allow artists to live, work, and socialize in a particular place. The search for low rents or property values drives the movement of artists, start-up

companies, and young innovators around a city. Because “Portland preserved its attractive and livable inner city neighborhoods and much of its older housing and building stock,” it has maintained a relatively low cost of living. Moreover, “several light industrial and warehouse districts have become havens for artists and creative industries needing inexpensive, flexible space,” (Bulick, 2003). Policymakers hoping to protect and promote cultural capital within their cities must address the distinct needs of cultural economy. Specifically, “policymaking must take its place such that new creative people are actually able to move into the city and afford rent and studio space,” (Currid, 2007).

Cultural development strategies may seek to improve features such as density, meeting places, and affordability that allow other dimensions of diversity and interaction to thrive. One method is through the development of cultural districts and neighborhoods that act as, “creative service/cultural magnets and breeding grounds for collaboration,” (Bulick, 2003). While each cultural district is dynamic and unique, for the purposes of this report, a cultural district is defined as a distinct area with a high concentration of culture - cultural facilities, arts organizations, individual artists, and arts-based organizations - that fuels related activity.

In order to understand why cultural district development appeals to communities, comprehension of their characteristics and implications for the cultural economy is essential. As previously mentioned, density is an important element as cultural clustering has a “positive impact on cultural production; artists and other cultural entrepreneurs interact, learn, compete, and test out their ideas on one another,” (Stern, 2007). The density of cultural districts allow places like Kansas City, which is not considered a top creative center, to promote the local cultural economy by developing “very strong niches where critical mass can be attained,” (Landry, 2008).

Moreover, because cultural districts are often mixed-use, incorporating retails, office, and residential spaces, they further allow frequent and repeated contact. Such variety of creative businesses and other land uses - from theatres, restaurants, and wine bars, to gardens and street life - ensures vitality and facilitates social interaction necessary to a strong cultural economy. Because art and culture are exchanged within social settings, the cultural economy depends on the ability for the interaction of work and social lives. This interaction is especially important as it facilitates the merging of different creative industries. Currid explains, “the cultural economy is most efficient in the informal social realm,” as separate creative industries “collaborate with one another, review each other’s products, and offer jobs that cross-fertilize and share skill sets,” (Currid, 2008). Coffee shops, restaurants, and nightclubs are not only attractive assets of cultural districts, but essential infrastructural attributes of the cultural economy. Thus, due to their “density of assets - organizations, businesses, participants, and artists, and artists - that sets it apart from other neighborhoods,” cultural districts are conducive to the “innovation and creativity- a spur to cultural production,” (Stern, 2007). Formal district designation may further promote cultural transactions, by ensuring that events, such as First Friday gallery walks, regularly bring people together.

Clearly, cultural districts are characterized by many of the same features desirable for a thriving cultural economy, but their potential social and economic benefits make them especially appealing to planers and policymakers. Cultural districts “provide ideal opportunities to achieve social inclusion in the capital - challenging existing economic and social barriers, promoting diverse workforces, engaging with disadvantaged communities,” (Stern, 2007). Moreover, arts organizations have direct economic benefits on urban neighborhoods “through their ability to expand local access to resources - by creating new markets, new uses for existing facilities, and

new jobs for local artists,” (Stern, 2007). Beyond the cultural benefits of clustering, then, cultural districts can encourage innovation and attract investment.

Within these districts, communities may use arts-based community development mechanisms to support the arts; however, not all goals of cultural district development are entirely focused on supporting creative industries. Due to the recognition of the symbiotic nature of place, culture, and economy, planners and policymakers have increasingly incorporated cultural district development into urban revitalization strategies.

The “culture as regeneration instrument” perspective is illustrated by many studies of cultural districts, where “cultural and urban policies recurrently use the cluster/district for aims that are not - strictly speaking - cultural,” (Cooke, 2008). While supporting the cultural sector is often part of the agenda, other goals, such as urban regeneration, or strengthening the local identity must be considered when examining a district’s development over time. These clusters/districts are seen not only as places of culture, but as policy “instruments meant to tackle several issues related to the enhancement of cultural assets and urban regeneration,” (Cooke, 2008). Urban regeneration strategies often involve enhancing the “image and prestige of particular places so as to draw in upscale investors and the skilled high-wageworkers who follow their train,” (Scott, 2004).

While advocates of cultural district development stress the importance of “long-term vision, planning, and commitment and should capitalize on regional assets that are specific to the cultural, economic, and social issues of the community,” (Stern, 2007), cultural districts pose a challenge from a community development perspective, as culture cannot be created by policies. Rather, “culture is dependent upon the ferment, efforts, and inspiration of ordinary citizens to give voice to their understanding of the world,” (Stern, 2007).

Many researchers suggest that because culture cannot be “created” by government policies or formal organizations, planners and community leaders would be better off “cultivating” their cultural economy by strengthening their (ideally) organically created cultural districts. Indeed, many cultural districts, such as the Crossroads Arts District, often form without public involvement. Due to their complex system of “artistic production and consumption and a mix of institutional forms, disciplines, and sizes - they have a degree of sustainability that a planned cultural district is unlikely to match,” (Stern, 2007).

This is partially due to the huge role urban form plays in cultural district development. Montgomery lists “a fine-grained urban morphology, variety and adaptability of building stock, permeability of streetscape, amount and quality of public space, active street frontages, legibility, and people attractors” as necessary elements of the built form (Montgomery, 2007). Not only would such elements as “fine-grained urban morphology” and “variety and adaptability” be difficult to create, they would be costly.

Another reason why natural cultural districts are preferred over created ones is that they have authenticity or “represent and signal meaning and identity to users and citizens.” Montgomery explains that a “cultural quarter without Meaning, *inter alia*, will not be much of a place. Nor will it tend to be contemporary, avant-garde, or particularly innovative,” (Montgomery, 2007). A successful district must be authentic, but also “innovative and changing,” in order to produce new meaning. Although the ideal cultural district will begin organically, at some point, public organizations may intervene to formalize natural neighborhood-based cultural clusters for revitalization purposes. The incentives and effects of formalized district development are worth examining and understanding, as there are often a variety of actors and interests at stake.

The social and economic benefits of cultural district development strategies give community leaders incentive to formally intervene. Yet, the multiple, interrelated benefits that may lead to problems associated with conflicting goals/incentives in cultural district development strategies. Culture-based revitalization in such districts has the often-conflicting task of stimulating economic growth without generating displacement or expanding inequality.

Problems associated with cultural district development cannot be overlooked. “Whether established or emerging, the core dilemma faced by natural cultural districts is what economists call externalities - the artists, nonprofits, and commercial cultural firms in these districts create a huge amount of social value but have no way of reaping their full reward from doing so,” (Stern, 2007). Thriving cultural districts often experience declining poverty rates and increased population, yet this social benefit comes at costs of increased housing costs, and the threat of gentrification. This poses a huge problem to the cultural economy of districts, which requires low barriers to entry for diversity to exist.

Interactions among people from diverse backgrounds and socio-economic statuses are important in generating new ideas that fuel the creative economy. Currid’s New York City analysis argues diversity is necessary, as “what ultimately perpetuates creativity is the influx of a new guard. Creativity is fundamentally about generating new ideas and new forms and much of this depends on new labor pools who bring forth fresh ideas of interpreting the world,” (Currid, 2007). Because districts must be welcoming to a range of income levels and socio-economic backgrounds, possible threats to diverse interaction cannot be ignored in studying effects of formal district development.

Peck suggests that policymakers and property developers view cultural district development as real estate development, rather than an attempt to support the arts or foster

creativity. The focus on real estate is evidenced by cultural economy strategies that are evaluated by measures of increased house prices. With less concern for the artists, and more on presentation to the broader community, cultural district development strategies that “commodify the arts and cultural resources, even tolerance itself,” actually drive out diversity and culture, resulting in gentrification and genericity (Peck, 2005).

Literature shows the “most salient factors of clusters and districts evaluated in the studies analyzed are: definitions and model, activities and services, intervention goals, and key factors to governance success,” (Cooke, 2008). Common intervention goals are: urban regeneration-recover degraded areas, attract tourists, attract external investments, give a positive image of the city; support the cultural sector; enhance artistic and cultural heritage; support creativity and innovation; and form/strengthen local identity. Stern identified the following key factors to successful cultural district development:

- Presence of skilled actors who support cluster/district implementation
- Creation of a body which interacts with all actors and coordinates district administration
- Effective collaboration between public and private sectors
- Common vision of cluster/district and definitions of clear-cut goals shared by all actors
- Achievement of a critical mass in the number and quality of actors and services
- Diversified financial sources
- Creation of an identification and advertisement trademark for the district and its products
- Regulation of propriety rights and quality standards
- Toning of co-operative/competitive forces and control of opportunistic behaviors
- Networks for relations between economic, non-economic, and institutional actors
- Participatory decision-making process

Perhaps the most important element of a natural cultural district is the population that fuels development. Natural districts, “already have the basics in place. They generally have a diverse

population that is already involved in creative industries...[and] the presence of artists, nonprofit organizations, and commercial cultural firms provides a foundation on which to build,” (Stern, 2007). Clearly, district implementation may involve a variety of actors, whether institutional and urban planners, non-profit and cultural organizations, firms, or unprompted artists. Because such districts rely on interaction between a variety of actors and organizations problems arise concerning, “relationships between public and private actors; definition of roles; creation of administration agencies; frame of inter-organization networks; combination and coordination of different activities, and so on,” (Cooke, 2008). Rather than the primary agent of social policy, the government must be viewed as “simply one of a number of social entities that determine policy through a transactional process,” (Stern, 2007). Thus, in exploring the transition of natural district to formal district development, a case study that examines multiple viewpoints of a variety of actors is necessary.

## **Summary**

Literature suggests that high quality will places attract members of the creative class, and consequently grow economically. Urban development patterns play a huge role in fueling the creative economy, as density, places to network, and affordability are necessary community attributes that foster diversity, interaction, and boundary crossing. Cultural districts, distinct areas with high concentrations of culture, have a density of assets that are conducive to artistic and cultural transactions. Thus, cultural districts are well-suited to support creative industries. However, some goals of cultural district development may be more focused on urban regeneration, due to the symbiotic nature of place, culture, and economy. Literature suggests

that communities should support naturally developed arts districts rather than creating contrived elements of creativity, as authenticity and identity are preferred by users and citizens. Social benefits of such districts include declining poverty rates and increased populations. Costs include increased housing costs, and gentrification threats. Thus, cultural district development strategies have the difficult task of stimulating economic growth without generating displacement or expanding inequalities. District development relies on interactions between a variety of actors and organizations, with the government as only one of many social entities involved. Thus, the collaboration of various public and private actors becomes necessary to the success of cultural district development.

## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **3.1: Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this report is to explain the effects of cultural district planning initiatives through a case study of the Crossroads Arts District in Kansas City, Missouri. The Crossroads Arts District is an example of a district that has undergone significant changes driven by local citizens, but greatly influenced by cultural development strategies. A case study of this district provides insight into how the district was established, and the processes and players that have shaped the Crossroads over time.

### **3.2: Report Methodology**

The study focuses on four main questions. The first question being how did this particular district evolve into an arts community? Second, why and how did planning initiatives formalize the district? A sub question involves the relationship between the arts district and the downtown revitalization. Third, what changes has the neighborhood undergone as a result? The final overarching question is what processes and players were involved throughout the cultural district development?

To answer these questions, the researcher began by reviewing historic documents about the Crossroads as well as literature and studies of other cultural districts. This step was taken to familiarize the researcher with issues that were potentially facing the district including the changing composition of the area, threats of gentrification, the function of public and private organizations, and the potential for conflicting interests. In particular, the researcher became increasingly curious about who was really behind the district's formalization. The next step

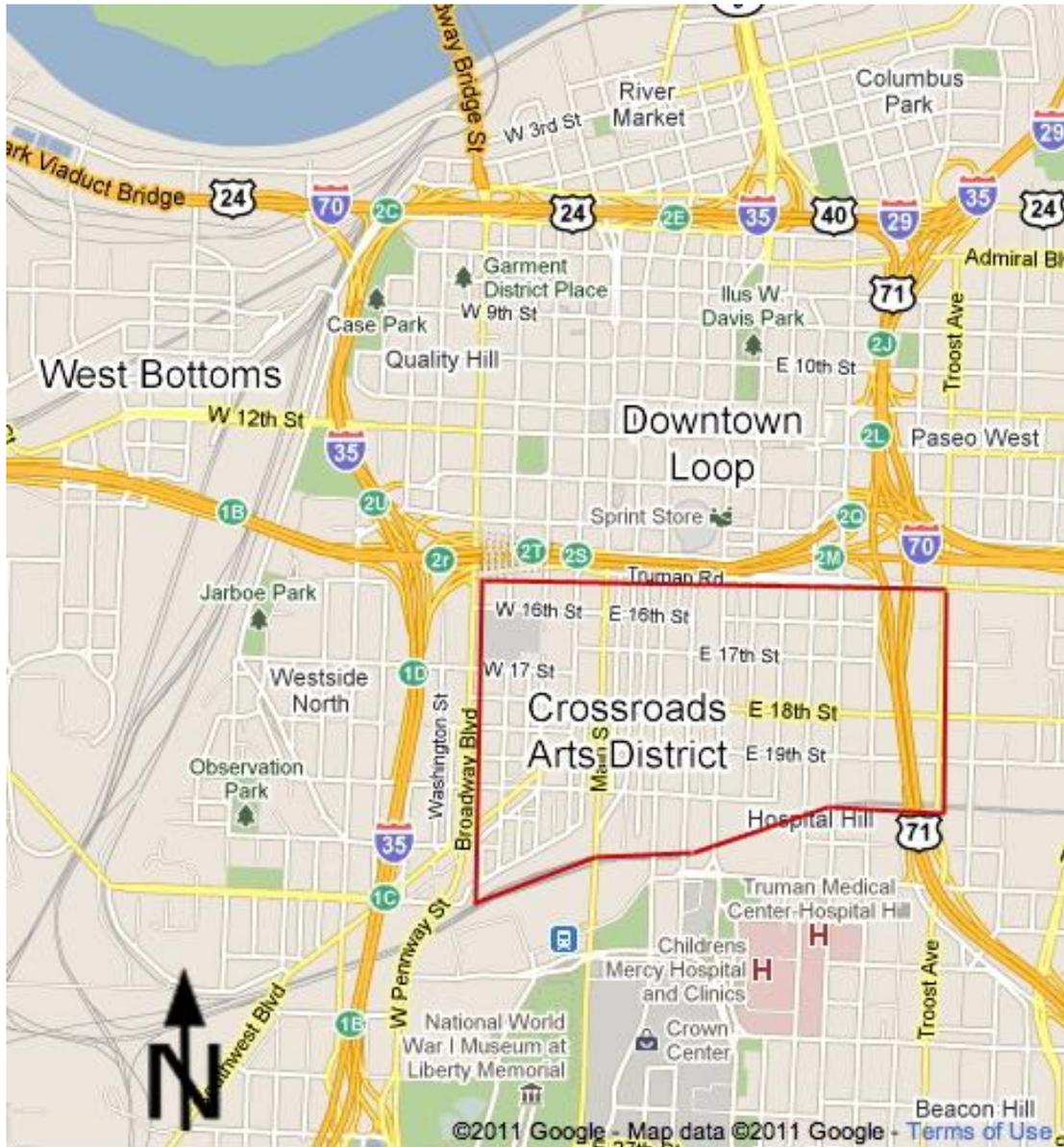
involved multiple visits to the area on typical, casual days as well as formal events such as First Friday gallery walks. Participant observation allowed the researcher to experience the district's events and understand how the district functions from a visitor's perspective. This step was also crucial as the researcher initiated informal conversations with local business owners and artists in the area to gain brief insights into their perceptions of the district, and gain references to key individuals for formal personal interviews. Personal interviews served as the primary source of data for this research. Interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders in the community as well as public officials with interests in the district. These interviews revealed a broad range of perspectives on the past, present, and projected development of the Crossroads Arts District. The interviews were loosely structured, allowing participants to elaborate openly on their knowledge and experiences with the district. The following list identifies the over-arching topics that were explored throughout the interview process.

1. How did this district evolve into an arts community?
2. Why/How did the district become formalized?
3. What effects did formal policies have on the district?
4. How does the Crossroads Arts District relate to the downtown revitalization?

Based on these interviews, this report makes conclusions about the perceptions and process of arts district development and maintenance, within the context of broader downtown revitalization initiatives. Because the concept of culture in community development is intrinsically tied to dynamic local contexts and perceptions, this research does not attempt to generalize the effects of cultural district development. Rather, this case study provides insight into particular characteristics and processes of this cultural district.

### 3.3 Study Area: Description of the District

The study area identified for this research is the Crossroads Arts District in Kansas City, Missouri. The map below depicts the boundaries of the area within Kansas City's urban core.



**Figure 3-1: Map of Kansas City's Urban Core, source: Google Earth, 2011**

Kansas City was initially chosen for two reasons: first, downtown Kansas City has undertaken aggressive revitalization policies that have consequently affected the Crossroads Arts

District which definitely warrants a case study of their affects; and second, because it was easily accessible for repeated visits and personal interviews over several months.

The Crossroads Arts District is one of 14 neighborhoods that make up the Greater Downtown Area of Kansas City, Missouri. Recognizing the competitive advantage a vibrant downtown offers, Kansas City leaders have focused their efforts on the revival of downtown commercial centers and venerable neighborhoods. Downtown improvements have included safety escorts, sidewalk and landscaping installation, maintenance services, and homeless services.<sup>2</sup> Public investments have enticed private investors to build or rehabilitate office spaces, hotels, and entertainment spaces. Over the last decade, downtown Kansas City has experienced a huge transformation, “with an economic development boom in excess of \$5.2 billion since 2000.”<sup>3</sup> Some investments have made important, subtle impacts, such as improving the overall safety and cleanliness of downtown. Other developments in the Downtown Loop, such as the new Power & Light District and Sprint Center arena, have made dramatic statements and received much publicity for the entertainment opportunities provided to residents of Kansas City and other surrounding communities.

Likewise, the Crossroads Arts District, located just south of, and adjacent to Kansas City’s Central Business District – “the downtown loop” - has provided a distinct cultural opportunity, drawing visitors even beyond the Kansas City metropolitan area to experience the culture and interact with artists. The district spans a fairly large area of mixed-use buildings that have been rehabilitated into condos, shops, restaurants, studios, and galleries. It is often described as a “grab-bag” type of neighborhood where high-rise lofts are scattered amongst

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<sup>2</sup> Sean O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18 2011.

<sup>3</sup> COR Team, 2010. Greater Downtown Area Plan, pg. 2

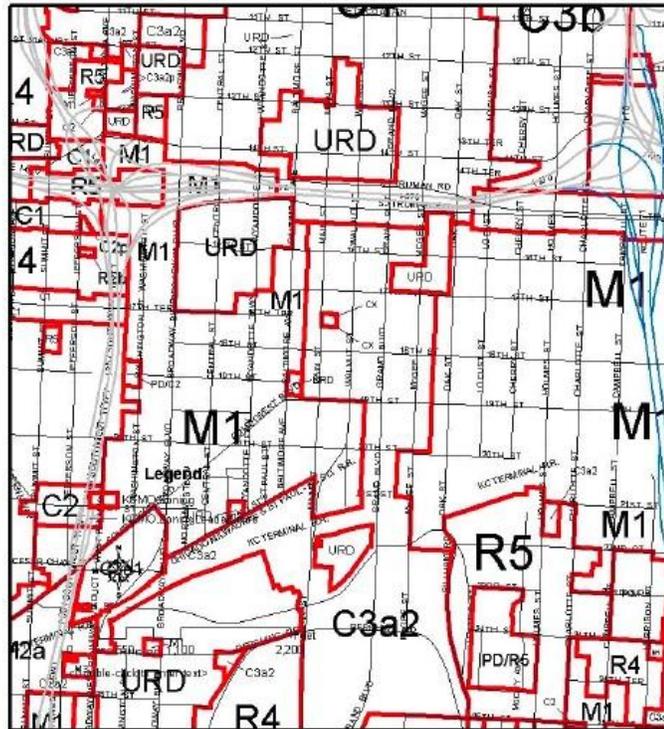
smaller businesses and studios. The district is clearly bounded by Interstate 670 on the north, separating it from the downtown loop to the north of the highway (Figure 3-2, below). To the south, the Kansas City Terminal Railway Tracks contribute to the neighborhood's quirky layout, while providing a definite barrier between Crown Center and Hospital Hill.



**Figure 3-2: Crossroads Arts District, source: Google Earth, 2011.**

The boundaries are less decipherable on the east and west sides of the district. Although Troost Avenue is the official boundary on the east, the Crossroads neighborhood seems to gradually lose character, with only a few trailing galleries and restaurants towards the 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine district. A similar lack of distinction is evident between the Crossroads District and the West Side neighborhood. This border was actually the subject of debate as the Crossroads residents felt their boundaries extended to Interstate-35, while the West Side residents felt their boundaries reached to Broadway. The dispute was eventually settled and Broadway is now the official west boundary of the Crossroads Arts District. Zoning classifications in the Crossroads

include Intermediate Business, Urban Redevelopment District, Adult Entertainment, and Light Industry as seen in Figure 3.3 below. The classification descriptions on the following page explain the variety of uses in the area.



**Figure 3-3: Crossroads District Zoning Classifications, source: Crossroads Arts PIEA, 2007**

**Table 3.1: Zoning Classifications in the Crossroads, source: Crossroads Arts PIEA, Development Initiatives, Inc.**

<i>Zoning Classification</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
C3a2- Intermediate Business, high buildings	District C3a2 is intended to permit large-scale commercial development designed to serve regional trade areas with greater height and bulk than in District C3a2
URD- Urban Redevelopment District	The purpose of the urban redevelopment district is to encourage and accommodate development and redevelopment of

	underdeveloped and blighted sections of the city and to encourage the latitude and flexibility in design to ensure the stated purposes of a redevelopment plan
CX- Adult Entertainment	The purpose of district C-X is to identify and prescribe specific requirements and conditions for the location of certain defined adult entertainment activities.
M1-Light Industry	In district M1, no building or land shall be used and no building shall be erected, altered or enlarged, which is arranged, intended or designed other than the uses outlined in Sec. 80-180 of Chapter 80 City Code

The district’s cultural uses began around the Freighthouse district, later spreading north, and then east due to affordable building prices.<sup>4</sup> Because the neighborhood is fairly spread out, it lacks an overall sense of density and vitality during the day. Instead, there are pockets of activity in smaller areas and the restaurants and coffee shops are surprisingly full even when the streets seem empty. The mood changes during events such as First Fridays when the district can get “shoulder to shoulder” packed with visitors from all over Kansas City.

The Crossroads Arts District is an example of a district that has undergone significant changes influenced by cultural development strategies. From a run-down and forgotten part of

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Potter, AICP, Development Initiatives, personal communication, February 18, 2011. Potter worked with the Kansas City Economic Development Corporation for several years before starting Development Initiatives, Inc. a private consulting firm. He worked on the General development plan and blight analysis for the Crossroads Arts PIEA in 2006

Kansas City, the neighborhood rapidly transformed into an area with a cluster of increasingly popular art galleries. The art galleries in turn spawned the growth of meeting places, nicer living spaces, and the beginnings of a nightlife destination for non-residents of the Crossroads. So successful were these changes that the area's median income dramatically increased from \$33K in 2002 to \$79K in only two years (Glassberg, 2005). This increase in the wealth and property demands of the district, however, has also fueled the gentrification process of the area, which now may threaten the continued "arts" flavor of the district, which is what made it so successful initially. These challenges are similar to the conflict and displacement struggles observed in cultural districts in New York City, San Francisco, Vancouver, and London. Many case studies illustrate a gentrification process of creative industries that is inevitable without appropriate policies, just as the Crossroads Arts District has experienced. Therefore this paper will show that cultural development strategies that prevent or slow this process must also be part of the long-range cultural development strategies.

Because artists are often priced out of such districts when property values rise, policies that enable creatives to afford to live in these districts are necessary to prevent what Peck calls "gentrification strategies," (Peck, 2005). In order to maintain the distinct creative synergy of the Crossroads, the Crossroads Community Association (CCA) began working with Mayor Kay Barnes to develop a tax abatement plan for those property owners with property devoted primarily to creative uses. In 2007, the Planned Industrial Expansion Authority (PIEA) Board of Kansas City declared the area blighted, making the district eligible for tax abatement purposes. The tax abatement allows eligible property owners of arts and cultural uses to pay property taxes based on the assessed value of their property for the next ten years, rather than increasing with each new assessment. These types of policies are recommended in literature, making an

examination of their affects an important contribution to understanding their effects on a cultural district.

## **Chapter 4 - Case Study of the Crossroads Arts District**

The Crossroads area has seen a variety of functions and users over time. From a heavy industrial area, to a leftover building stock, to a cultural district, the area's transformations, though unique, have been inevitably connected to the broader context of downtown Kansas City. This chapter follows the progression of the Crossroads Arts District from an organic artist community to a more formalized district, illustrating the subsequent community changes and demands<sup>5</sup>. An illustration of the areas changes over time helps us understand the neighborhood as a dynamic place where the interaction of key players has and continues to shape the district's use<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, the progression of the District demonstrates the roles that various organizations, such as community associations and economic development councils, can play in the evolution and economic growth of an urban area<sup>7</sup>.

### **Historic Uses**

Artists were originally attracted to the Crossroads, not because of any public policies or plans, but simply because the built environment of the Crossroads Arts District was ideal for their needs and use. Thus, an examination of the area's infrastructural attributes is necessary. The urban form of the neighborhood is a product of the neighborhood's industrial history. As Figure 4.1 shows, the district resides within the boundaries of the Downtown Industrial Area which, "characterized by numerous business and industrial establishments which occupy

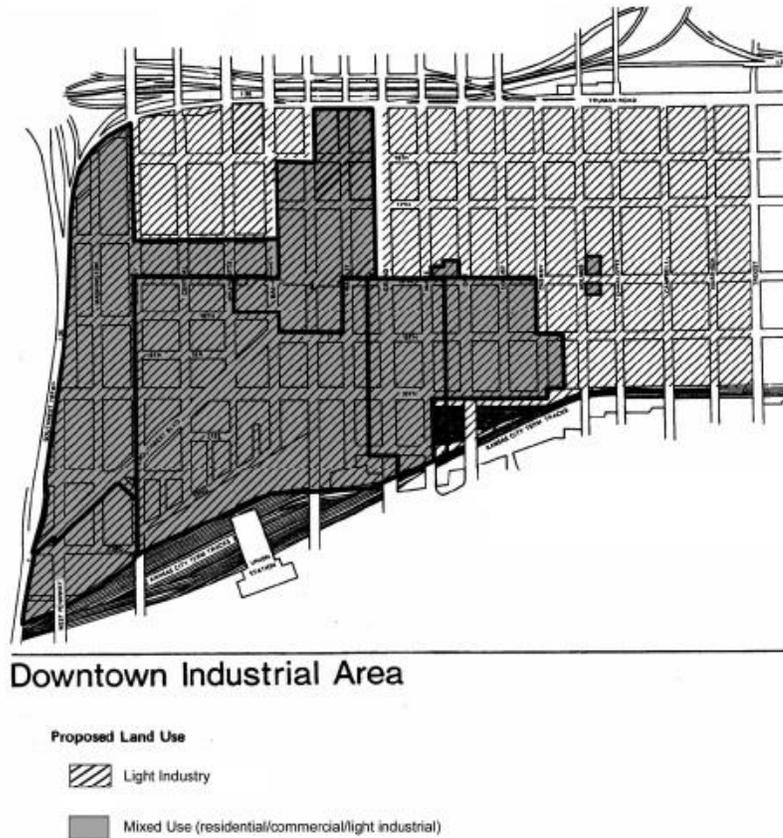
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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix B for a Summary Table of the Crossroads Arts District Evolution

<sup>6</sup> Appendix C summarizes the involvement of individual actors

<sup>7</sup> Appendix D summarizes the involvement of organizations

buildings that were either constructed before or shortly after the turn of the century along the major transportation arterials extending south of Truman Road to the Kansas City Terminal Railroad Tracks.”<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 4-1: Downtown Industrial Area, source: Crossroads PIEA, 2007**

Referencing the Crossroads’ building stock, long-time resident Suzie Aron elaborated on the connection between the railway and the neighborhoods’ form saying, “these are buildings from the time when people were taking stuff off the trains and putting them back on the trains...they would take the merchandise off, do something with it, and then send it back out

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<sup>8</sup> Development Initiatives, 2006, General Development Plan and Blight Analysis: Crossroads Arts PIEA

again, so it didn't matter whether it was beer, automobiles, movies, or garments, it was a time in Kansas City when that kind of commerce went on.”<sup>9</sup>

Over coffee at Mildred's Coffeeshouse<sup>10</sup>, local Joel Gladstone told a brief history of the area. Gladstone explained, “Back in the early 1900s, the railroads ran through here and they built all these great buildings for manufacturing,” items such as canned goods, commercial fryers, jeans, and even tanks during WWII<sup>11</sup>. “And all these buildings -- and they're awesome -- they're so strongly built that they're held together by laws of gravity. These huge beams are just sitting there.”<sup>12</sup> The buildings' strength allowed them to stay standing without maintenance or repairs once the industries left. The result was an aged building stock, and through the years, “they dropped in value. They were just sitting there vacant, in the 70s, they were just about free.”<sup>13</sup> The combination of the industries leaving, and continued suburbanization around

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<sup>9</sup> Suzie Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011. Aron grew up in downtown Kansas City. Her family owned a garment business in the Central Business District. Since moving back to Kansas City later on in her life, she has been heavily involved with the Crossroads District for years, jokingly referring to herself as the “big Jewish mother” of the neighborhood.

<sup>10</sup> Mildred's is a family owned and operated coffeeshouse centrally located in the Crossroads that, according to Jim Potter, was previously referred to as the “graffiti building” because it was covered in tags, until it burnt down and was rehabilitated in 2004. Currently, the coffeeshouse participates in First Fridays, showcases local artists, sells music, and is a popular spot for a variety of people. I had brought my camera and set it on the table while I was waiting to meet Gladstone. During a rare slower moment, the barista who noticed my camera told me he was a photography student at KCAI. He gave me a quick photography lesson and told me about some interesting techniques.

<sup>11</sup> Joel Gladstone, personal communication, January 28, 2011. Joel Gladstone is a realtor who specializes in properties in Kansas City's Urban Core. I was referred to his website <http://www.ruurbank.com/> by one of the business owners in the Crossroads District. A clear advocate for the urban lifestyle, he was very knowledgeable about the District as well as downtown KC. Gladstone was once a member of the Crossroads Community Association, but since his business moved, he is now a friend of the district

<sup>12</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

Kansas City attracted real estate interests outside of the Crossroads as well as Downtown. The low property values during this time reflect the overall lack of interest in the neighborhood.

Yet, it is precisely these reasons that made the neighborhood ripe for an arts community. Affordability is arguably the most important element necessary for new and emerging artists to be creative in a particular space. The lack of demand for property in this area made the values extremely low. Moreover, the buildings' histories lends them a unique character that artists may have appreciated more than others. Thus, while the built environment of the Crossroads did not entice businesses or residents, the affordable, flexible building stock of this "leftover neighborhood," set the stage for an influx of artists.

### **"Urban Pioneers"**

The next part of the Crossroads history illustrates how major changes in urban development patterns are not always the result of community plans, but rather the actions of individuals. Kansas City had maintained the area's industrial zoning for years as development and investments were being made elsewhere. However, like many other places across the U.S., artists were initially attracted to the warehouses as they were easily modified into affordable gallery and studio spaces. Gladstone explained, "Artists came down here, bought some buildings because they were cheap and they started putting in galleries and workshops." The Crossroads District began its transformation in the 1980s from a "leftover neighborhood that hardly anyone was interested in,"<sup>14</sup> into the distinctive gallery district it is today. At the time, "it wasn't

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<sup>14</sup> McGraw, 2010, Jim Leedy: The Documentary.

completely desolate, there were still some manufacturing businesses and car shops,” but there were neither residents nor visitors in the area “after 5 p.m. when the workday was over.”<sup>15</sup> Suzie Aron, who “was always interested in these types of buildings because of their integrity and architectural form,” returned to Kansas City to find “these buildings became shells like in downtowns all over America.”<sup>16</sup>

Jim Leedy, an internationally recognized painter and sculptor who had been teaching at the Kansas City Art Institute (KCAI) since 1966, rented a building in Kansas City’s Westport neighborhood to provide students and faculty an off-campus venue for exhibitions. His daughter, Stephanie Leedy explained, “He opened up a gallery on Broadway that he rented. Then Westport started growing and becoming gentrified,” causing his rent to inflate from \$500 a month to \$5,000 in one year.<sup>17</sup> Unable to afford the increased rent, Leedy closed the gallery in the 1970s.

Having experienced the vulnerability that comes with renting, Leedy “made sure to buy a building so he wouldn’t get kicked out.”<sup>18</sup> In 1980, he opened the Leedy-Voukous Gallery at 1919 Wyandotte. Leedy wanted to provide more studio space, particularly for graduates of KCAI. It had previously been considered taboo for graduates to stay in the area, but the affordable spaces and venues for display and exposure made the area attractive for artists. In order to subsidize the gallery space and provide opportunities for artists, Leedy “filled up the studio space upstairs,” charging low rents. Leedy’s outlook is, “if I can get enough money from

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<sup>15</sup> Stephanie Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011. Stephanie is Jim Leedy’s daughter who now owns several properties in the Crossroads and runs the Leedy-Volkous Art Gallery.

<sup>16</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

my renters to pay my taxes and pay my insurance and utilities, that's all I need. I'm not a developer; I'm not there to make money. I'm there to create a community.”<sup>19</sup> Whereas before, “there was nothing to hold them [the KCAI graduates] there. By providing studios, kids started to stay here. The gallery attracted people.”<sup>20</sup>

Many of the first artists to settle in the Crossroads Arts District did not necessarily view purchasing property in the area as a planning activity. Yet the interdependent relationship of the individuals within the area made planning a natural pursuit. By purchasing a building in the Crossroads, Leedy was planning for the future and avoiding rent problems he had experienced in Westport. In turn, the way he chose to use his property - low rents, studio/gallery space – began to shift the way the area was used. More galleries began to open in the area, including the Contemporary Arts Center in 1985. Clearly, Leedy's initial move into the Crossroads made the area more attractive for artists. Jim Leedy's individual decisions catalyzed major changes in the area, and were prompted not by public organizations, but by an ideal environment and his personal experiences.

## **Creating a Community**

As a result of Jim Leedy's actions, which began to shift the character and use of the district, the creative synergy grew organically as individuals continued to pursue their own interests in the arts and the neighborhood. Early on, Leedy envisioned an arts community in the Crossroads, and persuaded his tenants to purchase property in the district. In this way, he

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<sup>19</sup> McGraw, 2010

<sup>20</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

confronted uncertainty about how others would use the area. In 1988, when one tenant and student of Leedy's, John O'Brien, decided he was ready to move out. Leedy asked him to, "just please look for a building in the neighborhood so you can stay here. So he did."<sup>21</sup> Encouraged by Leedy, O'Brien decided to buy in the area, and he opened the Dolphin gallery in 1988. "At that point in time, there were buildings for sale for cheap, there was nothing down here."<sup>22</sup> Due to the area's infrastructural attributes that were well suited for galleries- flexible spaces, close proximity, and affordable values - "Leedy encouraged as many other artists as he could to buy buildings and use a similar formula of opening a gallery and renting studio space to others."<sup>23</sup> Many artists, who bought property in the area, already felt connected to the Crossroads after years of opportunities and support from other neighborhood artists. Because Leedy understood the importance of owning property, when tenants moved out, he "would say, buy a building, that's great, but buy one in the area so we can stay together and walk to each other's gallery. So that's how it all started."<sup>24</sup> Thus, we see that the arts installation in the Crossroads Arts District did not follow an organized timeline. Rather, it was a spontaneous and organic pattern of individuals making strategic, interrelated decisions.

During this time, Suzie Aron, who became involved in the real estate business, was also pursuing her interest in photography. "There was a small group of us in a building in the River Market, and it was a cheap space, but really had no energy, no synergy. I told them they should come up here [to the Crossroads] because Leedy had already started his energy down here and there were about 3 or 4 galleries already down here. So I got them [the Society of Contemporary

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<sup>21</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> *Jim Leedy: The Documentary*, McGraw, 2010

<sup>24</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

Photography] to come up here in one of Leedy's buildings."<sup>25</sup> Over the next decade, more galleries opened in the area, including the Cohen-Berkowitz Gallery, and the Opie Gallery for Young Artists. Thus, we see that galleries and artists desired to be near other galleries and to be a part of the creative synergy the Crossroads. A dense cluster of the arts grew simply because artists and galleries attracted each other.

Another key actor who helped attract even more emerging artists to the district is Jeff Becker. In 2001, Becker opened the Non-profit Crossroads Arts Incubator to equip emerging artists with resources and exposure for careers in the arts. Becker, who was "inspired by the business incubation model,"<sup>26</sup> recognized the need to accommodate new artists in the Crossroads up-and-coming art scene by providing affordable studio space as well as career development training. Located in the 3-story, Bauer Machine Works Building,<sup>27</sup> the incubator provides individual as well as common studio spaces to 47 "installation artists, jewelry, graphic, scenic, fashion and furniture designers, alongside painters, illustrators, writers, sculptors, photographers, and videographers."<sup>28</sup> The Arts Incubator has been a huge draw to the Crossroads and benefit to the artists, because "it's a great and rare opportunity for creatives to interact with their audience on a regular basis and experience their reactions, first hand, on their own turf, while the public is given a chance to view the work in the space it was created."<sup>29</sup> As more and more artists and visionaries were drawn to the Crossroads, Jim Leedy's vision for an arts community came to life. By first envisioning an arts community, and then recommending and convincing other artists to

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<sup>25</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> From the Arts Incubator website <http://artsincubatorkc.org/about/>, 2011

<sup>27</sup> Built in 2003

<sup>28</sup> from the Arts Incubator website <http://artsincubatorkc.org/about>

<sup>29</sup> From the Arts Incubator website <http://artsincubatorkc.org/about/>, 2011

invest in property, Leedy planted the seeds for incentives for collective planning activities later on.

## Claiming the Neighborhood

Thus far, this case study has shown how the burgeoning creative scene in the Crossroads grew organically. We must now turn to other characteristics of the neighborhood that caused problems for this new influx of creatives. We will see that because collective needs were not being met, voluntary, cooperative planning efforts eventually became necessary, despite the important role individual actors continue to play in shaping the District.

Kathy Aron Dowell, daughter of Suzie Aron, moved to the Crossroads and “rented a 300 square foot loft in the Opie Brush building from Jim Leedy.”<sup>30</sup> Dowell’s husband was an architect at El Dorado architecture, also located in the Crossroads. “When we moved here, there were just a handful of artists living/working there.”<sup>31</sup> Aron, who was already involved in the neighborhood real estate, explained that her daughter’s return to the area increased her concern for the Crossroads’ problems, such as “drugs, prostitution, and day labor.”<sup>32</sup> Aron’s interests in the community-- social, financial, and at this point, much more personal -- encouraged her to take

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<sup>30</sup> Kathy Dowell, personal communication, January 12, 2011. Kathy is well-connected to the Kansas City arts scene. Her website explains that she is a “strong supporter of Kansas City’s cultural community, and has been involved with the Visual Arts Consortium (VAC) group of 40 leaders in the arts community working to foster and improve the personal and professional lives of artists and arts professionals living in the Greater Kansas City area. She was also founding member of both ArtsAlive, an interdisciplinary cultural awareness initiative; and 360 Degrees, Kansas City’s first philanthropic giving circle (organized through the Women’s Foundation of Kansas City).” <http://www.kathydowell.com>, 2011

<sup>31</sup> K. Dowell, personal communication, January 12, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

action, and have since established her as a major actor in any Crossroads Arts District planning initiative. Dowell’s own experiences in other cities — Boston, San Francisco — where “revitalization was just natural,”<sup>33</sup> further allowed them to envision possibilities for the neighborhood’s improvement. Aron revealed their motivation behind planning activities, saying, “me a community person, and them a young couple moving back to Kansas City, decided to get involved, so it was kind of a family thing.”<sup>34</sup>

Aron explained, “In the beginning, it was a really rough neighborhood. It had integrity, it was cheap, but it also had real issues that most people were really unwilling to deal with. It’s usually in that type of a neighborhood that you find artists, because they can afford it, and they can’t afford anything else. Also, if the buildings are good buildings, they can see that and they’re willing to put in the sweat equity”<sup>35</sup>. This is exactly what Sean O’Byrne, the current Vice President of Business Development for the Kansas City Downtown Council, did. “I restored a loft in the Crossroads in 1984. At that point, nobody lived down there, so I provided all the labor for free and got my first year of rent for free. My second year, I paid \$150 a month.”<sup>36</sup> Despite the area’s growing artistic energy, there were still many empty buildings in the neighborhood, and “with empty buildings comes a lot of problems, police rarely came because there was nothing to steal, nothing to protect. It was kind of dangerous -- it was even less interesting than dangerous because nobody gave a damn.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>36</sup> Sean O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011. O’Byrne is currently the Vice President of Business Development/Executive Director of Kansas City’s Downtown and River Market Community Improvement Districts.

<sup>37</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

The unpleasant atmosphere of the area prevented most people, other than the artists, from investing in the area or even visiting at all. “So those of us who started moving back into the neighborhood, we knew that if we were going to be down here, we needed to do something about it to reclaim the community. We’ve always had a great dynamic, art community, but we couldn’t sell any art.”<sup>38</sup> Finally, Aron and other members of the community decided to take action and held a meeting at John O’Brien’s, owner of the Dolphin Gallery. “We got together and invited a bunch of people we knew that had buildings down here and started identifying issues -- how are we going to reclaim the neighborhood? Get police service? Make people want to come down here?”<sup>39</sup> These issues provided motivation for community members to come together and collectively address their neighborhood concerns.

### **Crossroads Community Association**

Individual property owners voluntarily formed a group to take action because they realized their collective needs- safety, maintenance- were not being met. These individuals engaged in planning activities by deliberating to gather information, identifying neighborhood issues, and evaluating alternatives. Through this planning process, the decision was made to establish the Crossroads Community Association (CCA) in 1997. The CCA was a factor in the districts’ success because it was a unified body that interacted with all actors involved. Aron explained, “We always had the boundaries, that was predetermined by a city plan. We knew who we were in terms of a name, it was already called the Crossroads, we just claimed it as the

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<sup>38</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>39</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

Crossroads Arts District.”<sup>40</sup> The CCA was and still is made up of neighborhood artists, property owners, residents and other stakeholders; in Aron’s words, “anyone who cares about the district.”

While individual interests of the members are varied, they share a common goal of supporting the arts. Their mission statement is stated below:

“The mission of the Crossroads Community Association shall be to support, promote, advance, and encourage the revitalization of the community as a thriving, safe and attractive center of art, history, enterprise, commerce, culture, residence, entertainment, education and other activity; to inform and educate the members of this association and the public about community issues; to provide a forum to address community objectives and issues; to build a strong community through communication, cooperation, planning and leadership; to build a strong partnership between business owners, property owners, tenants and residents to ensure community involvement; and to enhance the quality of life within the community,” (CCA, 2010).

It is clear from this statement, that the CCA recognized and embraced its formal role in planning activities. Aron recalled that the association allowed them to be “watchdogs for ourselves and both the tenants and the owners, we wanted it to be affordable so that everyone could join, and then we all started working together.”<sup>41</sup> Since its formation, the CCA has been an active organization. While the personal interests of members are very diverse, they share a unified interest in strengthening and promoting the Crossroads Arts District as a physical place. Bob Long explains, “Going to a Crossroads Community Association meeting is one of the few places you will find developers, sculptors, painters, real estate brokers, and residents who don’t do any of those things in the same meeting, because they’re all in the same neighborhood.”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, the Association was one key step in formalizing the area as a distinct cultural district. As more changes continued to transform the district, the CCA has served as a primary communication link between the interests of the neighborhood and other public entities. The

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<sup>40</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

district was further formalized through increased communication and cooperation among the galleries. Kathy Dowell “managed a few creative businesses in the neighborhood before becoming the director of the Society for Contemporary Photography in 2000,”<sup>43</sup> In this position, Dowell became a key actor in the formalization of the district as she looked for ways to collaborate with other galleries, and therefore increase publicity and media coverage of the arts in the district. Dowell’s position eventually helped establish the popular First Friday events in the Crossroads Arts District. The CCA and joint efforts of the galleries solidified the arts as a priority for neighborhood initiatives.

### **First Fridays**

Social ties to the Crossroads Arts District have helped strengthen collective efforts and collaboration, and have played a huge role in building area support. In this case, social ties have been built through both informal social interactions and formal events. While many events take place in the area, First Friday gallery openings are the most recognizable, recurring district events, and have not only helped unify, but also market the Crossroads as an arts district. We find once again that while the First Fridays have garnered much attention, interest, and marketing for the neighborhood, they had been occurring informally long before they were an official Crossroads event. While the evening gallery events are currently well established and formally organized; they began, much like the district itself, organically. Stephanie Leedy recounted that, “As artists started moving in here, we went for years and years without First Fridays. We would send out mailers and there was a standard group that would come every time. We saw the same

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<sup>43</sup> K. Dowell, personal communication, January 12, 2011.

people on our mailing lists. There was a small group of people that were just aware of the galleries.”<sup>44</sup> Aron recalled, “Everybody was so poor that nobody could afford postage, so we decided to have joint openings so we could share the mailing lists, share one envelope, and put all the invitations inside it.”<sup>45</sup>

After recognizing that the mailing lists were essentially the same for different galleries, the need for coordination became apparent. “We got sick and tired of sending out invitations and getting phone calls about other galleries’ openings. So then actually, Kathy Aaron and John O’Brien decided maybe we should try being open on the First Friday of every month and then we wouldn’t have to send out invitations,”<sup>46</sup> Gladstone credits First Friday events as a primary catalyst in increasing the area’s popularity. “Galleries started doing open houses, but then they thought, rather than each of us having openings, let’s get together, send out one postcard to all of these people and see what happens...it started by word of mouth and just kept growing.”<sup>47</sup>

Dowell explains that coordinating the openings was an important move because, “it established a 'brand' so to speak... in the beginning we all would call each other- again there were only about 6 of us by that time- and try to match opening dates, etc., to piggyback and build visitorship... but that was a pain for a number of reasons. I had been to other cities that had these established art-walk evenings (Portland, Houston, etc) and knew it was pretty simple... the shows don’t have to be new/opening, you just had to mutually agree to be open late one night every month... First Friday sounded good, it was easy to remember,”<sup>48</sup> The synergy that occurred when

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<sup>44</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> K. Dowell, personal communication, January 12, 2011.

“Building owners and artists got together, morphed into thousands of people walking around here.”<sup>49</sup> Trisha Drape, the associate director of the Arts Incubator, explained, “events had a huge part in the transformation of the district<sup>50</sup>,” by bringing together emerging artists, art collectors, students, and people new to the arts scene in a fun, social environment. Moreover, because the galleries and shows were all volunteer-driven, a sense of community and collaboration grew, and “that’s how we all evolved into the neighborhood.”<sup>51</sup> Clearly, the social affinity of the Crossroads made voluntary organization, and coordinating planning activities easier.

By organizing the openings, the area gained a lot of publicity and grew in popularity. “Then there were so many galleries, and most of them were along Baltimore, and then coffee shops started opening up, restaurants, then developers started buying some old buildings and putting in condos.”<sup>52</sup> The Kansas City Art Institute continued to be a natural feed into the area, as artists could work in the areas’ restaurants to supplement their earnings from art sales. Clearly, the developer’s decisions to invest were based on their awareness of market trends and the neighborhood changes brought about by the collective benefits of First Fridays and the CCA.

## **Increased Property Taxes**

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<sup>49</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Trisha Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011. Drape has worked in the Crossroads area for years, but recently joined the Arts Incubator in December 2010 as the associate director.

<sup>51</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

At this point in the Crossroads evolution, unintended consequences of neighborhood reinvestment become evident- primarily increased property taxes, threatening the affordable spaces that that allowed the arts district to grow in the first place. The new businesses transformed the area into a more livable and complete neighborhood for artists and property owners like Stephanie Leedy. Whereas, “before there was nowhere to eat...you couldn’t walk down the street you had to get in your car and drive somewhere.” Restaurants, coffee shops, and boutiques started to appear, including Mildred’s Coffeehouse in 2004, and The Cashew in 2005. Leedy and other long-time property owners witnessed the changes to their neighborhood, “and it was great, until the day we got this incredible property tax bill and we had to borrow \$40,000.”<sup>53</sup> Investments and improvements made the area more desirable and more expensive. In fact, the area’s median income dramatically increased from \$33,000 in 2002 up to \$79,000 in 2004 (Glassberg, 2005). This increased income indicates the rising real estate prices, and subsequent taxes, making rent unaffordable to many local artists.

The Leedys, along with other owners in the area, were caught off guard and completely unprepared for the huge assessment increase. “For years our taxes were really low, which let us keep the rents low. There was no mathematical equation for rent, we just wanted artists here. For years, we just slipped on by and our taxes stayed the same.”<sup>54</sup> Without warning, property owners in the district could not adequately prepare for the increased taxes. Leedy revealed her frustration saying, “In hindsight, I wish they would have increased them gradually, but it was like all of a sudden they realized, ‘wow there’s a lot going on in the Crossroads, we have to tax them.’ It wasn’t just the commercial properties, it was everybody. Jackson County wasn’t

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<sup>53</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>54</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

raising them incrementally, it was all at once. How is that fair? We're the reason everybody else is down here, so let us stay. We're willing to pay taxes, but it has to be reasonable."<sup>55</sup> Property owners were particularly frustrated because most noticeable improvements to the district were brought about by private, individual investments rather than public investments. These challenges are similar to the displacement struggles observed in cultural districts of New York City, San Francisco, Vancouver, and London (Currid, Hutton).

"We ran into some trouble once the city realized the value in these buildings and raised the taxes," explains Gladstone. "The CCA came along and them getting together gave them a voice...other than the fact that we're here, these buildings don't have a lot of value."<sup>56</sup> Once again, growing concern about the increased property assessments led the CCA to begin discussions about ways to retain artists in the late 1990s, but there were no formal efforts in place. Suzie Aron played a huge role in the long process, saying, "The reality was it took me years to get this [the Planned Industrial Expansion Area] done. And it was a language I had to learn. What I knew was that we were going to be in trouble, because we were getting too successful. We want other development other than arts development, but we recognized that the properties were getting more valuable and the rents were going up."<sup>57</sup> The CCA's common mission is "to be able to keep the creative people in the neighborhood because that's really the basis of our identity and although we want it to be mixed-use, we needed a stabilization factor. What is unique is that artists are very often in on the beginning of making an area special, but they usually have to leave -- we didn't want ours to leave."<sup>58</sup> The collective goal of retaining the

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<sup>55</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>56</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011.

<sup>57</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>58</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

arts was a necessary element of the district's success. This allowed the entire community to understand the increased property assessments as a neighborhood issue, and take action accordingly.

### **Crossroads Arts Planned Industrial Expansion Area**

In order to address the new property taxes, public assistance was needed for legislative action. As we have seen, the origin and growth of the Crossroads Arts District in Kansas City were products of community members. However, at this point in the case study, we will see the pivotal role played by public organizations and municipal governments. Due to the pressures caused by the increased property values, the Crossroads Community Association realized it was necessary for the public sector to become more involved in planning efforts. While the city initially gave the district its name, acknowledged it as a distinct neighborhood in city plans, and even made recommendations for increased gallery coordination, the CCA actively sought out public assistance only when it was clear legislation was necessary.

The property values in the Crossroads District had been reassessed at significantly higher rates, even though the neighborhood, like other parts of downtown, was still experiencing blight, vacant buildings, and a lack of vitality. Thus, the changing dynamic of the neighborhood concerned not only the local business and resident community, but public officials as well. When local property owners sought out ways to improve their neighborhood quality, Kansas City economic developers had been investigating incentives for businesses and development in the urban core. Their joint efforts eventually resulted in the Crossroads Arts Planned Industrial

Expansion Area (PIEA), a tax abatement policy that allowed arts/culture related businesses to keep their taxes low.

When development services specialist Bob Long began working at the Kansas City Economic Development Corporation (EDC) in 2003, one of his first assignments was to find a way to retain the area’s creative synergy. As Bob Long explained, “Conversations were primarily focused through the CCA, and they had a lot of talks about tools to retain the arts community. Well, that means legislation...which most of them knew nothing about. So when I got involved with that effort it was like trying to figure out how to do this. I thought well, we don’t have time to create a new tool, why don’t we use something we already have? So that’s when the idea of creating the Crossroads Arts PIEA began.”<sup>59</sup> The Planned Industrial Expansion Authority was formed to “foster commercial and industrial development in specifically designated redevelopment areas,” in different parts of Kansas City.<sup>60</sup> The PIEA approves new construction or rehabilitation projects to grant a 100% abatement of new property taxes for 10 years, followed by 50% abatement for the following 15 years. This strategy was an appealing solution “because all of the people involved in the local legislation process were familiar with PIEA. We wanted to use an existing tool, just tweak how it was used.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, as Figure 4.2 illustrates, there were already several piecemeal tax abatement projects in the Crossroads itself including the Film Row PIEA for the Screenland Theater building and the 23<sup>rd</sup> and Wyandotte PIEA for El Dorado Architects.<sup>62</sup> However, a comprehensive solution was needed to curb the increasing property taxes for the area as a whole.

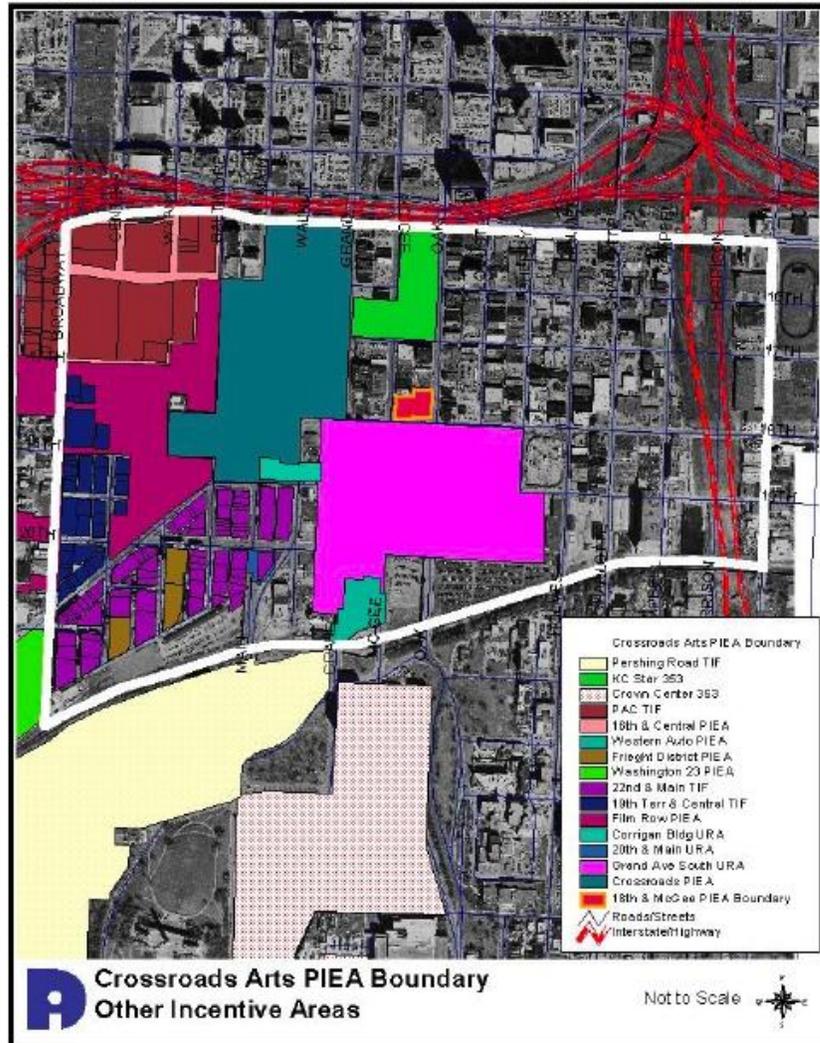
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<sup>59</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>60</sup> The Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City, [www.edckc.com](http://www.edckc.com), 2010.

<sup>61</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>62</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011.



**Figure 4-2: Pre-existing tax incentive areas, source: Crossroads Arts PIEA, 2007**

While the plan to address property taxes was the initial concern of the CCA, the EDC saw tax abatement policies as something they understood, and recognized the overall community benefit of maintaining an arts community. Even though the primary benefactors of the tax abatement policy were the Crossroads property owners, the EDC was willing to get involved in the planning activities for the presumed economic benefits of attracting investment downtown.

Anticipating that the 2007 property assessments would yield significantly higher taxes for property owners in the area, Long and the CCA were compelled to take legislative action as

quickly as possible. An overlay district was proposed to cover the entire Crossroads District, but only for eligible arts and cultural uses. When the “EDC did the Crossroads Arts PIEA, that hinged more on building use than property values, so it was a tool to grow and retain the arts community in that area.”<sup>63</sup> As Long explained, “if you weren’t an eligible use, you couldn’t go through the Crossroads Arts PIEA.” Suzie Aron explained that the CCA laid out everything they felt was important- particularly artist retention- and the EDC helped them go through the legal channels of getting it approved. “We told the city, and Kay Barnes was the mayor then, what does the city do to stabilize neighborhoods and encourage development? We needed that for a particular class of people. They were afraid of it, and thought we were showing favoritism, but we just pushed.”<sup>64</sup>

Once a potential solution was found with the tax abatement, property owners in the neighborhood were eager to get the Crossroads Arts PIEA approved before the new assessments. Recognizing the impending loss of Kansas City’s marketable cultural district also increased the sense of urgency on the part of the EDC. The time pressures of this policy approval changed the scope and horizon of the PIEA to become more politically appealing. A significant political decision was made to reduce the standard 25-year tax abatement to 10 years total. Moreover, while Crossroads community members had long believed that the district extended to Interstate 35 on the west, the overlay district extended only to Broadway. This area between Broadway and I-35 had been claimed by both the Crossroads District and the West Side neighborhood for years, so choosing not to include this area in the overlay plan made it more politically attractive.

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<sup>63</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>64</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

Long explained once the overlay district was approved, “we got a bunch of projects approved before the end of 2006 so that tax abatements would be effective 2007, keeping their taxes at a much lower level.”<sup>65</sup> In the Crossroads, between 2006 and 2007, “if your values only doubled, you were one of the lucky ones. Assessed values had huge increases, between 300-500%.” Thus, locking in the 2006 values was critical in keeping the area affordable. This tax abatement policy was aimed at “controlling the operating costs for arts-related entities to make it more affordable for them.”<sup>66</sup> At the time, “we didn’t have an example to follow. We knew the tax abatement tool, but we didn’t have anything to follow. As far as we know, at the time, Crossroads was the only place in the country that used tax abatements to retain the artists.”<sup>67</sup>

The approval of the Crossroads PIEA largely depended on the CCA’s ability to convince politicians of the value of culture. While familiar with stadiums and performance centers as economic drivers, the idea that the arts and culture could spur development was less convincing. Luckily for the Crossroads, “one of the things we have recently been able to track is that young people especially are attracted by culture. They are attracted to interesting cities, a place where something is going on.”<sup>68</sup> As the CCA and the EDC recognized, the chances of people moving and then “staying in a place, depends on quality of life. What we have been able to prove is that art is a huge, huge, huge marketing tool, so we were able to convince politicians that it was worth taking a risk.”<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> B. Long, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

The political context and fact that the City was actively pursuing economic investments downtown at the time cannot be ignored. In fact, in order to get approved, the CCA had to pay for a blight study to show that while some developers and property owners had invested in the area, many parts of the district lacked investment. The information obtained through the study helped convince elected officials that the Crossroads Arts District, despite the increased property assessments, still needed some development incentives. The blight study showed that the property values were driven by the arts. As many artists and owners explained, the assessed values did not accurately reflect the building conditions, only the value added by the visible arts and culture. The creation of the PIEA General Development Plan for the Crossroads Arts area, thus included the following development strategies: retention and expansion of Arts and Cultural uses, revitalize vacant and underutilized property, bring all structures used by arts and cultural uses up to building code, increase safety in the area by decreasing crime, vandalism, and vagrancy through the use of improved lighting, fencing, general maintenance, and a higher level of activity, increase business opportunities within the area, beautify the area by improving streetscape, cleaning up the area, and generally removing the existing blighting elements<sup>70</sup>. Clearly, the expected investments in the area were a major consideration of the Crossroads Arts PIEA.

With the Crossroads Arts PIEA, Kansas City had done something unlike any other metropolitan area. Although the Crossroads began as “one of these very typical art districts- depressed, low-rise, industrial, forgotten part of town that artists move into. They come in and do a lot of the work and colonize the place and it becomes hip and cool and then developers come in and everyone else follows and it drives the artists out,” the Crossroads Arts District is

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<sup>70</sup> Brian M. Pitts, Crossroads Arts (PIEA) General Development Plan, February 2007

unique because, “in Kansas City, we didn’t want that to happen.”<sup>71</sup> The awareness of such a risk clearly fueled individuals and collective groups to action. “When you talk about the pioneers and those people who had a vision, they realize that threat and try to stay ahead of it—talk with other businesses and property owners and say, ‘hey if you lose the artists, you lose what you have down here. Don’t let everything be a restaurant.’”<sup>72</sup> O’Byrne credits Aron as, “the one that led the charge on getting this PIEA overlay,”<sup>73</sup> Aron recalls that with the PIEA approval, “for the first time, the city recognized the arts as an economic driver, something that made the city special.” Moreover, because the tax abatement policy resonated with the banks, “it even allowed some artists to buy their own buildings, and we had a number of artists who did that.”<sup>74</sup> Thus, “Kansas City was able to keep the artists in the Crossroads, and keep them from scattering and ruining what was created as an indigenous arts community.”<sup>75</sup>

Keeping the creatives from dispersing has allowed the district to maintain an impressive concentration of artists. In fact, “when you talk to people, Kansas City is affordable for artists.”<sup>76</sup> The Arts Incubator works, “with a couple ladies from New York, and they’ve said this area has a more concentrated artist base than they’ve seen anywhere, even more so than New York City because they’ve had gentrification there. It’s a real, real concentration of artists because it’s more affordable here.”<sup>77</sup> Because the lower property taxes have allowed owners to charge lower rents, the tax abatement policy has been the key difference between the emergence

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<sup>71</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>72</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>74</sup> S. Aron personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>75</sup> O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

of an arts district and the retention of one. “The gentrification of the area so to speak was pushing the fringe artist out,” but because it was “important to the area to retain that artist/creative class, it was important to subsidize those uses.”<sup>78</sup> In fact, although other parts of downtown Kansas City have seen huge private investments over the past decade, O’Byrne credits the Crossroads for fueling the revitalization saying, “that art installation in the Crossroads area has become the number one economic engine for our whole area.”<sup>79</sup> From a real estate perspective, “all these businesses and residents come here because they want to be close to the arts.”<sup>80</sup> This awareness of the relationship between the arts and reinvestment encouraged the City to respond to the CCA’s needs. However, in order to serve the public, “they want increased tax revenues, so freezing taxes is generally not a good thing, but nonetheless the Crossroads was able to shepherd this in and it’s really a model for other cities.”<sup>81</sup>

While the CCA members understand the tax abatement policy as a tool to keep operating costs and rents low, from the city’s perspective, the main purpose of a tax abatement policy is to jump-start development. The hope is that when the time period ends, property owners will have made successful investments and are able to pay all the taxes, or they are short-term property owners and sell to someone who can afford the taxes. Either way, local governments grant these tax incentives with the assumption that they will yield higher tax earnings in the long run. As John Debauche, planner for the 4<sup>th</sup> district of Kansas City (which includes the Crossroads)

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<sup>78</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>79</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>80</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>81</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

explains, “the idea of a tax incentive is that it’s not forever, it’s supposed to defray development costs, but once they’re here for awhile and they’re healthy, they don’t need the help anymore.”<sup>82</sup>

However, even rent-subsidized galleries like the Leedy-Voulikos may not be able to afford the taxes in five years once the abatement is up. “It would be wonderful if the arts community was doing so well financially that they could afford the assessed taxes,” But the reality is “if those tax abatements go away, there will be a lot of property owners and potential tenants who won’t be able to stay in the Crossroads. Their taxes will have huge increases, and when the tax abatement is done, you are on the tax rolls for all of it.”<sup>83</sup> Currently, the abatement will be over in 2016, leaving many property owners in the same position they were in five years ago. There are many conflicting opinions about whether this should be a public concern, but Bob Long’s economic development perspective strongly supported artist retention. “I think we’ll need a permanent solution to keep properties affordable, and that will probably mean going to the legislature for a certain tool. We may end up needing a property value and or tax freeze for eligible uses.”<sup>84</sup>

Trisha Drape said that although, “a lot of the property owners have been very generous so that people can stay, there’s that fear of gentrification and the property rates pushing the artists out.”<sup>85</sup> Stephanie Leedy has been dealing with the development pressures from both public and private investments for a few years now. She says, “we’ve been lucky enough here, the plan is still working, but it’s just harder. If the abatement goes away, I really don’t know what we’re going to do. Our taxes would make us raise all the rents. That would force all these artists out

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<sup>82</sup> J. DeBauche, personal communication, January 12, 2011.

<sup>83</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>84</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>85</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

and then we would have to fix the places up to justify charging the rent and then we've become developers. That's not the vision my dad had. So what do we do? Do we fight this? Or just sell the building? And then there go the arts."<sup>86</sup>

Currently, "West of Grand you're starting to see more advertising agencies, architects, engineers- that type of creative class,<sup>87</sup>" whereas, "The real fringe type of artists are either going to move further east or down to the West Bottoms area,<sup>88</sup>" - the historic stockyard district in Kansas City. Not only are these areas more affordable, but with less financial interests involved, those artists, "can function a little quieter in those areas. There's a huge building stock in the West Bottoms. There's some out east [in the Crossroads], but its getting quickly gobbled up."<sup>89</sup>

As for the Arts Incubator, which currently rents their space, "we are committed to the Crossroads District, we want to stay and grow in this area."<sup>90</sup> Because "the incubator is such an integral part of First Fridays, we do plan on either buying this building and an additional one, or another larger one,"<sup>91</sup> to increase studio spaces for emerging artists. However, the increasing property values put pressure on the Arts Incubator to purchase property perhaps sooner than they would like to make sure it is affordable. "Right now the buildings are still somewhat affordable, but we're afraid that if we wait too long, we won't be able to stay in the Crossroads."<sup>92</sup>

As a completely non-profit organization, the Arts Incubator must look for creative ways to raise funds. While memberships, classes, grants and donations are main sources of

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<sup>86</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011.

<sup>87</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>88</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>89</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>90</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>91</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011.

<sup>92</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

fundraising; they also rent space to private parties for events. In fact, during Drape's interview, their entire top floor was set up for a wedding. The Arts Incubator is not the only gallery to realize that "renting out the space allows us to sustain ourselves."<sup>93</sup> Leedy explains that while the great art creates the illusion of very financially successful galleries, the reality is, even the for-profit, "galleries aren't surviving by selling art. They are all subsidized by renting event spaces, selling food, or charging rent. It's really difficult to survive as a gallery,"<sup>94</sup>

This illustrates another tricky part of the tax abatement policy. While the tax incentive is only available to arts and culture-based industries in the district, where to draw the line was a difficult issue when the Crossroads Arts PIEA was first created. As Long explains, "one thing we wanted to avoid was subjective decisions about art and the possibility for scenarios where 'we don't like your art, therefore we're not approving your tax abatement.' So we followed established governmental definitions to take it out of the decision-making process." This sounds simple, but as more properties applied, some uses were difficult to define. "We had clothing designers get approved, so fashion was OK, but Christopher Elbow, who makes artisanal chocolates, didn't get approved. Is it art or is it food? Graphic designers were approved, but architects were not. Is it art or is it craftsmanship? And does it make a difference? How do you treat restaurants? Being a chef, the preparation food, is an art form. But if they qualified, what's the difference between Michael Smith and Town Topic Hamburgers?"<sup>95</sup> Even bars or restaurants, which displayed art or had live performance venues, were not approved because,

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<sup>93</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>94</sup> S. Leedy, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>95</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

“their primary business is to sell food and beverages, but they draw the customers and support the arts by displaying them.”<sup>96</sup>

Eligible or not, in the Crossroads District, “there is an overall support for the arts. Other businesses are taking cues, even banks. Everywhere you go, you’re going to see art.”<sup>97</sup> Drape credits the business community within the district for recognizing the importance of the arts and supporting them. “When you really get down to it, your consumers in a small downtown area are the employees,”<sup>98</sup> including waitresses and servers that are also artists. “Nation wide, you see a lot of districts make the mistake of not catering to their employees, they’re always focused on getting more people to come to the district.”<sup>99</sup> While marketing events certainly have that goal, “the businesses down here do realize that ‘half my customer base are the people already here’ and cater to them,”<sup>100</sup> by showcasing their work or promoting their shows. Clearly, one of the district’s strengths has been the sustained synergy between the businesses and arts.

Tax incentives may seem contradictory in a place like the Crossroads where the market was already driving new development and therefore increased values. Especially as many people believe tax breaks should be given only “for areas that would have never developed on their own,”<sup>101</sup> However, the emphasis of the Crossroads PIEA on arts and cultural uses have allowed it to both encourage development and keep it affordable for artists. For the time being, the use-based tax abatement is a reasonable, and perhaps even ideal, solution. In fact, it was one of the least controversial issues the CCA had to grapple with. The tax abatement policy appealed to the

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<sup>96</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>97</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>98</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>99</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>100</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>101</sup> J. DeBauche, personal communication, January 13, 2011

property owners who could not afford the increased taxes, it appealed to new tenants because their rents were subsequently lower, and it appealed to residents who enjoyed walking to the galleries in their neighborhood. The only real problem the PIEA caused was a smaller tax base for Kansas City and Jackson County. Yet, even those local governments expected their benefits to come later on. The PIEA was viewed as such a success that in May 2008, the Crossroads PIEA was a Cornerstone Award Finalist, earning special recognition for encouraging investment in the area. The Kansas City Business Central May 2008 newsletter praised the PIEA saying,

“You see it happen in cities across America. Artists move into a neighborhood. They make it beautiful in an artsy way. People like artsy beauty. Businesses and residents move in. Property values and taxes increase. The neighborhood is gentrified. And artists are priced out. Neighborhood leaders and arts proponents were determined not to let that happen in the Crossroads. After more than four years of discussions with artists, arts organizations, businesses, the EDC and the PIEA, the City Council approved the Crossroads Arts Planned Industrial Expansion Area in late March 2007. Now, a total of \$984,782 is being invested in 39 projects in the Crossroads PIEA. The project is unique in that art-related business or organizations must own or occupy 51 percent of properties that receive assistance.<sup>102</sup>”

This short description reveals two very different goals, the first being to retain the arts, and the second being to encourage investment. Yet, as illustrated by the Crossroads, investment is exactly what drives property values, subsequently threatening the arts. In order to address both needs, public policy was necessary to mitigate the unintended consequences of the arts driving the area’s reinvestment. Culture and development are not necessarily opposing elements of a community; and the tax abatement policy, through stipulations that favor the arts, has effectively reconciled the two.

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<sup>102</sup> KCB Central newsletter, May 2008 <http://www.kcbcentral.com/>

## Residential Composition

This case study has largely followed the progression planning activities related to the arts and cultural capital of the Crossroads. However, a study of the neighborhood would not be complete without an investigation of the area's residential composition. The researcher's initial assumption was that, as an "arts district," a good portion of the neighborhood residents would be artists, living and producing art in the same place. However, both Potter and Drape mentioned the need for more "live/work spaces, lofts with studios; there are some, but we could use more of that."<sup>103</sup> In fact, although it is marketed as the Crossroads Arts District, "most residents are not artists"<sup>104</sup>. The majority of people living in the Crossroads are either empty-nesters/retirees or dual income, no kids – "DINKS"- families. The areas lofts or condos appealed to empty-nesters, "who always were art fans and enjoy going to the galleries that wanted a smaller place in an interesting location"<sup>105</sup>. The DINKS refer to young professionals who were drawn to the district because "the Crossroads is a cool place and they don't have to worry about where their kids are going to play or go to school."<sup>106</sup> Even if people were initially attracted to the area's uniqueness, "A lot of people leave because schools, [and until recently,] grocery stores weren't available."<sup>107</sup> The lack of parks also discourages residents from moving in. "There's Washington Park [near the Crossroads], but if you live in the Crossroads, there's nothing. You would have to go over this viaduct [to access the park]. As the crow flies, it's two or three blocks, but walking it's

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<sup>103</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>104</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>105</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>106</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>107</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

actually a half a mile.<sup>108</sup> Clearly, the lack of conveniences and amenities in the Crossroads District has kept the neighborhood from maintaining a permanent resident population. According to Aron, “we need to grow a living population, it’s just one more link in the chain.”<sup>109</sup>

Because the Crossroads is not an ideal neighborhood for growing families, younger residents in the area are not necessarily seeking permanent residence. As Gladstone explains, “more of the people here are renters. [They] want to be here for a while and then probably buy a house later on. Now that you can’t buy and sell on a whim, renting makes a lot more sense.”<sup>110</sup> Moreover, the recent housing crash has resulted in even fewer people purchasing condos downtown. Following years of growth and rising property values in the Crossroads, “Everything has kind of pulled back since the recession. It’s tough for everybody right now; the banks aren’t lending money, it’s hard to build [anything] new.”<sup>111</sup> Even existing properties have lost “30 to 35 percent in value in the past few years.”<sup>112</sup>

Encouraged by the success of the Crossroads Arts PIEA, many developers began rehabilitating historic structures into condos, but have since changed their projects into rental apartments. Blue Urban LLC, out of St. Louis, was mid-way through converting two Crossroads buildings-The Windows Lofts and the Piper Lofts- in 2008, when “we saw the market starting to change; we could sense credit markets starting to tighten, so the decision was

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<sup>108</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>109</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>110</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>111</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>112</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

made last summer to go ahead and convert these to apartments.<sup>113</sup> “Once the Piper Lofts were completed, they realized with the market that they couldn’t sell any. So now they’re being rented out for now and possibly reconfigured down the road.<sup>114</sup>”

Despite the economic downturn, substantial interest in the Crossroads Arts District remains. According to Drape, “We’ve just gone through two rough economic years, but there’s still an energy here.<sup>115</sup>” Even though, “all those buildings have all gone rental,<sup>116</sup>” for the time being, developers may begin selling condos in a few years. According to Kevin McGowan, of Blue Urban LLC, “One advantage of converting historic buildings into apartments rather than condos is that projects retained by the developer and rented for at least five years qualify for federal and state historic tax credits.<sup>117</sup>” This allows developers to “sell only as many units as the for-sale market is ready to absorb while taking advantage of the continuing revenue streams from the rental units.<sup>118</sup>”

In the meantime, efforts are underway to make the area more “livable.” While tax abatements and credits have clearly encouraged development, with so many tax incentives awarded to properties all around Kansas City, “it eroded away at our tax base, taking money

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<sup>113</sup> Kevin, McGowan, Blue Urban CEO, Kansas City Business Journal, Rob Roberts, Sunday April 26, 2009, Downtown Kansas City’s on Sale, make that for rent  
<http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/stories/2009/04/27/story6.html>

<sup>114</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>115</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>116</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>117</sup> Kevin, McGowan, Blue Urban CEO, Kansas City Business Journal, Rob Roberts, Sunday April 26, 2009, Downtown Kansas City’s on Sale, make that for rent  
<http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/stories/2009/04/27/story6.html>

<sup>118</sup> Kevin, McGowan, Blue Urban CEO, Kansas City Business Journal, Rob Roberts, Sunday April 26, 2009, Downtown Kansas City’s on Sale, make that for rent  
<http://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/stories/2009/04/27/story6.html>

away from the county, city, schools, library.”<sup>119</sup> In fact, right now, the CCA’s biggest concern is “the fact that the city has lost so much money that they really truly can hardly keep the city clean and safe.”<sup>120</sup> While the arts are certainly a prized characteristic of the Crossroads, community members also see the value of a stable resident population, whether or not they are involved in the arts.

### **Proposed Crossroads Community Improvement District**

With the Crossroads arts presence safe for the time being, planning activities have shifted to focus more on the business/residential functions of the district. Suzie Aron explained, “there’s this big concern that cities all over are cutting their budget,” so the CCA is a voice to “take a political stance on things that help cities and people understand quality of life.”<sup>121</sup> According to Joel Gladstone, the CCA has “done a good job of getting tax abatements through several programs, and then the association kind of went from there. Now they’ve changed a lot.”<sup>122</sup> Shifting their focus, the CCA is, “still a very active Association, they’re really trying to make this a livable area.”<sup>123</sup>

One proposed strategy for increasing the district’s residential appeal is by establishing a Community Improvement District (CID). A CID is essentially a self-imposed tax on properties within a determined area that a non-profit service organization uses to provide services within

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<sup>119</sup> J. DeBauche, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>120</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>121</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>122</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>123</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

that particular area. Downtown Kansas City has used this strategy as it, “was continually losing business because we weren’t taking care of the basics.”<sup>124</sup> Kansas City now has a Downtown CID and River Market CID that have helped increase the cleanliness and safety of those areas. Gladstone, describing downtown, said, “I remember years ago in KC seeing beer cans and cigarette butts on the streets. Those days are long gone and that’s because of the CID.” The proposed Crossroads CID “is a self-governed/taxed plan for the neighborhood that,” Dowell explains, “right now seems to be focused on keeping graffiti in check, allowing for more security, cleanup, etc. Basically the neighborhood decides how they want to use the pooled money.”<sup>125</sup> In a way, the CID will serve as a small governing body for the neighborhood, because, “unfortunately communities have to band together and pay for services that we can’t get from the city anymore - security, cleaning, marketing.”<sup>126</sup> Although people choose to go to the Crossroads because it’s edgy, “they want it safe and edgy.”<sup>127</sup> From a commercial real estate perspective, O’Byrne says, “If its not clean and safe, people are not going to go there. A safe, clean place makes people feel better, it changes the dynamic dramatically.”<sup>128</sup>

Not only are CID funds used to prevent graffiti and keep the sidewalks clean, they are also used to pay for professional staff to manage the district. This would be a huge step in formalizing the district, as currently the CCA is completely run by volunteers. Not only does this pose a challenge as far as conflicting interests go, the flexible lifestyles of the CCA members makes organization difficult. For example, City Planner John Debauche’s response when the

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<sup>124</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>125</sup> K. Dowell, personal communication, January 12, 2011

<sup>126</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>127</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>128</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

researcher explained difficulty in contacting the CCA was, “The CCA needs help sorting things out. The lifestyles of artists and developers- make their own schedule, busy, very active, highly educated-they have a bunch of people here that are busy people, and they’re not organized enough.”<sup>129</sup> Although “it’s still a very active association,”<sup>130</sup> it appears this group is currently functioning as more of a social connector and vocal outlet for when issues arise, rather than a cooperative group to connect and work with other organizations. Groups like the CCA, “often band together for political reasons, but they stay together in case something else comes up. Then they’re ready for the next thing that comes in front of City Hall.”<sup>131</sup>

Moreover, within the CCA are a variety of competing interests and needs. Bob Long explains, “I can’t imagine trying to wrangle that group because the only common interest they have is the physical location. How do you get the CCA, with all of those different interests to develop a consensus approach or response to anything.”<sup>132</sup> In fact, “creating the PIEA was the only thing not controversial to the CCA.” All members of the association had a “great deal of support for that because they knew it would make their neighborhood tick, but for a whole host of different reasons.”<sup>133</sup> The proposed CID, on the other hand, has not received the same collective support. Because the CID would impose higher taxes on properties within the district, the necessity of the CID has been questioned. Clearly, the CID’s purpose in keeping the area clean and safe would benefit the neighborhood as a whole, but is more directed towards attracting new businesses and residents.

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<sup>129</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>130</sup> J. Gladstone, personal communication, January 13, 2011

<sup>131</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>132</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>133</sup> B. Long, personal communication, January 28, 2011

## Planning for “Livability”

Attracting new businesses and residents is a goal that resonates with public planning initiatives. Thus far in the story of the Crossroads Arts District, the contribution of the Kansas City government has been primarily to provide limited tax incentives when needed. However, because Kansas City is hoping to double its downtown residential population, the city is now also seeking ways to make areas like the Crossroads Arts District more livable. Areas of focus for the Crossroads include development incentives, parks and amenities, readability, and connectivity. From a policy perspective, the city utilizes “very specific incentives to direct development and cure blight,<sup>134</sup>” in other words to, “spur the guy with the crappy warehouse that’s been in the family for generations to do something cool with it.<sup>135</sup>” Because, “developers own property and don’t always think of the community at large, stuff just kind of pops up,<sup>136</sup>” that may hurt the area. By using incentive policies, the City has more of a give and take relationship with property owners so that more people benefit from growth.

Another way the City is hoping to improve the neighborhood is by undertaking a park inventory, to find opportunities for small, urban parks. Making the streets more readable goes hand in hand with increasing green space in the Crossroads. As mentioned earlier, different transportation uses have greatly influenced the layout of the district. While some quirkiness is acceptable, the streets are not intuitive, especially to newcomers to the area. The district is

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<sup>134</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>135</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>136</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

accessible from major transportation routes, however, once visitors enter the district, it becomes much more difficult to navigate. The railroad and street grids do not match up, and the resulting odd angles cause an inefficient use of land, hurting economic development. As John Debauche pointed out, “Street cars used to take this jog over here and now it’s just a road. But if you look at this, what is the purpose of this? It disrupts the urban fabric.<sup>137</sup>” The solution proposed by the city is to “block off a few roads and create green space with the access.<sup>138</sup>” Not only would this make the district more readable, it would provide residents with more opportunities for parks. Due to its strategic location next to transportation routes and other distinct neighborhoods, the Crossroads Arts District is particularly important to the overall growth of downtown Kansas City, as seen in Figures 4.3 and 4.4 on the following page.

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<sup>137</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

<sup>138</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

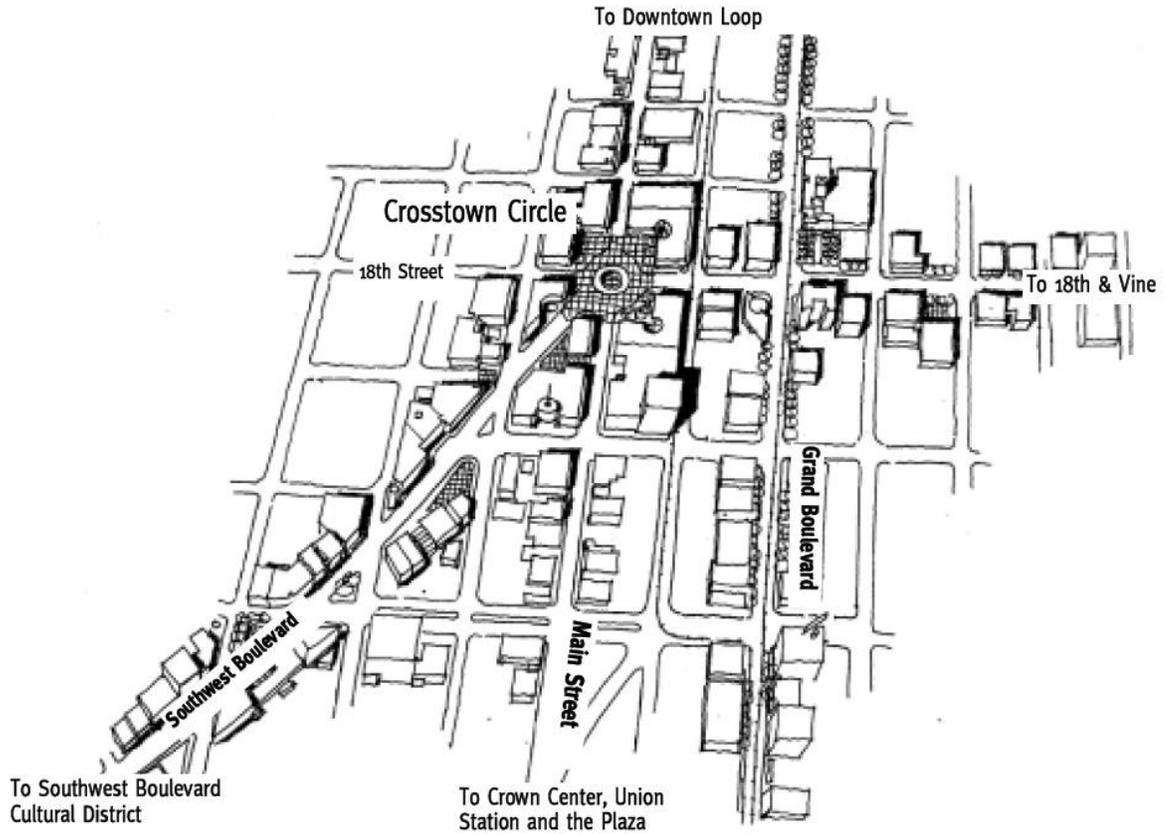


Figure 4-3: Vision for improving Crossroads Connectivity, source: FOCUS Urban Core Plan

22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> Street Replacement and Crossroads Circle Plan



Figure 4-4: Access and connectivity, source: Crossroads Arts PIEA, Development Initiatives, Inc.

“It’s got connectivity to 18<sup>th</sup> and Vine, we figure it’s a cultural connector; go from the West Side [a historically Latino neighborhood] to the indigenous jazz district [18<sup>th</sup> and Vine]- through an arts district.<sup>139</sup>” Connectivity is a key concern as Kansas City grows. According to Debauche, “we need to tie together some major destination spots and then create density in all of those spots.<sup>140</sup>” Kansas City, with the overall goal of doubling residents downtown, sees many planning opportunities in the Crossroads Arts District including development incentives, parks, readability, and connectivity. Clearly, public-private collaboration will remain important as this neighborhood continues to evolve.

## **Constant Change**

The Crossroads Arts District case study has illustrated the dynamic nature of neighborhoods. This paper has shown how the District evolved from a small group of pioneer artists acting out of economic necessity, to an expanding and hopeful community of art galleries and meeting places, to an organized neighborhood including restaurants and residences with a thriving nightlife and with tax incentives from the City. And the process of change and evolution of the District continues. While some changes occur unexpectedly or without an obvious plan, recent attention and investment focused on the Kauffman Performing Arts Center have further encouraged conversations with potential public officials.

Over the past decade, one of the most commonly acknowledged changes to the Crossroads District has been more of everything- more restaurants, galleries, advertising firms,

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<sup>139</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>140</sup> J. Debauche, personal communication, January 28, 2011

condos, etc. For those connected to the broader art world, “the biggest change is just that instant recognition, even internationally- people know what First Fridays is and know what the Crossroads is.<sup>141</sup>” This momentum is further fueled by the Kauffman Performing Arts Center, currently under construction. The center’s location, between the Crossroads Arts District and the Central Business District, was chosen with the vision that it would become a “cultural campus” and further revitalize the downtown area. Like most people involved with the Crossroads or Downtown Kansas City, Trisha Drape and the Arts Incubator are “excited for the Kauffman center, it can only be good for us, it’s just going to bring so many people. Some won’t venture this way, some will venture to Power and Light, but art lovers will be looking for something fresh in the Crossroads.<sup>142</sup>” While more visitors to the district seems inevitable, how local property owners respond is uncertain. “I think we’re headed for a bigger boost in traffic, we introduce new people to art every month, so with the Kauffman center, we’ll get more traffic, but are people going to want more restaurants? I don’t know. You can’t control what a property owner does with their building, but I think this area’s going to keep expanding.<sup>143</sup>” Aron expressed hope and excitement that the Kauffman Performing Arts Center “will bring people back down here,” but also concern that local “people can afford the tickets and take advantage of the opportunities.<sup>144</sup>”

Although the Kauffman Performing Arts Center is not opening until September 2011, its effects are already apparent. According to Jim Potter, “Shirley Helzberg owns the old Webster house- that was refurbished and the building caddy-corner...spent like a million dollars a block,

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<sup>141</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>142</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>143</sup> T. Drape, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>144</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

just to bury the lines. You're seeing more money like that coming into the district.<sup>145</sup> The Webster house, located close to the Kauffman center has undergone an extensive renovation and several blocks nearby have already invested millions of dollars in burying utility lines alone. While nearly all the nearby buildings are vacant, sidewalks, lighting, and on-street parking have been added, ready for a new business to move into the space.

But what will this increase in traffic do to the artists? Suzie Aron envisions the Crossroads PIEA as continuing to subsidize the arts for years to come. "We're going to go in and renew it as soon as we can. We've met with all the [Mayoral] candidates and all of them said they would support the renewal of it, so we'll address it with them as soon as we can."<sup>146</sup> Usually tax incentive policies are short-term because, "they need to roll over because things change. Also a lot of people don't like to say 'you can have a permanent abatement.'<sup>147</sup> A lot of cities may think, "well let's bring in the artists and let them start it and then move them out to the next place," but "The secret is to have a stable community, and if its stable it really has a better chance to grow."<sup>148</sup> Thus, while the tax abatement may not be permanent, its renewal appears to be heavily supported. Moreover, with the downtown council and CCA getting more and more people involved, the Crossroads is expected to continue to grow. Exactly what this growth looks like however, is yet to be seen.

While the downtown lifestyle is not for everyone, the creative energy of the Crossroads Arts District sets it apart and attracts both businesses and residents. As O'Byrne explains, "It's a lifestyle choice- the interaction is the key. We just got out of this business attraction and

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<sup>145</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>146</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>147</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>148</sup> S. Aron, personal communication, February 18, 2011

retention meeting, and Dave Scott president of Avid Communications, which is in the Crossroads, he goes, ‘you know where I get my business done? You know where I get my energy for this community? My ideas for sales? Mildred’s coffeehouse. I’ll walk over to Mildred’s, sit down, and someone will walk by and we’ll start talking and sharing ideas.’<sup>149</sup> Thus, the collaborative interactions between the CCA and Kansas City have led to flexible taxing policies that have successfully retained a thriving arts community in the Crossroads. The question remains, however, if such flexibility and cooperation can withstand economic pressures and gentrification threats.

### **West Bottoms - The New Artist District?**

While the future of the Crossroads remains uncertain, it appears to be an increasingly desirable location for residents and businesses. Though most community members and stakeholders support artist retention in the area, the artists themselves, particularly young ones, may find other places more suitable. Tax abatement policies in one area cannot prevent another location from being perhaps more affordable, welcoming, and flexible to fringe artists. Such was the case, “for young artists like Nancy Bach and Burak Duvenci, both 23,” who found, “the pricey real estate in the Crossroads was not a realistic option. Instead they chose to rent a warehouse loft in the West Bottoms district, about two miles northwest of the Crossroads district.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> S. O’Byrne, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>150</sup> Glassberg, H.

Located at the confluence of the Missouri and Kansas Rivers, the West Bottoms is directly west of downtown Kansas City. Along the same lines of development as the Crossroads district, the West Bottoms was largely shaped by the railroad. Its location made it an ideal site for trading between trappers and as a receiving point for steamships, but it was not until the Union Depot was built that the area thrived. With the railroad, the stockyards flourished, drawing hotels, restaurants, and housing, providing all the activities of a small city. The agricultural, meatpacking, freight, and industrial outputs made the West Bottoms the economic driver of Kansas City. In fact, at its peak, the Kansas City Stock Yards was second in size only to the Union Stock Yards of Chicago. The river location that allowed the area to prosper, also led to its demise. After two devastating floods and the loss of military contracts when WWII ended, many businesses moved elsewhere and the area began to decline in the 1950s. While Kansas City tried to reclaim the stockyards with the construction of Kemper Arena in 1974, the Kansas City Stock Yards closed in October 1992.

Nearly two decades later, the huge stock of leftover buildings is where several people interviewed speculated artists would go once they were priced out of the Crossroads, or more politely, the “next artist community.” Now, the old industrial area is filled with huge empty, brick, warehouses that seem to fit the description of the Crossroads district when Jim Leedy moved in. The buildings are architecturally sound and interesting- ideal for rehabilitation. Their proximity, coupled with an almost startling vacancy, lends a “movie set,” feel to the area. The broken windows, worn bricks, and visible age of the structures keep most visitors away, save urban photographers and graffiti artists who can use the space without people getting in their

way. Perhaps it is the very lack of people that makes the area so appealing to fringe artists who can “operate more quietly there.”<sup>151</sup>

The area has already seen an influx of artists, including John O’Brien, who moved the Dolphin Gallery in 2008, after 16 years in the Crossroads District. In fact, the area has been described to “positively teems with artists; locals say there are five or so warehouses with 50 to 100 residents each, sometimes squatting five to a loft.”<sup>152</sup> Interestingly enough, “many of the buildings are not zoned for residential purposes, and the artists remain because the city has chosen to turn a blind eye, for now.”<sup>153</sup> While the artists may be the only residents in the West Bottoms, several restaurants and business have begun to reestablish the area. It appears a new community is emerging in the West Bottoms, once again driven by the arts.

However young, the new settlement of artists in the West Bottoms illustrates just how quickly the creative synergy can move. While tax abatement policies certainly seem to address the needs of those already established in the Crossroads community, the increasing property values and residential demands have undoubtedly changed the nature of the district from its organic beginnings. Perhaps ultimately, long-term retention incentives aimed at the arts or otherwise, are simply inadequate in the broader context of dynamic communities, citizens and the market.

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<sup>151</sup> J. Potter, personal communication, February 18, 2011

<sup>152</sup> Glassberg, H.

<sup>153</sup> Glassberg, H.



## **Chapter 5 - Findings**

This investigation of the Crossroads Arts District provides insights about what drove this particular cultural district's development, and the resulting changes. Any neighborhood transformation is a complex process where intricacies increase with the number of interests involved. While some aspects of the study resonate with the findings of previous research in other locales, the findings presented here are not intended to generalize all cultural district development strategies. Rather, the details of this study of the Crossroads Arts District are understood as unique, but nonetheless valuable in understanding the implications for cultural district development and planning activities elsewhere.

This study has shown how the evolution of the Crossroads Arts District illustrates the following characteristics of cultural district development:

- The organic nature of creative synergy
- The importance of community associations
- The relationship between the arts and revitalization
- The role of public planning in addressing citizen needs
- The dynamic character of communities.

This chapter will report on each finding, with particular attention to the role of social ties throughout the Crossroads Arts District development.

### **Organic Nature of Creative Synergy**

This case study has clearly illustrated how the growth of the arts community in the Crossroads district was an organic process driven by several key individuals. Formal plans and

policies to create an arts community were never a part of the district's development. Rather, artists were drawn to the area for its wealth of flexible, affordable spaces. Perhaps the artists may have appreciated the architectural qualities of the warehouses more than others, but the main reason they went to the Crossroads was simply because they could afford to buy or rent spaces. Thus, they were willing to put up with some of the neighborhood issues that deterred other businesses or residents from moving in. Jim Leedy, unprompted by any public officials or organizations, then encouraged the arts community to grow simply by asking tenants to consider purchasing property in the area. Leedy's role as the "Godfather of the Crossroads" initiated a creative synergy, which then attracted other galleries and key players like Jeff Becker and Suzie Aron. The Arts Incubator was the product of Becker's desire to keep the barriers to entry low in the Crossroads, not a community-funded project. Likewise, Aron's efforts to organize the community were fueled by her own interests rather than a publicly prompted effort. Along with many other individuals in the Crossroads District, Leedy, Becker, and Aron all voluntarily and significantly contributed to the growth of the arts in the area.

Moreover, even events such as First Fridays were the result of the galleries working together to address a common interest, not a public agenda. These types of events have established a comfortable way for newcomers to interact with local artists, while continuing to strengthen the Crossroads community through social interactions. Interestingly enough, although the district attracts artists from all over the United States, and even the world, many artists end up staying in the area. While there are many factors that affect decisions on where artists choose to live, the social ties to the Crossroads Arts District, strengthened by the community support and events, have no doubt increased commitments to the area. In fact, while many galleries and residents do have financial interests in the area, they often seem to be motivated by protecting

themselves and ensuring neighborhood stability over making a profit. While outside developers have certainly influenced the area by developing condo projects, most property owners involved with the CCA do not see themselves as developers. Because they are more focused on seeing the community prosper, they often rent out their properties for creative uses rather than selling properties for quick financial gain. The spontaneous collaboration between business owners, artists, property owners, and residents grew from an overall support for the growing culture of the district. Moreover, establishing the Crossroads as an “Arts District” helped attract new community members that likely chose to move there due to a shared interest in the arts. Thus, the arts presence in the Crossroads was not a contrived public agenda, but rather the result of community members simply interacting and sharing a common support of the arts and the area.

### **Role of Community Associations**

This study also illustrates the important role of community associations in achieving collective goals. Though the Crossroads Arts District clearly evolved organically, the neighborhood’s gradual formalization was driven from within the community, through efforts to mitigate neighborhood problems and threats. While some cultural districts may become formalized through public intervention, the Crossroads Arts District formalized voluntarily. The Crossroads Community Association was established when the community members felt that the local government was not addressing their problems. While the local government is necessarily concerned with broader citywide issues including transportation, connectivity, and overall urban regeneration efforts, the Crossroads Community Association is able to focus on the best interests of the neighborhood. While the Association’s objectives have evolved along with

the district, this community association has played an invaluable role in creating unified goals for the area, collaborating with public agencies, and creating social capital within the district.

Coming together to identify a common vision and mission for the neighborhood has allowed even the diverse members of the Crossroads community to address their needs collectively. By declaring the arts as a collective priority, the CCA was able to brand the Crossroads as an arts district, simultaneously marketing the area and adding to its sense of identity, as well as taking action directly in pursuit of that goal. While immediate priorities of the district may change, the long-term vision as a cultural district has helped community members determine the future of their neighborhood and pursue legislative action accordingly. As more people chose to live or open a business in the Crossroads Arts District, as anticipated, maintaining a common vision with concrete goals will be imperative to the neighborhood's success.

Legislative action became vital when gentrification threats rose with property assessments. While citizens may pursue legislative opportunities for their private interests, the CCA played an important role as a unified body to take collective action for the neighborhood as a whole. Having a unified voice for the district made coordinating with public organizations a much more efficient process. The CCA undoubtedly lent credence to the Crossroads Arts PIEA proposal, assisting the approval process by explaining the tax abatement as a collective need. Now that the tax abatement policy is in place, the CCA still plays an important role by continuing to work with public organizations concerning the neighborhood. Establishing a unified body to represent the district gives community members a voice. Because the CCA has now been around for years, they will be ready to address the next issue that arises. By

collaborating with public organizations, the CCA serves an important role in pursuing the neighborhood's interests.

Finally, the CCA has helped build social capital within the district. Because the association is open to anyone, and the membership is affordable, property owners, business owners, artists, employees, and residents all interact with each other on a regular basis. Their meetings were often described as social events, where different people are able to interact. By providing a forum for community members to engage with one another, the CCA has helped build a supportive network of citizens. These social ties have helped members understand one another's perspectives and needs and no doubt contributed to the creative synergy that exists between the businesses, restaurants, galleries, and artists. With a common interest in the neighborhood prevalent, the CCA has continued to grow a sense of community among its members.

### **Arts and Revitalization**

The symbiotic relationship between the arts and revitalization is demonstrated by this case study. In fact, while the arts clearly spurred investment and attracted development in the Crossroads Arts District, Kansas City's downtown revitalization efforts also played a huge role in the area's success. Even the district's organic beginnings were related to artists' displacement from other parts of Kansas City, including West Port and the Central Business District. Moreover, the Crossroads PIEA was approved when the political environment favored development incentives. Although the artistic and cultural use specifications were unique to the Crossroads, Kansas City's downtown was aggressively attracting investment overall, making the abatement policy more readily supported.

Five years after the PIEA's approval, there seems to be a general consensus that the creative industries of the Crossroads Arts District are highly valued for their contribution to urban regeneration. While there are many organizations in Kansas City devoted to supporting culture and creativity, the city's perspective is more focused on strengthening the local identity, improving blighted areas, and attracting visitors and investments. Thus, the Crossroads location in the heart of downtown makes revitalization almost an inevitable goal. Because it is centrally located along transportation routes and adjacent to the Central Business District, planners and economic developers cannot ignore how the area feels from a visitor's perspective. While members of the Crossroads Community Association are also interested in attracting visitors for the purpose of gaining exposure and selling artwork, their neighborhood improvement efforts are largely driven by their own common support of the arts and ties to the neighborhood. While the arts and redevelopment function in different ways, the Crossroads Arts PIEA is a great example of how a community can successfully promote both simultaneously.

### **Role of the City**

Although it was the community members that took the initiative to formalize the Crossroads Arts District, this case study also shows how local governments can play a pivotal role in redevelopment projects. Kansas City facilitated the formalization process and has since worked with the Crossroads community, recognizing its contribution to the greater downtown area. Because the city was flexible and served the interests of the local citizens, policies, and in particular, the tax abatement policy, were made that significantly altered the course of the district.

The policies that resulted from formalizing the district can be considered highly successful. The arts continue to have a large presence, the properties are relatively affordable compared to other large metropolitan areas, and the area will almost certainly continue to see investments and improvements. For the galleries and artists already established in the area, it seems they will remain stable. Thus, although public organizations did not actively pursue intervention in the Crossroads Arts District, they served their purpose by addressing the needs of the overall community. By helping to facilitate the PIEA approval process, Kansas City played a vital role in accommodating the citizens in ways that would benefit the community overall.

While the City has facilitated helpful policies, it has also struggled to provide essential services for all the downtown areas. For those Crossroads residents not directly involved in the arts scene, disadvantages to living in the district remain especially problematic. The lack of quality public schools and parks has made the Crossroads unappealing to growing families. While increasing green space is a goal of both city planners and economic developers in Kansas City, the school problem involves a completely separate set of actors that were not interviewed for the purpose of this research. In many ways, the CCA still seems to feel that Kansas City cannot meet their needs, and this is why, for many local residents, the creation of the Crossroads CID is expected to make huge changes to the area. Clearly, the community members seem to trust themselves more so than the city in taking action towards improvement. Thus, the relationship between the CCA and the city has appeared to be a pattern of community members taking matters into their own hands and then seek public assistance when needed. Perhaps this pattern is ideal, when, after all, community members are likely to know their own needs better than anyone else.

## **Dynamic Character of Communities**

As evidenced by changes apparent in the Crossroads Arts District and Kansas City's urban core, change must be expected in any community over time. While neighborhood stabilization and maintenance are important public goals, city planners must accept the dynamic character of neighborhoods. Thus, constant engagement with local citizens becomes an important part of the planning process in order to understand their changing needs.

As the Crossroads illustrates, while basic safety, maintenance, and affordability have remained important needs throughout the area's transition, neighborhood amenities and cleanliness have become a higher priority for some. Viewed in the broader context of Kansas City's simultaneous transition, transportation, access, and readability have become increasingly important neighborhood pursuits. The point of all of these changes is not to illustrate the task of neighborhood stability as a futile effort, but rather, that city planners must draw on their knowledge and understanding of changing development patterns as a tool to guide development. By anticipating change and development pressures, community leaders and local governments are better prepared to preserve valued neighborhood characteristics.

Rather than letting development and market demands dominate neighborhood transformations, planners must engage the community members and use appropriate policies to support and maintain valued community assets. The Crossroads Arts PIEA is an example of such a policy, but one that formed somewhat reactively. Perhaps if city planners had been in communication with neighborhood residents before the property assessments rose dramatically, they may have been able to address those needs and problems earlier. In doing so, the Crossroads Community Association and the city may have formed a more collaborative,

effective relationship. As the West Bottoms begins to show signs for a similar potential transition, city planners would benefit from beginning to engage and work with locals before neighborhood threats present themselves. This will allow the city and the community members to have a common understanding and work towards a unified vision for the neighborhood's future, rather than simply responding to problems as they present themselves.

While the future of the Crossroads and the West Bottoms areas are unpredictable, city planners must work with community members and organizations such as the CCA to understand changing needs, anticipate threats, and take advantage of opportunities. With an understanding of broader community issues and contexts, planners are better positioned to empower citizens through dialogue and information. This type of collaboration is key to maintaining a common vision and a participatory decision-making process. With an understanding of economic and social factors that drive neighborhood transformations, city planners who engage actively engage the public may be better prepared to provide services and improvements in ways that will direct growth and development to benefit the community overall.

## **Conclusion**

The recent changes in the Crossroads Arts District reflect how a multitude of individual and collective interests have shaped priorities and influenced development patterns within the area. Many actors engaged in planning efforts, both public and private, to reduce uncertainty and make strategic decisions for the future. The values, goals, and actions of the actors involved in the district all shaped the direction of the neighborhood. While each actor may have focused on information pertinent to their own interests, sharing information and deliberating together have

allowed them to find many practical solutions to address the community's needs. The interdependent nature of their decisions illustrates how planning work is not limited to the local jurisdiction, but is actually the work of many different actors. Thus, by responding to and working with community organizations, planners may empower the collective voice to improve communities.

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## **Appendix A - List of Acronyms**

CCA- Crossroads Community Association

CID- Community Improvement District

EDC- Economic Development Corporation

KCAI- Kansas City Art Institute

PIEA- Planned Industrial Expansion Authority/Area

## Appendix B - Summary Table

Summary Table of the Crossroads Arts District Evolution

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Physical Form</i>	<i>Market</i>	<i>Needs</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Organizations</i>	
Abandoned Industrial (pre 1980s)	Industrial	Low property values/rent				
	Vacant, flexible warehouses	Low property demand				
		Lack of investments in building stock				
Growing Arts Community (1980s-early 2000s)	Warehouses rehabilitated into galleries/studios	Low property values	Affordable, flexible spaces	Jim Leedy John O'Brien Suzie Aron	Crossroads Community Association Planned Industrial Expansion Authority	
		Artists purchased/rented property	Safety			
		Artists invested in and improved building stock	Maintenance			
			Coordination			
Urban Redevelopment (early 2000s-2006)	Influx of development	Increased property values	Affordable rent, studio space	Bob Long Suzie Aron Jeff Becker John Debauche	Crossroads Community Association Arts Incubator Economic Development Council of Kansas City Planned Industrial Expansion Authority	
	More uses including restaurants, shops, lofts, and condos	Increased demand for other uses	Artist retention			
		Gentrification threats				
Crossroads Planned Industrial Expansion Area (2006-present)	Mixed-Use	Greater investments in area	Affordable rent, studio space	Bob Long Suzie Aron John Debauche Sean O'Byrne	Crossroads Community Association Arts Incubator Economic Development Council of Kansas City Planned Industrial Expansion Authority Downtown Council	
	Concentration of arts uses maintained	Increased residential/renters market	Artist retention temporarily aided by tax abatement policy			
	Growth apparent for all uses	Gentrification threats				
			Signs of artist displacement to the West Bottoms area	Physical improvements-access, parks, cleanliness		
				Amenities for a complete neighborhood		
		Improved schools				

## Appendix C - Table of Organizations

Summary Table of Organizations involved with the Crossroads Arts District

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Interest in the Crossroads</i>	<i>Public/Private</i>
City of Kansas City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary agent for the economic and physical development of Kansas City</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connection as an activity centers</li> <li>• Attract business citizens and jobs</li> </ul>	Public
Crossroads Arts Incubator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop careers for emerging artists</li> <li>• Connect artists with visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed to providing and expanding affordable studio space in the Crossroads</li> </ul>	Private, Non-Profit
Crossroads Community Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance the revitalization of the Crossroads</li> <li>• Inform and educate members</li> <li>• Provide communication forum</li> <li>• Help build partnerships between business owners, property owners, tenants and residents</li> <li>• Promote community involvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical neighborhood is the binding community of place for members of the CCA</li> </ul>	Private, Non-Profit
Downtown Council of Kansas City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with the CCA to establish the Crossroads CID</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed to the revitalization and resurgence of Downtown</li> </ul>	Private, Non-Profit
Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development and revitalization services</li> <li>• Led CCA through the PIEA tax incentive process</li> <li>• Connects Kansas City to the business and economic development community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognized arts as attractive to businesses</li> </ul>	Public/Private Non-Profit

## Appendix D - Table of Actors

Summary Table of Actors involved in the Crossroads Arts District

<i>Actor</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Motivations</i>	<i>Public/Private</i>	<i>Formal/Informal</i>
Jim Leedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Godfather of the Crossroads"</li> <li>• Purchased property and opened first gallery in the Crossroads</li> <li>• Rented affordable studio space to artists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experienced gentrification in Westport</li> <li>• Wanted to provide gallery space to KCAI students</li> <li>• Envisioned arts community</li> </ul>	Private	Informal
John O'Brien	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opened Dolphin gallery in the Crossroads</li> <li>• Helped establish the Crossroads Community Association</li> <li>• Later moved gallery to the West Bottoms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraged by Jim Leedy</li> </ul>	Private	Informal
Jeff Becker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opened the Crossroads Arts Incubator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide affordable studio space to emerging artists</li> </ul>	Private (Non-Profit)	Informal
Suzie Aron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraged the Society of Contemporary Photography to move to the Crossroads</li> <li>• Helped establish the CCA</li> <li>• Primary liaison between public and private organizations</li> <li>• Current President of the CCA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Real estate broker, property owner</li> <li>• Personal concerns for family safety</li> <li>• Recognized the importance of artist retention in neighborhood</li> </ul>	Private	Informal/Formal
Kathy Dowel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalized First Fridays</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connected to Kansas City arts scene</li> <li>• Young family in the Crossroads</li> </ul>	Private	Informal/Formal
Bob Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked with the CCA to establish the Crossroads Planned Industrial Area tax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position at the Kansas City Economic Development Corporation</li> <li>• Recognized the importance of artist retention in the Crossroads to downtown economic growth</li> </ul>	Private Non-Profit	Formal
John DeBauche	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Planner for Kansas City's 4<sup>th</sup> District which includes the Crossroads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct and improve development</li> <li>• Implement long-term plans</li> <li>• Increase downtown residents</li> <li>• Improve transportation access &amp; downtown readability</li> </ul>	Public	Formal
Sean O'Byrne	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vice president of business development, Downtown Council of Kansas City</li> <li>• Help establish proposed Crossroads CID</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Safety and Maintenance</li> <li>• Make area more attractive to businesses and residents</li> </ul>	Private (Non-Profit)	Formal