



**New Bohemia  
Third Street Arts & Entertainment District Plan  
November 22, 2005**



### **Mission**

The New Bohemia Group creates and promotes an environment that attracts, encourages, and rewards creativity, innovative works of art, and applied arts and sciences.

### **Vision**

New Bohemia will be the diverse neighborhood of Cedar Rapids that attracts artists, entrepreneurs, and residents from all walks of life to work, live and visit because of the authentic environment that embraces creativity, diversity, and new technologies.

### **Values**

- *Creativity* – New Bohemia offers a place where artists and entrepreneurs can pursue their dreams and innovations, and the general public is encouraged to join in the excitement.
- *Diversity* – New Bohemia is an inclusive place that not only tolerates diversity, but actively welcomes people of all backgrounds to celebrate their differences.
- *Technology* – New Bohemia is a place that encourages people to utilize the latest advances in technology to fulfill their dreams.
- *Community* – New Bohemia is the place where people can congregate, network, and most importantly have some fun.
- *History* – New Bohemia respects the legacy of the original Bohemian immigrants and seeks to preserve manifestations of their contributions.
- *Integrity* - As an open and inclusive environment, New Bohemia expects the highest standards of integrity and ethics.

### **Rationale**

The “formal” arts are well established and supported in Cedar Rapids; our many world-class institutions such as the Cedar Rapids Symphony, the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, Theatre Cedar Rapids, Cedar Rapids Opera Theater, the Paramount, KCCK Radio, among others all make Cedar Rapids a more attractive place to live and work. Cedar Rapids is also fortunate to have a large number of talented artists and creative people scattered throughout the city. The one thing Cedar Rapids lacks, and most progressive urban centers offer, is an arts & entertainment district where creative types can congregate to work and live, and area residents can visit to experience authentic, local cultural and entertainment.

A local arts & entertainment district will not only enhance the quality of life of the current residents of Cedar Rapids – it will make our community more attractive to the kind of talented people local companies seek to recruit, and young entrepreneurs who can provide economic diversity.

Cedar Rapids has a strong community foundation with many generous corporate citizens including such companies as CRST, Rockwell Collins, the Quaker Oats Company, Alliant Energy, and Aegon. Even so, most traditional manufacturing jobs left town long ago, and more recently we've seen most of the telecommunications jobs move overseas. Whether we like it or not, technology, globalization and economics are going to continue to "flatten" the world, and it is going to happen at a relentless pace. There is no point in whining about the challenges these trends will bring to our community - the key to survival will be attracting and retaining talented individuals that can add value to our local economy through their creativity and innovation.

In order to compete in this new "creative economy," Cedar Rapids must offer an environment that is attractive to a diverse range of creative people. Cedar Rapids was built by creative entrepreneurs, but the world has changed so much in the intervening years that the assets we had years ago are no longer sufficient to attract the contemporary entrepreneur. We need to return to our entrepreneurial roots, but do so in a way that is appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The question then, is what does Cedar Rapids need to offer to attract, nurture and retain a talented work force. We already offer many advantages: we are centrally located, we have the enormous educational resources of the University of Iowa, Kirkwood Community College, Coe College, Cornell College and Mt. Mercy College right in our back yard, the cost of living is significantly lower than major urban areas. An authentic local arts and entertainment district where creative people of all types can go for entertainment, culture, community, and inspiration would make our community that much more attractive. By supporting a local art scene, we are actually supporting the economic viability of Cedar Rapids.

### **New Bohemia / 15 in 5: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Challenges**

#### **Strengths**

- Substantial community support for the development of an arts & entertainment district
- Fifteen in 5 structure, support of Greater Cedar Rapids Foundation and the Chamber of Commerce
- Legion Arts, Cherry Building as "anchors"
- Other cultural attractions nearby: e.g. National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, African American Historical Museum & Cultural Center, St. Wenceslaus Church
- Central location, linking both the Downtown District with all of its attractions, and the Czech Village, which is in need of revitalization
- Support from the City Planning Department
- New Bohemia already enjoys relatively high awareness: web site, list-serve

- Substantial pool of talented artists in the community
- Historic buildings with unique character
- Streetscaping project already underway
- New developments & investment: e.g. Water Tower Place
- Huge, unused parking lot one block away

### Weaknesses

- Minimal involvement / organization of local businesses & property owners
- Failure of previous redevelopment initiatives (Cedar Bend, Destination South Side, River Run)
- No funding at present

### Opportunities

- Cleared Iowa Iron & Iowa Steel brownfields available for redevelopment
- Quality Chef building soon to be available for redevelopment
- MidAmerican Housing Partnership (MAHP) is interested in developing its green space in front of OSADA into a park with public performance stage
- Tie-in with other Fifteen in 5 committees, Downtown Housing Committee, Activity Center Committee, Bike Trails Committee, Brownfield Development Committee, Riverfront Development Committee, Parks Committee
- Multiple public funding sources: Consolidated Central Urban Renewal tax increment fund, HUD Special Purpose Grants, EPA assessment and clean-up grants, State Brownfields Redevelopment Grants, State Vision Iowa Grants
- Building Renovation/New Construction Incentives: Façade renovation programs, Historic district tax credits, Tailor zoning design standards and uses to encourage revitalization, Economic development incentives for new construction, Building renovation grants
- New Business Development: Partial property tax exemptions, possible business start-up grants.
- New Affordable Residential Development:: Zoning and development standards to encourage residential mix in new development and renovations, Partial property tax exemptions, Renovation grants for existing units.

### Challenges

- Infrastructure
  - Former packing plant site – developers hesitate to invest until they know what will happen
  - Unnecessary grain truck traffic – major source of noise and pollution, hazard for pedestrians. Heavy traffic will damage new streetscape.
  - Mt. Trashmore / compost facility – timeframe for closure not clear, plans for rehabilitation after closure not clear, current garbage truck traffic and odor inhibit investment and development
  - HandiMart's gravel parking lot on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave & 3<sup>rd</sup> Street – source of dust and pollution.
- Ambiguity regarding development plans

- not clear if/when/where a new farmers' market will relocate in the district
- not clear if/when/where an interurban train depot would be situated
- not clear what will happen to the Iowa Iron / Iowa Steel brownfield sites
- Floodplain restrictions inhibit renovation / restoration of historic structures

### Strategic Plan

We will integrate the existing New Bohemia Group (which is registered as a 501(c)(3) but does not yet have tax exempt status) with the activities of the Fifteen in 5 Third Street Arts & Entertainment District Committee into a seamless, integrated operation.

### Organizational Structure

A Board of Directors will provide oversight and coordination of the entire group, and committees will be established to develop tactical plans achieve each initiative. The term for each board position will be two years. Committee chairs may serve on the Board of Directors. Once the initial structure is confirmed and funding is arranged, the board will actively pursue hiring a professional staff (possibly in conjunction with another organization) for implementation of day to day activities.

### Board of Directors

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Committee Chairs (8)
  - Art Promotion / Event Committee
  - District Development Committee
  - OSADA Park Committee
  - Streetscape Committee
  - Artist Space Committee
  - Artist Relocation Committee
  - Marketing / Outreach Committee
  - Fund Raising Committee

### Strategic Initiatives

- **Art Promotion / Events** – Organize at least three outdoor art promotion events and two networking / social events per year. Coordinate with local artist community and student organizations to seek ideas and gauge interest / participation. (e.g. 2x2xU, artist exhibits, student exhibits, street festival, etc.) provide infrastructure to allow artists, students, or others to organize their own events, and Include family-friendly activities as well.

- **District Development** – Obtain official designation as cultural district and local historic district – create dialogue with local property owners, business owners and developers, let them know what tax incentives and other benefits are available. Provide architectural design standards for both renovations and new construction to maintain appropriate aesthetics. Work with city, developers and investors to renovate cleared brownfields and resolve infrastructure issues, pursue waivers for renovation of historical buildings in flood plain. Encourage appropriate businesses to move in (restaurants, galleries, funky retail, coffee shops rather than cookie-cutter franchise operations.)
- **OSADA Park** – Coordinate with MAHP, Cedar Rapids Parks Dept, Water Tower Place, etc. to have the OSADA lawn landscaped and converted into a park with public performance stage, paved pathway to bike trail, basketball courts and playground for neighborhood kids. Coordinate programming for performance area.
- **Artist Space** – Work with the city, Legion Arts to obtain the Quality Chef building on the corner of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Third Street, conversion into a blackbox theater & artist coop gallery, arrange facilities management. Market survey to determine viability.
- **Artist Relocation** – Work with city, MAHP and/or local landlords to source low-rent and/or subsidized housing for artists, tax incentives for artists, outreach to encourage artists to move here.
- **Streetscape** – Provide input to city and OPN / Ament on the streetscape project, ensure design matches with New Bohemia Group's vision.
- **Marketing** – Determine marketing needs of committees, publicize activities in local media, coordinate with other culture organizations, and maintain web site.
- **Fund Raising** – Set fund-raising goals based on the needs of the committees and allocate funds accordingly. Responsibilities could include membership fees, corporate sponsorships, grants, solicit donations, and fundraising events. Seek tax exempt status.

### **Next Steps**

1. Review plan, suggestions for improvement
2. Confirm committee members and chairs/co-chairs
3. Establish schedule for meetings