



LD-6

Artists help revitalize neighborhood

Until just a few years ago, the Lower Town neighborhood of the city of Paducah, Kentucky (26,000), was a popular spot for drug dealers and slumlords. Although it had good housing stock built between 1850 and 1930, property values were going down and the average annual income of this area near downtown Paducah was less than \$10,000. By implementing a neighborhood plan based on input from neighborhood residents, the city has drawn artists to live and work in the neighborhood, and the area has experienced a complete facelift.

Implementation notes

Leadership/staffing The development of the city's Lower Town neighborhood plan and artist relocation program was led by a local artist who joined the city's planning department, and the city's planning director. The city's mayor, manager, and commissioners have also been involved in the process.

Timeline The local artist, who had lived in Lower Town for years, began contacting other cities in 1999 to learn how they had revitalized neighborhoods. In response to what he learned, the city commission in 2001 passed ordinances requiring property owners to maintain minimum standards, and the city began enforcing those standards. Development of the neighborhood plan began in 2001, which is also when the first artist moved to Paducah as a result of the plan's implementation.

Budget/funding The city has invested approximately \$900,000 from its own funds into the neighborhood to upgrade infrastructure, buy down loans, pay architectural fees, and acquire property. Artists have invested or are about to invest a total of \$9.2 million in purchasing and rehabilitating Lower Town property.

Program description The city's planning department began its planning activities with a detailed inventory of the neighborhood's structures and property. Staff went door-to-door to invite residents to four brainstorming ses-

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sions attended by up to 150 residents. Residents developed a priority list of problems on which the plan was ultimately based. Leaders of the planning effort also visited Rising Sun, Indiana, to study its art district. They concluded that Lower Town's mixed-use zoning and large old houses would make the neighborhood a perfect location for both galleries and homes.

A major component of the plan was the artist relocation program. The program offers artists incentives to purchase and renovate properties in Lower Town as combined residences, studios, and galleries. A local, community-owned bank offers financing for up to 100 percent of a structure's value to artists who could not otherwise afford the large loans needed to purchase and renovate Lower Town properties. Through the city's contributions, artists receive loans at lower than market interest rates and discounts on closing costs. The program also offers free lots for new construction, a free Web page, other joint marketing and promotional programs, and city and state enterprise zone incentives.

Results The program has been extremely successful. Today, 25 artists have homes, studios, and galleries in Lower Town; another 15 are in the process of obtaining financing and making other arrangements to move into the neighborhood. The city receives much greater tax revenue on these Lower Town properties since their renovation because their values have risen rapidly. The improvements to Lower Town have attracted other businesses, including a restaurant, a candle store, and an exercise studio. Several residents of nearby suburbs have expressed an interest in moving into Lower Town now that it has become such an attractive neighborhood.



1. 524 Harrison Street - Before



2. 524 Harrison Street - After

An advertisement for the Paducah Artist Relocation Program. It features a photo of Max Beckmann and lists his top 5 cultural destinations: Paris, Paducah, New York, Chicago, and Frau Blücher's Artist Retreat in Munich. The ad also includes the text "Yeah, Paris is OK, but their BBQ's awful. Opportunities for Artists, Galleries, & Restaurants." and the Paducah Artist Relocation Program logo with the website www.paducaharts.com and phone number 270-444-8690.

Max Beckmann's
TOP 5
Cultural
Destinations

1. Paris
2. Paducah
3. New York
4. Chicago
5. Frau Blücher's Artist Retreat, Munich

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ARTIST RELOCATION PROGRAM

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