

ADVISORY COMMUNICATION



Date: October 17, 2017

To: Mayor Hovland and Members of City Council

From: Arts and Culture Commission

Subject: Feasibility of a new Edina Art Center

**Action
Requested:**

Identify and approve the design, funding and construction of a new Edina Art Center, location to be determined.

Situation:

For the last 41 years, the Edina Art Center has served the community with exhibitions and classes in the fine arts, including pottery and clay, sculpture, watercolor, drawing, painting, jewelry, photography, printmaking, and classes for youth—including an extensive menu of summer art camps for children.

The current Edina Art Center is facing several major challenges, all related to the limitations of the existing facility.

1. The size of the facility is small and inflexible. As a result, the class and studio offerings are neither able to meet current demand nor adapt to future growth.
2. The facility is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Individuals with physical disabilities, whether temporary or permanent, cannot fully navigate the space.
3. The location is out-of-the-way, not on or near public transit, and relatively difficult to find. The surrounding area has very little foot traffic, and no nearby businesses or amenities.

Background:

The Edina Art Center (EAC) opened in 1976 and has since expanded twice (1990, 1997). The EAC is located at 4701 W. 64th Street, one mile west of Southdale Center on the frontage road south of Highway 62. The EAC building has a total of 10,150 square feet on three levels, including 10 classrooms/studios and two small display galleries. The EAC is open 52 weeks per year, and currently serves approximately 5,000 people annually with 236 different classes, 14 exhibitions, and 96 summer camps for children.

The EAC has an outstanding reputation for visual arts experiences, with its pottery and ceramics classes especially top-notch and popular. Classes are regularly and rapidly filled, often with a waiting list of eager participants.



The EAC employs Michael Frey as a full-time general manager plus 9 other staff (1 full-time and 8 part-time). In addition, 61 art teachers are employed during the year for specific classes. The current annual operating budget is \$727,823, and earned revenues total \$512,287.

Three separate, independent studies conducted recently all conclude that an improved EAC is vital to Edina:

- 2012 Sutton Report found that the Edina Art Center was a cherished community asset but had challenges to remain competitive in the market, including building design and size, ADA compliance issues, circulation, and location. Two outcomes of the Sutton Report were the formation of the Arts and Culture Commission and the hiring of a full-time Edina Art Center director.
- 2014 Schuler Shook analysis of physical space found that the Edina Art Center lacked sufficient size to meet its needs.
- 2016 Grandview Task Force proposed to build a community center on the 3.3 acre Grandview site. That project featured a new and larger art center, along with a senior center, recreation spaces and underground parking. While the final proposed cost of the project exceeded the preference of many in Edina, the proposal clearly indicated the importance of a new art center.

Assessment:

The Edina Art Center is at a critical crossroads. Currently, its size is limiting service to participants, reducing potential earned income, and inhibiting community impact. Its location restricts its visibility, accessibility, and expansion options. Its lack of ADA compliance is a major problem now and will continue to be problematic as more Edina residents choose to age in place.

Yet the arts are cited locally and nationally as being critical to quality of life, building community connections, health and well-being, experiencing diverse voices, and happiness. In 2017, the National Research Center completed a study of Edina residents who reported that they continue to enjoy a high quality of life, as in previous years. The survey also indicated that Edina residents feel expanding programs to advance cultural awareness and acceptance of diversity is a priority for the city.

Research has demonstrated many benefits to a community and its citizens when the arts and art centers are present and accessible. The arts can:

- Build community identity, pride and status
- Promote neighborhood cultural diversity
- Improve people's sense of belonging to a community
- Bring people together who might not otherwise come into contact with each other, increasing tolerance of others and building social networks
- Attract people (especially high-skill workers and visitors)
- Attract businesses and economic investment



Source: Joshua Guetzkow, *How the Arts Impact Communities*, 2002, Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies.

The City of Edina is known for excellence in quality of life, education, and parks and recreational facilities. In Edina and similar communities, there is a growing expectation that arts, culture, and creative expression are recognized and highly-valued aspects of everyday life. By supporting a new Edina Art Center, the City of Edina will meet the needs and interests of its residents, strengthen the community, and continue to build the city's outstanding reputation.

Recommendation:

The Edina Arts and Culture Commission requests that the City of Edina design and build a new Edina Art Center focused on visual arts that will:

- Offer more space, including art studios and exhibition space, designed specifically with the arts needs in mind.
- Be a fully accessible and ADA-compliant facility to serve all our community's residents.
- Be conveniently located with ready access to mass transit.