

Vision for 81 San Marcos St as a Community Cultural Hub

Overview

Austin Creative Alliance (ACA) occupies an historic former church built in 1916 just East of downtown. In addition to a beautiful light-filled sanctuary, the property features a home, and several separate spaces used as studios, offices and classrooms occupied by a community of nine artists and three arts nonprofits, who serve thousands of Austinites through their creative work and cultural programming.

Austin Creative Alliance has negotiated a deal with the property's owner to sell at well below market price in order to keep the historic building intact, establish critically needed, *permanently affordable* live/work spaces for artists, and create a community-centered arts venue for performances, rehearsals and classes.

ACA's acquisition of the property would have the following immediate impacts:

- **Save existing jobs in the arts** by avoiding the displacement of three arts nonprofits and nine working artists
- **Exempt the building from property taxes**, freeing up the existing cash flow to address maintenance, renovation and preservation.
- **Bring the currently underutilized 2,000 square foot historic sanctuary into use** as a desperately needed community arts space
- **Make the property eligible for nonprofit grants and tax credits (including state and federal historic tax credits and potentially New Markets Tax Credits)** as an historically significant site



Statement of Need

Arts and music have been cornerstones of Austin's worldwide identity since it became Texas' center of 1960s counterculture. However, the City's continuous and rapidly increasing growth has made preserving affordable artist spaces and venues difficult. Permanent, affordable arts space for the Austin community has been the most critical challenge for cultural workers and arts organizations. Over the last fifteen years, many venues and artists' spaces have closed due to rising taxes, rents and development pressure.



History of the Building

Located in the Willow-Spence Streets National Historic District, the 107-year-old sanctuary building was home to the First Church of the Nazarene, a progressive and inclusive congregation, which advertised its female evangelical preachers. In 1950 it became home to the East Second Street Church of Christ and then the San Marcos Street Church of Christ. In 1986 the Iglesia De Cristo Church of Christ moved into the building, where it held Spanish language services. From 1999 to 2005 the first brick and

mortar LGBTQ congregation in Austin, Grace Ministries and Kingdom Seekers in Christ Jesus, occupied the space.

From 2005 forward the property has been occupied by nonprofit, community service and arts organizations and since 2015, Austin Creative Alliance has been the anchor tenant, using the building to serve its membership of over 400 artists and 100 grassroots organizations.

Future Plans

Once ACA has transitioned the sanctuary space into a flexible rehearsal, education, and performance venue, the organization will convene its membership along with the larger cultural sector to chart the future of the property. ACA will also explore adaptive renovation of the entire property, including the home, schoolhouse, and courtyard. While the building's current uses as offices and studios are beneficial and necessary, there is potential for cultural workers' housing, a demonstrated need in Austin. The existing courtyard offers opportunities for additional outdoor facilities.

ACA anticipates a capital campaign will be necessary in order to modernize the property and its facilities, ensuring the site continues to serve as a hub for working artists and community centered arts programs. This would include the historic sanctuary, home, schoolhouse, and courtyard. To fully realize this potential, ACA plans to rehabilitate and adaptively reuse the historic property in compliance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. Additional priorities include obtaining LEED certification and carbon neutrality, expanding ADA accessibility, and adapting the sanctuary for the widest variety of performance, rehearsal and educational uses.

Summary

Austin Creative Alliance plans to preserve a contributing building in a National Historic District, stem the tide of artists and cultural organizations currently facing displacement, and expand affordable spaces for arts education, rehearsal and grassroots community programming. ACA's acquisition of the historic property at 81 San Marcos Street is an unprecedented opportunity to address multiple needs in Austin.