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## **Arts on Gaines project has artist support**

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For the past decade, wood-carving artist Steve Fox has been using his Brookwood Drive basement as a creative workshop.

But he says he'd be ready to give it up to move into a proposed development where artists would live, work and exhibit their creations, a place where they could share their views on everything from high-concept artistic visions to down-to-earth marketing advice.

"A place like Arts on Gaines would be interesting because it would be a community," Fox said. "Right now, we're scattered all over the city and the county."

Fox is vice-chairman of a committee that the city and county formed four years ago to look into creating a space for artists. He's also among dozens of artists interested in moving to the site, which would mix affordable housing for artists with studio workspace.

Proponents say it would help efforts to revitalize Gaines Street, and they're hoping results from a recent survey will convince Tallahassee leaders to turn over a 4.5-acre, city-owned parcel at Gaines and Gay Streets.

But city re-development officials, who have been counting on businesses to build retail space on Gaines Street, received a \$4.1 million offer for the site on Thursday from a residential developer.

"We need to make a decision soon, just for everyone's sake," said City Commissioner Mark Mustian.

The survey, commissioned by the Council on Culture and Arts, was completed by 332 artists. It showed that half are interested in relocating to a multi-purpose arts facility. Also, about two-thirds expressed interest in renting studio or workspace.

"The responses were incredible," said Peggy Brady, the council's executive director. "It really solidifies what this group of citizens has been doing for the past three years working towards this point."

Based on the survey results, Minneapolis-based nonprofit Artspace, a national leader in real-estate development for the arts, is proposing the creation of up to 55 affordable housing units and 30 studio spaces.

Artspace is set to present the survey's findings 7-9 p.m. Tuesday at the Marriott Residence Inn at Gaines Street and Railroad Avenue. Earlier that day, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation will make an announcement regarding a grant request for the project. COCA is seeking a \$225,000 grant to help get the project going.

"There's been conversation now for 20-some years about turning Gaines Street into an arts and entertainment district," said Mike Pate, the foundation's local program director and former publisher of the Tallahassee Democrat. "What we have now is some things actually coming to fruition."

Proponents say Artspace can be built within three years. It would include an "incubator" space to house the Boys' Choir of Tallahassee and the Tallahassee Ballet. It would also have rehearsal space for rent and performance/convention space for 300 to 500 people.

The project's cost isn't yet known, but COCA expects to have to raise at least several million dollars from the private sector. COCA also hopes to get a \$100,000 grant from the Legislature.

It's also not clear how much would be paid for the site at Gaines and Gay. However, local governments in most communities have turned over land for a symbolic \$1, said Wendy Holmes, vice president of consulting and resource development for Artspace.