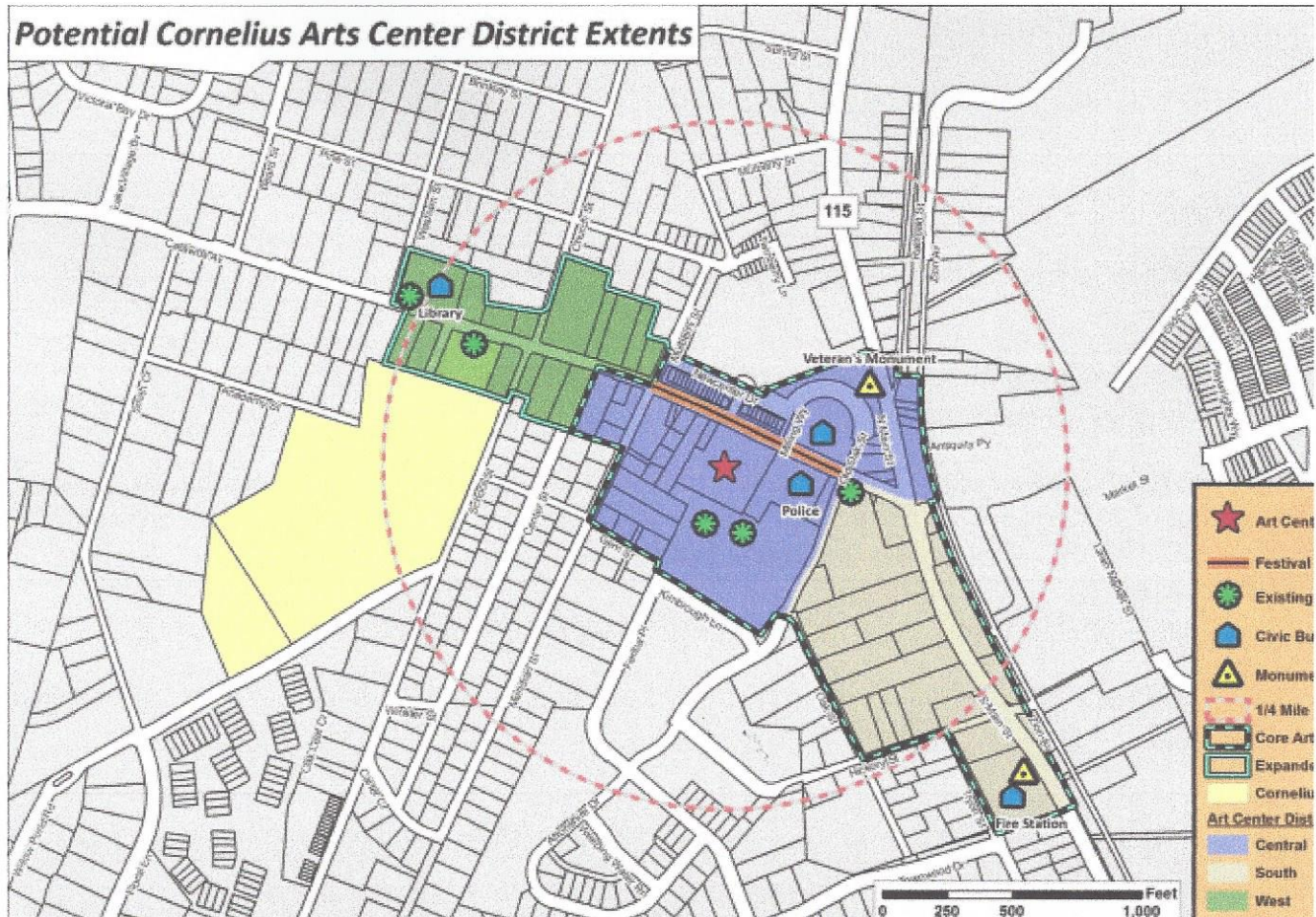


Business

Bright picture for Cornelius arts includes theater, exhibit space, plaza

By [Newsroom](#) · October 6, 2016 · [Post a comment](#)



Oct. 6. A community-based arts center and arts district in downtown Cornelius took a big step forward this week after Greg Wessling, head of the Arts Center Working Group, outlined plans to launch, staff and fund a \$4 million facility that would provide focus to the cultural scene in 28031.

The Town of Cornelius [has signed an agreement to buy 1.85 acres downtown, as first reported by *Cornelius Today*](#). It's the old Farmers Co. site—the blue buildings just west of the police headquarters.

The price tag is \$1.495 million, according to Town Commissioner Jim Duke. Voters have approved \$4 million for an arts center. The big news this week is that a more formal board of directors and non-profit will help push the plan forward, which, right now includes a plaza-like approach to Catawba Avenue for street festivals and art shows.

On deck for December is the hiring of an executive director and, during the first quarter of next year, a request for proposals from architects.

Groundbreaking is scheduled for the third quarter of 2018, with a grand opening one year later, in 2019.

Arts are an economic driver for cities all around the nation. One success story is Concord, where both Cabarrus County and the City of Concord have cultivated a downtown arts scene which includes a live performance theater and galleries.

New board members include: Pat Bechdol, Doug Singleton, Troy Stafford, Janice Travis, Greg Wessling, Tamara Williams and Woody Washam. Travis' husband is Mayor Chuck Travis. Washam is mayor pro tem of Cornelius.

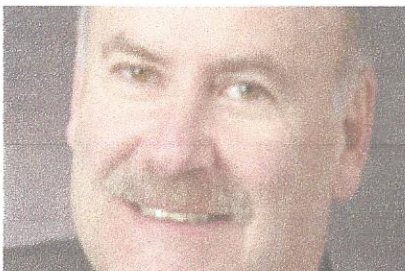
The working group report, which was presented to the Town Board this week, said the new arts center will be a "shining example of public/private partnership; instill a sense of community identity and pride."

The center will have classroom space, music practice rooms, a dance studio and individual artist studio spaces as well as a significant ceramics center and galleries.

Key to the design is a theater conceived as flexible-use space that can accommodate performance art of many types including theatrical, dance and live music. The seating and riser system will be flexible, allowing for different configurations and capacity options.

"The arts center is the incubator for the bigger picture," Washam said, explaining that the downtown arts district will bring new life and a focus to the center of town. Cities like Concord have enhanced their downtowns with a modest tax overlay, but there are no similar plans at this point in Cornelius, Washam said.

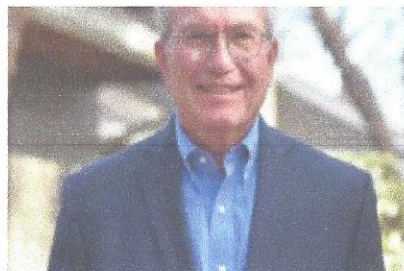
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