

Bradford secures \$100K to help seed Cornelius Arts Center

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June 24. It looks like NC Rep. John Bradford, a Cornelius resident, has secured \$100,000 in discretionary funds from the state for the embryonic Cornelius Arts Center. The seed money will help launch the multimillion-dollar arts center in downtown Cornelius that will be built on 1.85 acres just to the west of the Police Station.



John Bradford

Bradford, a Republican who previously served on the Cornelius Town Board, could not be reached for comment. The arts center is expected to provide a powerful economic development boost to the downtown area which so far has dodged the revitalization seen in places like Mooresville and Concord.

Funding for an arts center was approved by voters in a bond referendum for town center redevelopment back in 2013. Some \$4 million was approved, separate from the land which was recently acquired for just under \$1.5 million. The property was assessed at \$1.1 million during the 2011 revaluation, according to Mecklenburg County tax records. The property includes a century old cotton gin which is expected to be incorporated into the new facility.

The arts center, which is expected to include arts and ceramics studios, performance spaces and a gallery, would cost well north of \$4 million, which means a robust private fundraising campaign will get under way. Town officials envision an arts district downtown that could include a redo of the Catawba Avenue streetscape to facilitate festivals. The arts center Strategic Working Group, comprised of business and community leaders, put together a vision for the arts center: <http://www.cornelius.org/DocumentCenter/View/3754>

As first reported by Business Today and Cornelius Today, the board of directors of the arts center, a non-profit quite distinct from the town, has hired Justin Dionne, 32, to run the facility. He is the former artistic director of Lee Street Theater in Salisbury, a model for a community-driven theater that embraces multiple communities and types of performances and art.

Neither Dionne nor Mayor Pro Tem Woody Washam could be reached for comment. Strategic Working Group members include Greg Wessling, a former senior executive at Lowe's; Denis Bilodeau, former president of Aquesta Insurance; and Carroll Gray, the former CEO of the Charlotte Chamber as well as the Cabarrus Chamber.