

Testimony – Caron Atlas, Co-director, NOCD-NY, Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group, and Director, Arts & Democracy Project Oversight: New York City’s Cultural Sector and Derivative Businesses, May 11, 2012

COVER SHEET

My name is Caron Atlas and I am Co-director of NOCD-NY, the Naturally Occurring Cultural District Working Group, a citywide alliance of community based arts and cultural networks and leaders that has joined together to revitalize NYC from the neighborhood up.

Our members, located in all five boroughs, reflect the diversity of the City and include a non-profit industrial developer, a cultural district composed of small arts organizations and businesses, community-based cultural hubs, artists, arts councils and museums.

My testimony will provide an overview from our coalition. I will describe Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts, why they matter, and offer our recommendations for the City.

- Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts (NOCDs) anchor neighborhood-based cultural economies that reach beyond the neighborhood to broader citywide and, at times, regional economies.
- Rather than operating from the top down, they are self-organized with local leadership and are an organic part of the community.
- They cross sectors, connecting arts and culture, small business and manufacturing, education, environment, and more
- The cultural ecologies of NOCDs interweave social, civic, and economic benefits within and across their communities. Often the economic benefits of NOCDs flow from their social and civic benefits.
- NOCDs stimulate economic development that has a double bottom line and a focus on an equitable and sustainable distribution of opportunities and benefits.
- Additionally they are hubs of creativity, and entrepreneurship and function as support systems for shared challenges.

Recommendations

We are highlighting recommendations that can be implemented in the short term to strengthen NOCDs and local cultural economies. The specifics of these broad categories are included in the bullet points under them on the attached written testimony. Our members will illustrate them when they speak.

1. Prioritize equitable distribution of opportunities and benefits related to cultural economies
2. Support cultural incubators and mission driven ownership
3. Reduce city bureaucracy and burdensome regulations
4. Provide access to public space
5. Use public resources to support neighborhood based culture

6. Include cultural leaders in decision-making

Some details on the last recommendation include:

- Convening stakeholders in an interagency roundtable to create a blueprint of support for neighborhood-based cultural clusters and networks.
- Establish knowledgeable cultural liaisons at City Councilmember offices with the role taken either by senior staff, a member of the local cultural community, or both.
- Support cultural committees on community boards.

We are happy to work with you on these recommendations.

Thank you for organizing this hearing and for the opportunity to testify.