

The Many Sides of Fountain Square

Fountain Square Theatre | Murphy Arts | The Wheeler Building

Southeast Neighborhood Development Corporation
Indianapolis, Indiana



CASE STUDY OF CULTURE IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Commissioned by **LISC**

Not too long ago, you probably would have wanted to stay clear of Fountain Square, with its drug houses and vacant buildings. Things have changed, however, and not just the new range of entertainment and dining choices—Fountain Square has added new businesses, housing stock, and people, too.



The Cultural Trail runs past the Fountain Square Theatre Building. *Photo by Metris Arts Consulting*

Walk around the blocks at the commercial center of Indianapolis' Fountain Square neighborhood¹ on any given evening and you might stumble across an album release show at Radio Radio, the in-house burlesque troupe at White Rabbit Cabaret, or a bluegrass jam at Arthur's Music Store. You can stop on your route to savor artisan chocolates, enjoy a cold craft beer, or witness a man snore over his eggs at a greasy 24-hour diner.

Not too long ago, you probably would have wanted to stay clear of Fountain Square, with its drug houses and vacant buildings. Things have changed, however, and not just the new range of entertainment and dining choices—Fountain Square has added new businesses, housing stock, and people, too. Some residents and visitors welcome these changes and others feel threatened.

¹ To geographically define the Fountain Square neighborhood, we use the Fountain Square Neighborhood Association's service area, which is bounded to the north by the railroad tracks north of Deloss St., to the east by State St., to the south by Pleasant Run Pkwy, and to the west by I-65 (southeastneighborhood.org/neighborhoods/index.html). This area is approximately 1 square mile (six census block groups) and lies one and a half miles to the south east of the central business district.

What is clear, though, is that revitalization efforts that focused on restoring entertainment venues, creating new facilities, and establishing housing for artists have been successful in altering the trajectory of Fountain Square.

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The catalyst for this change was the restorations of three major buildings in the community, supported by the Local Initiatives Support Corp. (LISC): the Fountain Square Theatre Building, the Murphy, and the Wheeler. Investment in these buildings allowed Fountain Square to develop an arts-and-entertainment destination identity and experience a dramatic turnaround from market failure to stability to what now has even become speculation.



Action Duckpin Bowl at Fountain Square Theatre, featuring reclaimed bowling equipment from the 1930s.
Photo courtesy of Linton Calvert

History and context

A hundred years ago, Fountain Square visitors had lots of art and entertainment from which to choose. Eleven theaters opened between 1909 and 1929 in the neighborhood, just one aspect of a thriving commercial district.² After attending a moving picture or live vaudeville act at the Fountain Square Theatre Building, you could head up to the fourth floor to bowl or play billiards.³

Who called Fountain Square home? After WWII, people from Kentucky and Tennessee migrated north to the neighborhood, joining the descendants of German, Italian, and Irish immigrants.⁴ Overall, the population was white, working class, and without a college education.⁵ Then, similar to other neighborhoods around the country, Fountain Square struggled when many residents fled to the suburbs in the 1950s. Interstate 65/70, completed in 1976, physically tore apart the community, running like a wall just west of Shelby Street.⁶

2 Brian Smith, "The Artists Are Disappearing From Fountain Square," Online magazine, Indianapolis Monthly, (February 15, 2017), <http://www.indianapolismonthly.com/arts-culture/artists-disappearing-fountain-square/>.

3 The Fountain Square Theatre Building, "History of the Fountain Square Theatre Building," The Fountain Square Theatre Building, 2017, <http://www.fountainsquareindy.com/about-us/history/>.

4 Linton Calvert, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 28, 2017.

5 Ibid.; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 28, 2017.

6 Smith, "The Artists Are Disappearing From Fountain Square."

Strategic arts-focused change in Fountain Square began in 1993, with significant investments by LISC and the private sector in the Fountain Square Theatre Building. Within a decade, LISC worked with the community developer Southeast Neighborhood Development, Inc. (SEND)⁷ to renovate two other major buildings that helped cement Fountain Square’s identity as an arts-and-entertainment destination/economic cluster.⁸ Interviewees credit these three key rehabilitations with catalyzing investment in Fountain Square. Other factors that contributed to Fountain Square’s resurgence include its compact and walkable streetscapes, historic building stock, a historic district designation, proximity to downtown and major interstates, and accessibility to the airport.

Physical revitalization and development

The last ten to twenty years have seen notable physical development in Fountain Square, including rehab of existing buildings, construction of new commercial and residential property, an extension of Indianapolis’ Cultural Trail, new murals, and upgrades to the Fountain Square plaza and restoration of its historic fountains.

7 SEND’s service area extends considerably beyond the Fountain Square neighborhood, to the west, south, and east. For boundaries, see: https://www.scribblemaps.com/maps/view/SEND_area/6e6pWMNEck.

8 Economic cluster theory holds that businesses do better when they are able to benefit from a common infrastructure, a common market, a pool of skilled workers, and nearby suppliers. See *More than Storefronts* in this series for a short discussion of arts-and-culture economic clusters, with Fountain Square as one case study.

THREE CRITICAL PROPERTIES BACK TO PRODUCTIVE USE

Fountain Square Theatre Building: On the corner of two major thoroughfares, the Fountain Square Theatre Building has gone through numerous iterations: a vaudeville and movie theatre with bowling on its fourth floor from 1928-1957, a Woolworths in the 1960s, and from the 1970s until the early 1990s, a thrift shop, used furniture store, and vacant upper level office spaces. Extensive renovations by owners Linton and Fern Calvert began in 1993 with restoration of its fourth floor bowling alley, even reclaiming vintage duckpin bowling equipment found in an old barn in Columbia City, Indianapolis.⁹ Today the building has a theater with a 40-foot domed ceiling that once again features twinkling stars, a mezzanine level that retains much of its original architectural details,¹⁰ and meeting space, a boutique inn, and restaurants and bars.



The Fountain Square Theater Building was completed May 4, 1928. The building is referred to as “the Big Light on the Avenue”. Photos courtesy of the Fountain Square Theatre

9 The Fountain Square Theatre Building, “History of the Fountain Square Theatre Building,” *The Fountain Square Theatre Building*, 2017, <http://www.fountainsquareindy.com/about-us/history/>.

10 The Fountain Square Theatre Building, “Fountain Square Theatre: Overview,” *The Fountain Square Theatre Building*, 2017, <http://www.fountainsquareindy.com/fountain-square-theatre/overview/>.

After the renovations, supported by a \$400,000 loan from LISC,¹¹ the Fountain Square Theatre Building served as the neighborhood's first anchor visitor attraction, although even as recently as the early 1990s those who ventured to take their children duckpin bowling might have to brave gunshots outside—they would have had no trouble finding parking, though.¹² However, Linda Osborne, the long-time owner of the nearby Arthur's Music Store, says the Fountain Square Theatre Building's success gave LISC and the City of Indianapolis confidence in the ability to invest in the community that lent impetus to subsequent plans.¹³

The Murphy: Once home to a two-story, 64,000-square-foot five-and-dime on prominent Virginia Avenue, the Murphy sat vacant for two years before visual artist Philip Campbell stepped inside. Developer Kite had just purchased the Faris Building in downtown Indianapolis to rent out to the Eli Lilly Company, displacing five art galleries and studios for Campbell and 50 other artists. With the hope of bringing many of these artists to the Murphy, Campbell and business partner Ed Funk signed a two-year lease on the building with option to purchase from SEND. In 1999, with a \$125,000 construction loan from LISC and significant sweat equity, Campbell developed 23 artist studios on the second floor and retail space on the first floor. He constructed walls for the first and second floors, installed heating and AC, and screwed in hundreds of lightbulbs.¹⁴ "It was still rustic and rough, but that was its appeal," says Anne Laker, formerly on the staff of Big Car, an art organization that called the Murphy home for years.¹⁵



Signage at the Murphy and the Cultural Trail. Photo by Metris Arts Consulting

Campbell wanted to foster connections between first-floor tenants and the artists upstairs, so he rented the first-floor space to an art supply store, galleries, and a late-night diner.¹⁶ Campbell charged the Murphy tenants the "least amount of money possible" because he says that for him, "it wasn't about making money."¹⁷ In 2009, the Murphy went into forbearance and developer Craig Von Deylen purchased the property. He's since invested significant money into the Murphy and maintained a mix of creative businesses that are quality tenants, though the balance now tips towards music and restaurants, rather than visual arts.

Multiple interviewees point to the Murphy as an integral factor in shaping Fountain Square. The building went from a vacant eyesore, abutted by a drug house where police would do monthly raids,¹⁸ to an

11 Smith, "The Artists Are Disappearing From Fountain Square."

12 David Baker, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 27, 2017.

13 Linda Osborne, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 27, 2017.

14 Philip Campbell, Personal Interview, interview by Rachel Engh, March 28, 2017.

15 Anne Laker, Personal Interview, interview by Rachel Engh, March 27, 2017.

16 Campbell, Personal Interview.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

economic generator. In fact, Ken Honeywell, owner of Well Done Marketing, located in the Murphy, has trouble imagining Fountain Square as it is today without the building's renovation.¹⁹

The Wheeler: While SEND worked with Campbell on the Murphy, the nonprofit developer already had its sights set on the Wheeler, a 60,000-square-foot building located just off of Shelby Street, one of Fountain Square's main corridors. Indianapolis played an important role in manufacturing cars and auto parts in the first decades of the twentieth century, and the Wheeler-Schebler Carburetor Company was one of its most important auto parts manufacturers.²⁰ By the 1990s the massive building was vacant. With LISC support and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, SEND invested more than \$5 million to redevelop the former factory into 36 affordable live/work lofts for low-income artists,²¹ and remediated environmental contamination from the manufacturing processes.²² The University of Indianapolis served as a long-term anchor tenant for the first-floor theater, gallery, classroom, and office space (although it recently did not renew its lease). With the building's high maintenance expenses, SEND has struggled to cover the Wheeler's carrying costs, says Paul F. Smith, SEND's president,²³ and the group recently issued a request for proposals seeking a joint venture development partner to assist SEND in determining the future of the building.

19 Ken Honeywell, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 27, 2017.

20 National Park Service. U.S. Department of the Interior, "Wheeler Schebler Carburetor Company Building," Nps.Gov, accessed July 20, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/indianapolis/wheelerschebler.htm>.

21 Aaron Laramore and LISC, "LISC Request for Program Action for Loan or Line of Credit PA Number: 41053-0081," n.d.

22 Will Pritchard and LISC, "LISC Amendment Request Form for Loan, Lines of Credit, and Guarantees PA Number: 41053-0029," n.d.

23 Paul F. Smith, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 28, 2017.

CULTURAL MARKERS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD'S IDENTITY AS AN ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION

Colorful artwork covers many exterior walls in Fountain Square: a huge painted dandelion loses some of its seeds on a rich blue background, "YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL" looms large across the Murphy, and an animal clinic painted a large dog profile and city skyline on its expansive façade. Aryn Schounce, former Chief Operating Officer of Big Car, cites these and other murals as "important pieces for Fountain Square and [its] identity."²⁴ Osborne credits the murals to artists' migration into the neighborhood and says Fountain Square residents embraced the artwork.²⁵ Not everybody remembers this infusion of murals fondly, though. Some controversial murals caused the City government lots of grief, remembers David Baker, the City of Indianapolis' historic preservation administrator: "One person's graffiti art is somebody else's graffiti," he says.²⁶

Fountain Square boasts two plazas that serve as focal points and destinations in the commercial core.²⁷ SEND renovated the larger of the two after its work on the Fountain Square Theatre Building, Murphy, and Wheeler, and now bands play there on summer evenings and motorcyclists organize shows for their bikes.²⁸

Since 2013, the larger plaza also marks the terminus of an influential additional leg to the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, an eight-mile loop dedicated to bikes and pedestrians that "connects neighborhoods, cultural districts, and

24 Aryn Schounce, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 28, 2017.

25 Osborne, Personal Interview.

26 Baker, Personal Interview.

27 Jeff Miller, Personal Interview, interview by Rachel Engh, March 28, 2017; Calvert, Personal Interview.

28 Calvert, Personal Interview.

entertainment amenities while serving as the downtown hub for central Indiana's vast greenway system."²⁹ Will Pritchard, a former LISC staffer, notes that Fountain Square's viable commercial district attracted the \$10-15 million-dollar addition; fifteen years ago, the City wouldn't have even considered this extension.³⁰ The Cultural Trail "healed the cut" that I-65/70's construction introduced, linking Fountain Square to downtown and other cultural districts and prioritizes landscape/street-scapes design elements. Interviewees spoke in hyperbolic terms about the Cultural Trail's influence in stimulating investment in Fountain Square: it "blowtorched the pile of wood on fire"³¹ and served as "the big bombshell that changed everything."³²

"Smooth sidewalks make a huge psychological difference both for people who live there and tourists," says Anne Laker, former board president of Big Car. "The Cultural Trail, as soon as that went in, the standard skyrocketed—landscaping is here, suddenly there was this big beautiful plaza. Certain buildings that were super decrepit are suddenly gone instead of being there as a rustic symbol of the past."³³

OTHER INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY RENOVATION

Including but not limited to the renovations of the big three buildings, SEND and LISC invested tens of millions of dollars in Fountain Square over the last two decades. For instance, SEND developed SENSE Charter School, Fountainview Apartments, Fountain Square

Brewery, and dozens of homes in the neighborhood. It also administers a façade grant program to help make the community more appealing and give local businesses a strong visual presence on the street.³⁴

Economic and neighborhood effects

Fountain Square supported a vibrant commercial district in the 1950s; residents enjoyed their pick of five and dimes (three total), plus a theater, shoe store, bakery, and more. When I-65/70 cut through the neighborhood, paired with outmigration to the suburbs, it left Fountain Square "almost a derelict neighborhood" without services in the 1970s and 80s.³⁵ For Fountain Square to move from a rough neighborhood to a place to drop \$100 on a meal took more than two decades and several different iterations of community change—relatively low-cost housing for artists, investments that took time to have an impact, awakening markets, and then a recognition of the changes by the city and real estate investors.

MORIBUND MARKET LEAVES LITTLE INCENTIVE TO INVEST

With many vacant storefronts and dilapidated buildings, Fountain Square remained rough into the 1990s and early 2000s. Baker remembers when the rehabbed Fountain Square Theatre Building offered the only stability in an area that was otherwise "pretty bleak."³⁶ Many long-term property owners who had paid off mortgages put minimal amount of work into their buildings, which sat in disrepair.³⁷

29 Indianapolis Cultural Trail, "Indianapolis Cultural Trail: About," Indianapolis Cultural Trail, accessed August 2, 2017, <http://indyculturaltrail.org>.

30 Will Pritchard, Personal Interview, interview by Rachel Engh, March 28, 2017.

31 Adam Howell, Personal Interview, interviewed by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 29, 2017.

32 Baker, Personal Interview.

33 Laker, Personal Interview.

34 Smith, Personal Interview.

35 Osborne, Personal Interview.

36 Baker, Personal Interview.

37 Pritchard, Personal Interview.

The Cultural Trail “healed the cut” that I-65/70’s construction introduced, linking Fountain Square to downtown and other cultural districts and prioritizes landscape/streetscape design elements.

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ARTISTS AWAKENS LOCAL ECONOMY

Fountain Square’s low-cost housing and studio space attracted artists; this increased density sparked social and economic activity in the neighborhood. Long-term residents, many without much income, “stayed home and drank beer on the front porch,” according to Linton Calvert.³⁸ Although not wealthy, artists spent money in the community on food and drink—Campbell recalls artists on the second floor of the Murphy popping down to street level to use the bank and buy lunch.³⁹

Interestingly, multiple interviewees characterized the artist housing at the Wheeler as having more modest neighborhood impacts than the Murphy and Fountain Square Theatre Building.⁴⁰ “We were all excited, but it never seemed to evolve,” Osborne says. “We all assumed it would be more vibrant, have more activity, more open galleries, more connections to the public.”⁴¹ The general sentiment, they explain, is that the Wheeler underperformed because it is tucked slightly off the main commercial drag, is more oriented to being a residential space, and—most recently—has a diminishing arts identity as the mix of residents between artist and non-artist continues to shift towards the later.

By the early 2000s, when the Murphy and the Wheeler joined the Fountain Square Theatre Building as neighborhood anchors, more people began to consider Fountain Square a destination. In the fall of 1999, Campbell launched First Fridays in the Murphy, where artists opened their studio doors to the public. The monthly events brought in hundreds of people to the neighborhood and benefited from and helped attract



Fountain Square murals. Background mural titled Mpozi after its subject, an Indianapolis photojournalist who died suddenly in 2006 at the age of 34. Foreground mural titled Weeds?, part of the Lilly Oncology on Canvas series. Photo by Metris Arts Consulting

³⁸ Calvert, Personal Interview.

³⁹ Campbell, Personal Interview.

⁴⁰ Osborne, Personal Interview; Honeywell, Personal Interview.

⁴¹ Osborne, Personal Interview.

complementary businesses, such as nightclubs, restaurants, and bars.⁴² Even today, Heartland Film’s Adam Howell points to First Friday traffic as the “biggest advantage” for Fountain Square businesses,⁴³ while Von Deylen credits Fountain Square’s strategic embrace of music as a key reason for Fountain Square’s recent burst of economic activity.⁴⁴ Regardless, the lure of specific times to enjoy arts and entertainment in the community clearly pulled in customers for area businesses.

SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT AND APPRECIATION

Before Fountain Square’s identity shifted, small developers and businesses in the community that sought financing faced an uphill battle. Traditional lenders doubted their ability to generate rents and sales to cover their loan payments.⁴⁵ Osborne remembers unsuccessfully trying to get a commercial loan through the Small Business Administration to renovate 1066 Virginia Avenue, a large, three-story multi-use building on the neighborhood’s main square. Eventually, SEND accessed below-market financing that enabled it to complete the development that Osborne had found impossible to do as an individual property owner.⁴⁶

As more people lived, worked, and played in Fountain Square, bigger investors took notice and capitalized on the changing market. Interviewees specifically reference Von Deylen’s significant investment in Fountain Square and adjacent Fletcher Place as raising the bar for the levels other developers and property owners were willing to invest.⁴⁷ SEND and LISC invested tens of millions



New and old housing stock juxtaposed in Fountain Square. Photo by Metris Arts Consulting

of dollars into Fountain Square over the last two decades, and more recently private investors, led by Von Deylen, invested a similar amount in a much more compressed timeframe, leading to the recent substantial neighborhood changes.⁴⁸

Smaller scale property owners and investors have also ridden the tide of Fountain Square’s turn-around. Smith says the Fountain Square residents who bought a house, fixed it up, and saw its value considerably appreciate are among those who have seen some of the greatest economic benefits of Fountain Square’s revitalization.⁴⁹ Demographic data for the six block groups comprising the Fountain Square neighborhood reveal increases of 72% to median house from values from \$47,000 to \$81,000, outpacing that of SEND’s larger service area (26%). Median rents in Fountain Square increased 82% (\$439 to \$798).⁵⁰ Several interviewees tell stories of

48 Ibid.

49 Smith, Personal Interview.

50 U.S. Census Bureau, “Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) Sample Data,” *American FactFinder*, accessed July 31, 2017, <http://factfinder.census.gov>; U.S. Census Bureau, “2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Subject Tables,” Online database, *American FactFinder*, accessed July 31, 2017, <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Statistics represent estimated change from 2000 to 2013 (midpoint of the American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Numbers have not been adjusted for inflation.

42 Campbell, Personal Interview.

43 Honeywell, Personal Interview.

44 Craig Von Deylen, Personal Interview, interview by Rachel Engh, March 27, 2017.

45 Pritchard, Personal Interview.

46 Osborne, Personal Interview.

47 Pritchard, Personal Interview.

people who bought inexpensive homes for as little as \$30,000 and sold them for \$250,000 to \$500,000. HGTV even runs *Good Bones*, a show featuring two women who buy, fix up, and sell homes in Fountain Square and other Indianapolis historic neighborhoods. Individuals who renovated their property as a long-term investment in the neighborhood resent these house “flippers,” says one anonymous interviewee.⁵¹

CHANGE IN THE COMMERCIAL AREA: LESS VISUAL ART, MORE MUSIC

Fountain Square was known as a “music mecca”⁵² long before its big three building renovations, but recent activity in the neighborhood further cements this identity and its role for the community as an arts economic cluster. Arthur’s Music Store has spent 65 years in Fountain Square and enjoys a statewide customer draw, although even into the early 2000s, the store would receive calls at 2 in the afternoon on a Tuesday from customers wondering “if it was safe to come down there.”⁵³ People know Fountain Square as the origin of original music in Indianapolis, as well: Activist and musician John Loffin remembers that six bars featured live country music when he played in the neighborhood in the early ’80s.⁵⁴

Today the neighborhood supports several live music venues, a record store, an independent record label, and multiple annual music festivals. The Murphy, in particular, appears to function as an incubator. Owner Von Deylen points with pride to several arts and entertainment business that started small in The Murphy and grew, such as the concert venue Hi-Fi, record label Joyful Noise, and My Old Kentucky Blog.⁵⁵

However, while Fountain Square’s music scene flourishes, the visual arts have diminished. Honeywell notices fewer visual artists in the neighborhood and acknowledges the loss of “Fountain Square’s cult status as [an] outsider art community.”⁵⁶ Interviewees describe smaller turn-outs during recent First Fridays⁵⁷ and annual community arts events (e.g. Masterpiece in a Day) than in years past.⁵⁸ Notable visual arts losses recently include the departures from the Murphy of Big Car and the Indianapolis Museum of Contemporary Art (iMOCA). Von Deylen still leases the second-floor Murphy studios exclusively to artists and creative businesses at below-market rent, which he cross-subsidizes via first-floor leases at a higher rate, but he reports that he struggles to fill these spaces even though he could find non-arts tenants for much more per square foot “in a heartbeat.”⁵⁹

Why have visual arts organizations left the neighborhood? Rent pressures appear to be a factor, but not the predominant one. For example, iMOCA lost its below-market rent at the Murphy to accommodate Hi-Fi’s expansion. Commercially oriented music venues may be better able to withstand rent increases: Calvert notes that music venues get more traffic than art galleries because their doors are open more frequently and they get a bigger draw from visitors from outside of the Fountain Square or even Indianapolis markets.⁶⁰ Von Deylen speculates that artists and arts organizations are buying real estate in other areas.⁶¹ Laker said that Big Car left due in part to a feeling that rent hikes were on the horizon.⁶² For instance, nearby Bud’s supermarket would leave the neighborhood a few years later. Laker also says that Big Car left to catalyze change in other neighbor-

51 Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 27, 2017.

52 John Loffin, Personal Interview, interview by Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, March 28, 2017.

53 Osborne, Personal Interview.

54 Loffin, Personal Interview.

55 Von Deylen, Personal Interview.

56 Honeywell, Personal Interview.

57 Ibid.; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017.

58 Honeywell, Personal Interview.

59 Von Deylen, Personal Interview.

60 Calvert, Personal Interview.

61 Von Deylen, Personal Interview.

62 Laker, Personal Interview.

hoods and take advantage of grant opportunities to do.⁶³ Councilmember Jeff Miller offers a similar viewpoint: “Sometimes artists want a new challenge, it’s nothing to do [with being priced out]. It’s a feeling that ‘I’ve done everything I can do here, my nature is to create, to improve.’”⁶⁴

The Wheeler also has fewer artist tenants than in years past, which also contributes to the loss of Fountain Square’s visual arts identity. Smith noted a need to market the units to non-artists when artist applications fell a few years after opening; he speculated that artists may be more interested in finding the next cool neighborhood to inhabit.⁶⁵ The Wheeler’s high carrying costs, which prompted SEND to put the building on the market, also contribute to uncertainty regarding its long-term arts character. Multiple interviewees believe the Wheeler should remain subsidized apartments for artists but worry that a new developer will choose to create market rate or luxury apartments instead.⁶⁶ Although the Wheeler’s tax credits expired in 2016, SEND committed to retaining affordable units for an additional 15 years. However, SEND is seeking an exemption due to the Wheeler’s high maintenance needs and carrying costs. Law requires SEND to cap rents for current tenants for the next three years, which SEND is considering voluntarily extending to five years.⁶⁷

Social impacts

The renovations of the Fountain Square Theatre Building, Murphy, and Wheeler catalyzed Fountain Square’s revitalization by drawing new residents and visitors through a mix of arts and entertainment uses. In this

section, we explore the social effects of these changes—gentrification and new arts offerings (not universally seen as inclusive).

SIGNS OF BIFURCATION AND GENTRIFICATION

New businesses have moved into the Fountain Square neighborhood, and new residents have, too. It seems that in 2017, Fountain Square’s long-standing tenants are juxtaposed with more affluent newcomers, but that relative equilibrium is in no way guaranteed.

Take the mix of restaurants. On one block, regulars frequent Peppy’s Grill, a small all-night greasy spoon, and on the next block, foodies flock to award-winning expensive eateries. Places like these co-exist for the moment. Councilmember Miller holds up Peppy’s as a litmus test for gentrification: “If we ever get to the point where Peppy’s Grill thinks it doesn’t belong and feels like they can’t afford to do business here, we’ve done something wrong.”⁶⁸ Multiple interviewees mentioned the contrast between these new expensive restaurants and persistent poverty among some of Fountain Square’s residents.⁶⁹ Honeywell asks himself if the presence of two James Beard Award-nominated restaurants in Fountain Square poses a challenge to the neighborhood: “I guess it is if you have to move,”⁷⁰ he concludes.

Has Fountain Square’s property value appreciation resulted in displacement of low-income residents or other hardship? Interviewees describe demographic shifts consistent with gentrification. Laker no longer sees people pushing their oxygen tanks down the street,⁷¹ and Osborne notices more families with strollers and

63 Ibid.

64 Miller, Personal Interview.

65 Smith, Personal Interview.

66 Honeywell, Personal Interview; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 27, 2017.

67 Smith, Personal Interview.

68 Miller, Personal Interview.

69 Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017; Loflin, Personal Interview; Osborne, Personal Interview.

70 Honeywell, Personal Interview.

71 Laker, Personal Interview.



Hallway exhibition space at the Wheeler. Photo by Metris Arts Consulting

yoga mats strapped on their backs.⁷² Pickup trucks full of salvaged materials, check-cashing stores, and people dumpster diving are still part of Fountain Square’s fabric, yet the people we interviewed describe newcomers as white and college-educated, with good-paying jobs,⁷³ and they say that artists now can’t afford to live in the neighborhood.⁷⁴ Demographic data paints a more nuanced picture. The percentages of residents in Fountain Square with college-education have increased between 2000 and 2013, but, interestingly, poverty rates also increased and median income declined. Overall, Fountain Square lost population. In combination, this pattern is consistent with the in-migration of younger residents at the beginning of their careers, but not all the classic signs of gentrification.⁷⁵

New property tax assessments have yet to fully come into effect for Fountain Square, but interviewees speculate that when they arrive, older adults on fixed incomes may not be able to afford the cost⁷⁶ and landlords may

pass on the increase to their tenants.⁷⁷ Others describe home value appreciation as concentrated on specific blocks and sections of the community. While buyers can still get cheap homes in Fountain Square, they must look 12 blocks from the commercial core, rather than two, a change from 10 years ago.⁷⁸ Demographic data also suggests that increases to median house values are most highly concentrated in the two block groups immediately to the north of Fountain Square, where education levels also increased the most.⁷⁹

MIXED PERCEPTIONS ON ARTISTS’ ROLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Some interviewees state that artists who moved into the community respectfully integrated within Fountain Square’s existing culture; others disagree. Osborne describes artists who play music on their front porch or make art in their backyard and long-term residents sometimes even join in.⁸⁰ On the other end of the

72 Osborne, Personal Interview.

73 Ibid.; Pritchard, Personal Interview.

74 Osborne, Personal Interview; Schounce, Personal Interview.

75 U.S. Census Bureau, “Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) Sample Data”; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year.”

76 Miller, Personal Interview; Smith, Personal Interview.

77 Miller, Personal Interview.

78 Pritchard, Personal Interview.

79 U.S. Census Bureau, “Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF 3) Sample Data”; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey 5-Year.”

80 Osborne, Personal Interview.

spectrum, Loffin says the cultural offerings produced by Fountain Square arts organizations don't include or celebrate pre-existing art and cultural practices, such as the Appalachian oral tradition, family recipes, bluegrass music, quilting, games, or gardening.⁸¹

Artists, as well as neighborhood organizations like SEND and the Fountain Square Merchant's Association, attempted to bridge these gaps and better connect artists and residents by organizing neighborhood arts and cultural events. A key vehicle for this type of interaction is the Fountain Square Arts Council, formed in 2009 after residents involved in a LISC community planning process identified a need to create community priorities around arts and culture. The council produces Arts Squared, an annual arts festival and parade that brings people together, establishes neighborhood identity, and promotes community pride.⁸² Other events specifically geared towards residents include SEND's outdoor summer movies⁸³ and Fountain Square Merchant's Association's holiday events with Santa.⁸⁴ Interviewees repeatedly called out one aspect of Art Squared, Masterpiece in a Day, "as a way to celebrate the history of the community ... [and] unite the community and artists."⁸⁵ Campbell started⁸⁶ the event when he still worked out of the Faris Building. Artists get one day to complete a piece inspired by the neighborhood.⁸⁷ Laker, a past winner, appreciates the event because it got artists to "engage in your place ... to explore this space and find its heart."⁸⁸ Masterpiece in a Day engages non-artists

residents, too, as they see artists in action, rather than a typical day when they're up in the studio.⁸⁹

Interviewees harbor mixed thoughts on the success of these events in terms of inclusivity. They note that long-term and more recent residents mingle together at Art Squared,⁹⁰ along with visitors from all over Indianapolis and beyond,⁹¹ and Howell sees "an insanely wide demographic" by age, race, and economic status at Heartland Film's free public programming and First Friday events.⁹² While some interviewees credit SEND, LISC, and Fountain Square Arts Council for creating and sustaining positive public arts and entertainment offerings, Loffin faults SEND and LISC for inadequately involving the neighborhood's white working-class people.⁹³ Instead, he says, SEND, LISC, and incoming artists re-enforced the dominant culture, celebrated "high" art, and invalidated the culture of long-time residents.

As Fountain Square continues to change, issues such as the appropriate outreach to and inclusion of residents and businesses that have been in the community for years—in some cases for generations—will continue to be an issue. Fountain Square has been transformed in many ways, recapturing its legacy as an entertainment district, bringing in artists and art-centered businesses, attracting restaurants and new retail, restoring old buildings, and heating up the residential real estate market. Now issues like a shift away from visual arts and toward music and an increasingly high profile in the city will test where the neighborhood will go next.

81 Loffin, Personal Interview.

82 Calvert, Personal Interview; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017; Schounce, Personal Interview.

83 Honeywell, Personal Interview.

84 Osborne, Personal Interview.

85 Campbell, Personal Interview.

86 With Campbell's departure from the neighborhood, Big Car took over this event. Now Fountain Square Arts Council organizes it as part of Art Squared.

87 Laker, Personal Interview.

88 Ibid.

89 Calvert, Personal Interview; Laker, Personal Interview; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017.

90 Calvert, Personal Interview; Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017; Osborne, Personal Interview.

91 Anonymous interviewee, Personal Interview, March 29, 2017.

92 Howell, Personal Interview.

93 Loffin, Personal Interview.



Fountain Square Theatre marquee.
Photo courtesy of Linton Calvert

Interviews

David Baker, *Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, Department of Metropolitan Development*
Linton Calvert, *Fountain Square Theatre Building*
Philip Campbell, *Independent Artist*
Chris DePrez, *Fountain Square Clay Center*
Ken Honeywell, *Well Done Marketing*
Adam Howell, *Heartland Film*
Anne Laker, *formerly of Big Car Collaborative*
Brandon Libuano, *State Farm Insurance*
John Loflin, *Southeast Congress' Working Class Task Force*
Jeff Miller, *City (Indianapolis) County Councilor for District 16*
Kelli Mirgeaux, *Polyphonic Solutions LLC*
Linda Osborne, *Arthur's Music Store*
Will Pritchard, *CREA LLC*
Aryn Schounce, *Formerly of Big Car Collaborative and Community Building Team for the Southeast Congress*
Paul F. Smith, *Southeast Neighborhood Development, Inc.*
Craig Von Deylen, *Deylen Realty*
William Taft, *LISC Indianapolis*



Artist-designed utility box wrap. Photo by Metris Arts Consulting

With residents and partners, LISC forges resilient and inclusive communities of opportunity across America—great places to live, work, visit, do business and raise families. Since 1980, LISC has invested \$17.3 billion to build or rehab 366,000 affordable homes and apartments and develop 61 million square feet of retail, community and educational space.

Launched in 2009, Metris Arts Consulting believes in the power of culture to enrich people's lives and help communities thrive. We believe those benefits should be broadly shared and inclusively developed. Metris seeks to provide high caliber planning, research, and evaluation services to reveal arts' impacts and help communities equitably improve cultural vitality. To accelerate change, we seek to share knowledge and amplify the voices of those closest to the work.

Cover: Public art atop the Murphy. First installed in 2007, this was the first public art project of the nonprofit arts collective Department of Public Words. *Photo by Metris Arts Consulting*
Edited by Carl Vogel
Design: Sarah Rainwater Design
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