

STEAM Garden

An Innovation Center for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts + Design, and Math
in Albany's Central Avenue Multi-Cultural Corridor

Concept overview

The Central Avenue Business Improvement District (CBID) in Albany plans to redevelop a vacant building into an innovative space that aggregates entrepreneurs, creative technology professionals, higher education students, and arts organizations in a hybrid facility blending educational, laboratory, business, and short-term residential spaces for employees and artists in a live work environment. As of Summer 2015, the property is on track to become an approved START-UP NY site affiliated with



the University at Albany. The transformation of this property would serve as a catalyst for the continued revitalization of the Central Avenue Corridor in the heart of the Capital Region's multi-cultural center, and more broadly would establish a significant new asset in the Capital Region's support ecosystems for entrepreneurship, technological innovation, cultural diversity, and the creative economy. Expected tenants and educational programming are a strong reflection of the shift toward STEAM education and career paths (science, technology, engineering, arts + design, and math). The project is pre-positioned for the creation of numerous new innovation-based jobs and the expansion of technology and arts firms into this underserved, culturally diverse neighborhood.

Modeled partly on the successful Syracuse Technology Garden, this incubator will feature:

- Affordable work spaces for small technology companies and entrepreneurial tenants, for example freelance web design or other technology professionals who benefit from clustering in proximity to one another.
- "Learning labs": Access to fast track workforce and entrepreneurial training with state of the art learning laboratories and live/learn opportunities for disadvantaged individuals within the culturally diverse, easily accessible Central Avenue corridor. This feature will be provided in partnership with Hudson Valley Community College and its Workforce Development Institute, with the University at

Albany engineering and entrepreneurial programs, and with the University at Albany School of Social Welfare.

- Furnished residential units intended for short-term stays by professionals employed by tenant companies, to complete the live-work-play environment known to be an enabler for innovation by creative young technology professionals.
- Google-inspired collaborative spaces designed to integrate the facility's live/learn/work functions and cultivate creativity and collaboration in support of innovation and entrepreneurial success.
- Studio, arts, gallery, and makerspace elements as appropriate for the initial wave of tenants.

This project is a partnership-driven approach to support mixed-use development and neighborhood growth within a multi-cultural district in the heart of the City of Albany and the Capital Region, while simultaneously positioning the district as an economic driver by cultivating technology incubation, entrepreneurship, workforce training, and talent attraction.

The overall concept—targeted building redevelopment and the establishment of an organic and sustainable economic development catalyst project—is consistent with the vision of CBID's 2009-2010 Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan; its Cultural District Business Plan; and the City of Albany's neighborhood revitalization strategies. Specifically, it will enhance linkages between the Avenue, its commercial assets, its surrounding residential neighborhoods, and nearby educational institutions. Over the past several years, the neighborhood has developed enormous economic potential as a result of its diversity and the collaborative work of community leaders; this grassroots foundation is ripe for state investment to help seize this economic opportunity, further stabilize a neighborhood rich with small and minority-owned businesses, and spur job creation in Albany's urban core.

Project status

The CBID has acquired the structures of the former Holy Family Parish at 279-285 Central Avenue in the heart of Albany's growing international and cultural district. This is an existing tax-exempt facility whose transformation under this project would not reduce local property tax revenue as it has never been a taxable property. CBID has also commissioned multiple feasibility studies conducted regarding various concepts for site use that have informed this plan. CBID has undertaken an initial series of capital improvements to the building.

The site has received serious expressions of interest from prospective tenants involved in social welfare-related "apps", sharing economy services, and the creative arts. Expected tenants to date include a car-share company and an arts organization. The University at Albany, which is locating engineering, entrepreneurship, and maker space programs in the neighborhood but quickly reaching capacity, is interested in holding programs in the Learning Labs.

Funds are being sought to cover a portion of the cost of necessary building improvements, including an elevator and external elevator atrium; environmental remediation; façade improvements; new windows and doors; electrical enhancements; and updated amenities. Planning to date has focused on energy-efficient, green approaches to this retrofit.

CBID plans to apply for financial support from the New York Main Street program and Empire State Development Grant Funds, and in parallel will seek to position the project for inclusion in any community

revitalization- or technology incubation-themed initiatives in the Capital Region Economic Development Council's Upstate Revitalization Initiative competitive plan. The project clearly advances the CREDC's Opportunity Agenda as well as priorities regarding technology incubation, entrepreneurship, job creation, and urban revitalization.

This project has been developed with the input of a working group composed of representatives from local businesses, the CBID board of directors, Hudson Valley Community College Workforce Development Institute, University at Albany School of Social Welfare, University at Albany Office of International Education, City of Albany Police Department, NYSERDA, and the Capital District Transportation Authority. National Grid is also serving as a partner in this effort.

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