



The Brookland Artspace development will feature 41 affordable units of live/work housing exclusively for use by area artists. Rendering: Artspace/Hickock Cole Architects

## Arts-Centric Affordable Housing Coming to Brookland

Dance Place-Affiliated Development First of Its Kind in Washington

BY HUNTER GORINSON

**A**fter nearly five years in development, work on the District of Columbia's first affordable housing complex explicitly reserved for professional artists will begin this spring in the Ward 5 community of Brookland. The development, called the Brookland Artspace, is to be the first collaboration between longstanding neighborhood theater, Dance Place, and Minneapolis-based nonprofit organization, Artspace Projects Inc. – the country's only developer dedicated to creating, fostering and preserving affordable space for artists and arts organizations.

Designed by Hickock Cole Architects, the \$12.5 million project will provide 41 live/work rental units at 3305–3313 Eighth St. NE – directly ad-

jacent to Dance Place's headquarters and flagship studio space – for qualified District artists making 60 percent or less of the area median income.

As the first such project within the District proper, the Brookland Artspace proposal has received unanimous support from the local Advisory Neighborhood Commission 5C, \$1 million in stimulus-sponsored low-income housing tax credits from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and, this past Oct. 19, a first-stage planned unit development approval from the DC Zoning Commission.

"We're likely to begin [construction] in February or March," said Heidi Kurtze, director of property development for Artspace. "We have some federal stimulus money in the project, so we have

to stick to a first quarter 2010 deadline. Right now, I am putting our financing team in place for construction loans ... and finalizing our drawings."

### A New Kind of Low-Cost Living Space

Artspace first began exploring the possibility of an artists-only enclave in the District after opening their similarly styled live/work development, the Mount Rainier Artists Lofts, across the Prince George's County line in 2005. The resounding success of that project piqued the interest of not only the developer, but District officials hoping to diversify the city's portfolio of affordable housing as well.

After identifying Ward 5 as a perfect location for arts-centric housing, DHCD decided that a partner-

ship between the developer and the area's oldest arts institution, Dance Place, would be a natural fit. Indeed, the pairing has proved to be so fruitful that it could lead to further collaborations after the Brookland project opens in 2011.

"This project has been declared a 'demonstration project' by the District simply because there was no – and still isn't any – affordable artists' live/work housing in the District, like Artspace's model across the country," said Kurtze. "We're thrilled to be in Washington, DC, and we hope that this project is the first of many. I always say, now that I've cracked the code of DC government, it shouldn't go to waste on just one project. There's such a rich arts community in the District that we really hope that this project is the beginning of many."

If all goes according to plan, the first of those projects would be either a massive renovation of Dance Place's 24-year-old theater or construction of an entirely new facility. Though that project had initially been planned to go to ground simultaneously with the neighboring Artspace residences, Dance Place representatives realized earlier this year that their original vision might have been overly ambitious.

"The building will cost [an additional] \$7 million, and right now is just the wrong time in the economy to do that kind of project," said Dance Place Director Deborah Riley.

"We weren't able to get a commitment from the District of Columbia and the deputy mayor for planning and economic development because, you know, they're in budget deficits as well. So we're on pause, but Artspace is moving forward."

Nevertheless, Riley and her cohorts remain optimistic that a de facto arts colony just a stone's throw from their space will not only shine a new light on the theater itself, but remedy the plight of Washingtonian artists struggling to maintain a foothold in one of the East Coast's most expensive cities.

"Artists leave by the droves because they simply cannot afford to live in the District of Columbia, so we're losing lots and lots of painters, musicians, sculptors, dancers, poets, actors and so on. [Trying to curb] that was the initial seed of the project," she said.

#### An Underserved Demographic

The Artspace development will usurp the current site of the Brookland Studios, an eight-unit one-story building that provides long-term leases for studio and rehearsal space to area performance and visual artists. That, however, has been deemed a small sacrifice

and that the benefits of an upgraded studio "will definitely be an improvement." But in addition to low-cost housing and studio space, the development team has also lined up an array of community uses for the Brookland Artspace to build upon Dance Place's already esteemed place in the fabric of the neighborhood.

"We're really hoping to work in the community and get as many sub-contractors on the job as we can. We're going to be putting a green roof on the project, and that's a community volunteer project. There's going to be some murals on the exterior of the building

have to rent it. That's a huge community benefit. We will have our children's classes there and low-cost rentals for dancers to rent the space for rehearsals. It's a great gift to the dance community that they're providing that studio," said Riley.

#### Brookland: DC's Newest Entertainment Destination?

In a fortunate confluence of real estate dealings, Abdo Development, in association with Catholic University, is currently planning to construct a 12-acre mixed-use development at Eighth and Monroe streets NE – less than a quarter of a mile from the Brookland Artspace site. On top of more than 700 residential units and 83,000 square feet of new retail space, the development is also set to include 15,000 square feet of artist studios.

In the view of the Artspace project team, the prospect of an even larger influx of artists to Brookland, along with dozens of new, local outlets to entertain the university's thousands-strong student population, can only play to their own project's strengths and result in a synergy between what would otherwise be considered rival projects in a typical development scenario. The arts-centric nature of both developments, however, means that lightning could strike twice for Brookland.

"We're very excited about the possibility of Brookland becoming an arts destination. We'd like to think that

[Abdo was] inspired by the kind of energy and development we've provided in the Brookland neighborhood with our activities and the blossoming of other organizations," said Riley. "Building on all of that success will only make the neighborhood richer. We're very pleased about that."

*For more information on Brookland Artspace Lofts, call Heidi Kurtze at 612-465-0215 or visit [www.artspace.org/properties/danceplace](http://www.artspace.org/properties/danceplace). For more information about Abdo, call 202-265-9393 or visit [www.abdo.com](http://www.abdo.com). ★*



The Brookland Studios adjoining Dance Place will be demolished to make way for the new Artspace project. Photo: Hunter Gorinson.

in lieu of the larger, more modern facility that will rise in its place and the altruistic goals it will serve.

"There is neglect for artists and their families in general. It's something that's needed, and something has to be done. We need this project," said Sylvia Soumah, a current Brookland Studios tenant and the founder and artistic director of DC's Coyaba Dance Theater.

Though she will temporarily lose her rehearsal space, Soumah says that she "absolutely" plans on returning once the Brookland Artspace is complete

that's a youth and community project," said Kurtze. "Dance Place is so deeply tied to the community through the magnet program and the charter schools, that at Artspace, we take that very seriously."

Per the terms of their agreement with the developer, Dance Place will also be granted two units in the new building for administrative and classroom use, in addition to a new, state-of-the-art rehearsal space, completely free of charge.

"Artspace is developing it, building it, paying for it, and we will not