

Makerspaces as Downtown Assets.

Makerspaces have been employed around America as places where people can congregate to learn a trade, perfect a skill and socialize in a setting that is safe, convenient, well-served and productive. The videos and discussion below describe what Makerspaces are and how they are being deployed to use physical spaces and equipment to advance social and economic sustainable lives.

Consider two situations.

First, makerspaces are places that need spaces that are generally large open areas in locations that have “retail” characteristics...they need to be accessible to people who walk or drive to the location, they need to be in safe neighborhoods and they need to be in a mixed setting with other active uses. Generally, makerspace organizations are NGOs with adequate but not exorbitant funding. Makerspaces by their very nature are mobile; they can move from spot to spot as their spaces become too expensive or otherwise uninhabitable.

Second, the requirement for ground floor retail in all office and apartment buildings in the downtown areas and some beyond, has created a glut of empty spaces that have retail characteristics even though they are ahead of the retail market.

Makerspaces as Tenants. With required non-residential uses on the first floor of downtown buildings, there is a lot of space to fill. There is only the need for so many shops, diners and restaurants. What to do with the programmed vacant space? A marriage of makerspaces in otherwise vacant ground floor retail space works as a temporary or interim use. Makerspaces require minimum interior improvements from the landlord, they do little damage to space while in residence and create foot traffic that may be useful in creating a known location later useful to more conventional retail uses. Some are successful on-going operations that become self-supporting and may continue in the same location permanently, or at least as permanently as any retail business.

Makerspaces are great CRA projects for small cities and towns. They may even warrant some short-term financial support in order to draw people to or near main street, to address unemployment and to fill empty downtown space with a community-based activity. Their educational, economic, and social value justifies a serious look. Partnerships with community colleges, high schools, workforce organizations and social agencies can be based on the missions of several different organizations...the potential for multiple benefits abound.