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Arts moneymakers on the table Thursday

BY MATT PILON STAFF WRITER

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EASTHAMPTON - With arts surveys under way, a city group created to help local artists make money will meet Thursday evening at the Apollo Grill on Pleasant Street. Local artists are encouraged to attend to join the discussion of the early survey results.

The two-pronged survey is being conducted to determine the feasibility of three economic, arts-related ideas local artists have brought forward over the past two years: enhancing the Easthampton City Arts Web site to enable artists to sell their work online; instituting a cooperative retail gallery to showcase and sell local art; and establishing a regularly scheduled Arts Night Out to take place in commercial and art centers in the city.

The Easthampton City Arts Commission contracted with the Valley Community Development Corp. in late August to help examine the ideas, and the Valley CDC enlisted the help of the Franklin CDC to conduct two surveys, one of city businesses and the other of city artists.

Gene R. Talsky, director of small-business development at Valley CDC, conducted the business survey, which focused solely on the feasibility of an Arts Night Out, in which area businesses would play a crucial part.

"There's strong support among the businesses for this," Talsky said.

Talsky said that approximately 15 percent of the businesses on Main Street, Union Street and Cottage Street responded to the survey.

"That was very pleasing to me," he said.

Amy Shapiro, technical assistance program manager at the Franklin CDC, conducted the artist survey, which is ongoing.

Shapiro said Tuesday that she had received 66 responses to the survey, which is available online at easthamptoncityarts.com and in hard copy.

"That's pretty good," she said. "I'm really pleased with those results, but I'd like a lot more."

Shapiro said she will collect responses through the end of the month and encouraged artists who have not done so to visit the Web site to respond to the survey.

"The idea is to capture as much information as we can," she said. "This is really about having people participate."

Shapiro is researching other communities that have implemented similar ideas, such as Northampton and Brattleboro, Vt., both of which have Arts Night Out events.

"We're capturing information on best practices from other communities," she said.

The arts project also includes the Web site and its upkeep, a directory of local artists, and eventual business plans for ideas that are deemed feasible. Funding came from two Massachusetts Cultural Council grants received this year and last year totaling \$34,500. Both grants required matching funds, which were given by local businesses, the Williston Northampton School, and the city.

City Grants Coordinator Ellen Koteen, who sits on the 10-member coordinating committee of the arts commission, said the feasibility study is the "major undertaking" of the \$22,000 grant received this year.

Koteen said the study should be concluded by the end of this year.

"We really want to encourage local artists to attend Thursday evening," she said.

CDC representatives and the commission will meet at the Apollo Grill Thursday from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Free refreshments will be served.

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