

**Testimony – Tamara Greenfield, Executive Director, Fourth Arts Block, and Co-director, NOCD-NY**

Oversight: New York City’s Cultural Sector and Derivative Businesses, May 11, 2012

Chairs Reyna, Van Bramer, and members of the City Council - thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Naturally Occurring Cultural Districts and our relationship to the local cultural economy.

I am Tamara Greenfield, Executive Director of Fourth Arts Block or FABnyc, a neighborhood wide coalition of 26 arts and community organizations in the East Village & Lower East Side. I am also co-director of the NOCD-NY working group and a public member of the Community Board 3 Arts & Culture Task Force.

As a neighborhood wide coalition, FABnyc works with our members to provide support services, facilitate resource sharing, and build deeper partnerships with the community. In particular, we work with local partners to raise the visibility of culture and small businesses through common placemaking tools like maps, websites, banners, public events and a visitors center.

In the process of pursuing these and other community improvement strategies, we have faced a wide array of confusing obstacles and regulations.

These obstacles are difficult for everyone, but hit smaller cultural groups and businesses the hardest. In general, there is a bias towards big arts institutions and business in our city’s policy-making and actions, leaving smaller cultural groups and businesses to fend for themselves.

Here are some tangible recommendations to help ease these challenges:

**1. Streamline guidelines to help community based efforts to improve street-level visibility**

NOCDs are often hurt by lack of visibility to the general public. Several years ago, we led a participatory design process to increase signage, improve lighting and plant more trees. Even with funding from Councilmember Mendez, many of our proposed improvements have stalled. Agency rules governing streets and public spaces are often in conflict and require long, unclear approval processes.

**2. Ease and clarify street activity permitting guidelines for community-based festivals**

FABnyc organizes several festivals and street closures each year. These events offer free access to cultural programming for our community and bring new visitors and business to the neighborhood. Each year, it gets harder and harder to produce these festivals due to mounting rules from the Mayor’s Street Activity Permit Office. Our tiny staff has to work harder to navigate restrictive rules designed for big commercial street fairs.

**3. Encourage NYC & Co to promote neighborhood cultural vitality**

FABnyc has paid \$675/year for an annual membership in NYC & Company. Unfortunately, most of the marketing is focused on large institutions or highly recognizable locations, which then

only benefits the businesses in those areas. By diversifying the kinds of promotion they do, we will also distribute the benefits of local, regional and international visitors. In San Francisco, street banners are provided free to arts and community groups to increase visibility of local culture. In NYC, it costs us \$2000+ each year for one banner.

#### **4. Learn from New York City's other successes**

- NBAT: FABnyc opened a Café and visitors center last year. The City's New Business Acceleration Team program helps small food businesses open quickly by unifying guidelines for several agencies. With their help, we opened in one month!
- Sustainability Programs: Last year, FABnyc was named the Go Green LES Model Block for sustainability. We have been helping small businesses and low income residential buildings get free energy assessments and incentives. Similar programs could be targeted to nonprofit cultural organizations to help them lower their costs and increase efficiency.
- Group Purchasing: The City's new group purchasing program is wonderful and available to nonprofits of every size.

We strongly encourage you to convene stakeholders in an interagency roundtable so we can support creative community building efforts together.

Thank you for your time.