



Peoria Arts and Culture Center

The Schoolhouse



Statement of Purpose

An arts-centric city facility where experiences foster community engagement and education, where we celebrate and support artistic expression and appreciation and further the development of Peoria's creative sector; honoring Peoria's past, celebrating Peoria's present, and creating Peoria's artistic future.

Peoria Central School – A Historic Gem

The community came together to create the Peoria School District in 1889, and it was officially recognized by the county as School District #11. The two-room schoolhouse, known as Central School, was designed in Mission Revival style and was completed in 1906. The Schoolhouse is listed on the National Register of Historical Places and the Peoria Register of Historic Places.

The Peoria Historic Schoolhouse served as a place of education and enrichment for generations. That tradition will continue and be re-imagined for the 21st century. The Schoolhouse is a new home where creative expression is available to all, where generations learn from one another and imagination fuels a new connection.

The Schoolhouse will be the creative hub where community connects, and access to arts and culture is shared.

It is a welcoming space, and a canvas for lifelong exploration of creative expression.

The Schoolhouse will be a key driver in the broader downtown redevelopment plan. By joining the existing venues in downtown such as Axiom, The Monastery, and the Peoria Center for the Performing Arts, this destination for arts experiences and learning will complement the current offerings by introducing unique programs, exhibits, and events. Our approach will harness the strengths of our Arts, Culture, and Library Services department, supported by our staff expertise, event acumen, and creative and innovative programs.

A phased approach will be taken to create community engagement through long-standing traditions in downtown such as the Peoria Holiday Festival and 2nd Saturdays, and more recent initiatives such as Light at Play.

Regular gallery hours will be established with rotating exhibits and programs.

Community Input

Beginning in January 2026, staff will begin a community outreach campaign to garner interest and feedback regarding the types of programming that community members would like to see at The Schoolhouse. Additionally, all programs in year one will have a participant survey to assist staff in determining the viability and success of the programs.

Community Engagement

Future opportunities to involve the community as volunteers and docents for programs, events, and the gallery will be implemented once the programming calendar has been established.

Why This Matters – Community Impact

The Schoolhouse Arts Lab, Art Gallery, and exterior gathering space will ignite artistic engagement, strengthen community bonds, and reinforce Downtown Peoria as a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich destination. This investment helps foster quality arts experiences that meet community needs and create long-term economic, social, and cultural returns. It will become a lasting landmark for creativity, a place where residents are active participants in Peoria’s cultural story.

The Schoolhouse will be a catalyst for cultural vitality and a lasting asset for the community.



The Arts Lab: Creativity Lives Here

The Arts Lab will connect residents through intentional art making. Its creation will expand our reach, unify our cultural initiatives, and amplify Peoria's position as a creative destination.

❖ The Arts Lab - Arts Programming

Programming will engage residents through hands-on creative experiences, professional development opportunities for artists, and interactive community events.

Many of these classes will be offered as 6-8 week sessions meeting weekly, some will be single workshops. A full calendar of programming will be created for year one and will be published a month at a time similar to our current library offerings.

◆ Art Classes

Beginner, Intermediate, and advanced sessions will meet artists where they are in their individual artistic journey

◆ Expert Level Educational Experiences

Curated classes taught by professional artists for advanced students

◆ Aging Artfully

Creative arts classes for older adults, enhancing quality of life through social engagement, improved mobility, and cognitive stimulation

◆ Interactive Activities

Plein air painting sessions, gallery tours, public art tours, history walks

◆ Classes and Workshops - Current Gallery Exhibition

Hands-on classes inspired by gallery exhibitions, often led by the exhibiting artists and art professionals

◆ Artist Talks

Artist lectures about inspiration, process, themes such as Peoria history, as well as seasonal offerings

Engaging Minds, Inspiring Creativity: A Crossroads of Arts, Culture, and Literacy

The Schoolhouse unites the trusted reach of the public library with the vibrant energy of the city's arts and culture center to spark community engagement, literacy, and creative expression. This initiative blends the educational mission of the library with the transformative power of the arts, creating a shared community space where stories, traditions, and creative voices can thrive.

❖ **The Arts Lab - Library and Historical Programming**

◆ **Storytime in the Gallery**

Young children and families enjoy themed read-aloud sessions surrounded by visual art, followed by hands-on crafts or sensory activities inspired by the exhibit.

◆ **Poetry in Motion**

A creative workshop where participants craft original poems, then transform them into performances through spoken word, movement, or visual artistry.

◆ **Open Mic and Poetry Slam Nights**

A welcoming platform for teens and adults to share poetry, stories, or monologues, building confidence and celebrating diverse voices.

◆ **Folktales Around the World**

Multicultural storytimes with tales, songs, and crafts from global traditions, co-hosted by local cultural ambassadors.

◆ **Heritage Month and Historical Showcases**

Collaborations with cultural organizations to present exhibits, music, lectures, and interactive activities honoring traditions such as Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Peoria History.

❖ **Additional Arts Lab Initiatives**

◆ **Artist Archive**

A comprehensive registry of artists, artist groups, art guilds, and emerging talent, plus a catalogue of regional calls for art

◆ **Artist Support**

Training in marketing, collector cultivation, gallery representation, and portfolio preparation (including a junior track for students)

◆ **Artist Materials Exchange**

Bi-annual professional arts supply swap

◆ **Artist Think Tank**

Cross-disciplinary collaborations and technique innovation

❖ **Community Events**

◆ 2nd Saturdays (Oct – Apr)

◆ Peoria Holiday Festival (Dec)

◆ Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Celebration (Jan)

◆ Light at Play (April)

◆ Historic Preservation Month Activities (May)

The Gallery: A Curated Cultural Experience

The Schoolhouse Gallery will inspire visitors with thoughtfully curated exhibitions that reflect Peoria's creativity while aligning with Downtown's evolving identity. Our strategy blends existing programs, like the Young Artists Showcase, with new initiatives such as themed exhibitions for the Holiday Festival and Light at Play, featuring quality installations that celebrate local and regional artists.

A dedicated curator will ensure exhibitions are cohesive, thematic, and immersive, pairing exceptional artwork with thoughtful lighting, presentation, and amenities. Partnerships with local, regional, artists, museums, universities, and touring exhibits will expand reach and relevance.

Throughout The Schoolhouse homage to our city's history and culture will be evident through displays, programs, and interactive elements.

Exhibition Schedule – Year One

- **Sep – Jan:** *Photographically Peoria* – Community-sourced photography celebrating Peoria's people, places, and history
- **Dec – Jan:** *Young Artists Showcase (Fall)* – Student artwork Grades K–8, in partnership with Peoria Unified School District
- **Feb – Apr:** *Spotlight on Pop Culture* – Exploring pop culture's influence through visual and interactive mediums
- **Apr – May:** *Young Artists Showcase (Spring)* – Second annual installment of student artwork
- **Jun – Jul:** *Abstraction Distraction* – A multisensory exploration of abstract art in various mediums.
- **Aug – Sep:** *On Our Own Time* – City employee art exhibition and performances.

Historical Context – Exhibits and Programming

Historical exhibits and programming will be integral to the experience at the schoolhouse. Visitors will be immersed in the historical context of the building and the community that lived and worked and established Peoria.

The Details

The Historic Schoolhouse building

2453 square feet

2 rooms with capacity up to 49 persons each

Room 1: The Gallery

Room 2: The Arts Lab

The Annex building

1093 square feet

Restrooms, Office, Storage, Janitorial

Proposed Hours of Operation

Tuesday - Thursday 11am – 7pm

Friday and Saturday 11am – 8pm

Additional hours to coincide with Downtown events.

The Renovation Team

Building Assessment and Architect – Holly Street Studio

General Contractor – Chasse Building Team

Building Renovation Project Schedule

3/12/25	Architect Conceptual Design Report
4/23/25	Building Conceptual Design and Precon
11/10/25	Design Development Sign-Off and Council Update
12/24/25	Construction Documents – 90%
1/16/26	Construction Documents – Final 10%
2/25/26	Site Plan Review, permits
3/6/26	Construction – Notice to proceed
7/22/26	Construction – Final Completion
9/12/26	Proposed Grand Opening Celebration

Financial Overview

CIP Budget FY26	\$ 3,000,000
Construction	\$ 2,200,000
Professional Services	\$ 330,822
Equipment, FF&E, Signage, etc.	\$ 380,665
Surveys, Fees	\$ 53,513
Contingency	\$ 35,000

Year 1 Proposed Operating Budget	\$ 160,000
Personal Services (PTNB)	\$ 50,000
Programs	\$ 40,000
Advertising	\$ 3,000
Electricity, Water, Sewer, Refuse Collection	\$ 20,000
Telecomm/Internet	\$ 3,000
Facilities (INT SVC CHG)	\$ 30,000
Information Technology (INT SVC CHG)	\$ 4,500
Insurance Reserve (INT SVC CHG)	\$ 4,500
Operational Supplies/Equipment	\$ 5,000

Conceptual Drawings and Topographical Plan



