The Dirt Palace at the Wedding Cake House is an ambitious restoration project of the historic 514 Broadway property last occupied by the Tirocchi sisters and the couture design business that they ran from the location from 1915 to 1947. The renovation will develop artist in residence quarters which will complement the feminist residency program and facilities at the Dirt Palace’s current location in Olneyville Square.

Our programing at 514 Broadway will provide support to 20 - 50 artists per year. Artist residencies serve as research and development laboratories for the arts, providing artists with the critical time, space, and support for the creation of new work and the exploration of new ideas. Rhode Island is home to an incredible community of artists, but has a distinct lack of residency platforms. Our goal of supporting mid-career individual artists through this program addresses realistic challenges in RI’s celebrated arts landscape. The planned expansion of the Dirt Palace artist residency program will address this gap - deepening support for local artists while also inviting rich creative exchange among local, national, and international artists.

Our mission is to enhance the cultural life of the neighborhood by building relationships between artists and the public as well as creating visibility for female-identified artists and people historically marginalized within the arts. The Wedding Cake House project will ground innovation and creative entrepreneurship in a historical context by building out a site that connects the region’s history of design and textile manufacturing to current practices in arts and design fields, while showcasing Rhode Island as a place steeped in design thinking and visionary approaches. Developing a residency program at this site, that connects to the public and is focused on our mission of gender and cultural equity, encourages the arts community to grow in ways that address historical and structural social inequities.

Public programing on this site will complement and support the artist residencies by connecting audiences and artists. Arts patrons will have the opportunity to stay in unique short term rentals alongside of resident artists, allowing for audiences exploring the area to learn about the regional culture and history while directly supporting the creation of new work by our artists in residence. These immersive spaces, filled with local art, will also include audio walking tours, connections to arts programing on site and throughout the city, and will encourage the public to experience both regional history and contemporary art, while intersecting with working artists.
• Our organization shares the connection of female leadership/entrepreneurship with the Tirocchi legacy of the building. The location and history of the building as the famous site of a woman owned design business makes it an ideal project to complement our current facility, mission and program.

• This project came out of a rigorous strategic planning process with nationally recognized consultants. The findings of our planning process focused on our need to build sustainability and pointed to expansion into a second facility as a key approach grow resources, programs and meet community needs.

• Unlike a traditional developer, our motivation is not to make a profit via developers fee’s while rehabbing a building for someone else’s use, but rather to leverage the development of a historically significant property to scale our organization at a critical moment.

• Our Organization’s commitment to the property and our programs that will be housed in the facility is long term

• The Wedding Cake House is exactly a half mile away from our current facility. This is a great location for both in town and out of town ‘residents’ who will be granted small residential spaces in the Wedding Cake House to live in and use as private art studios for smaller scale work, and be granted access to the production facilities at the Dirt Palace which include: a screen printing & letterpress shop, music rehearsal studio, film & animation studio, wood shop, library, and big open flexible space for fabrication of large scale projects.

• The site of the property also makes it an ideal location for forming partnerships with other Providence art based not for profits, such as RISD, the Steel Yard, AS220 & Trinity Rep who bring visiting artists to town from time to time, but lack the space to house them.

• Our project speaks to the history of the house as a famous site of a woman and immigrant owned design business through our feminist values and mission focused on gender and cultural equity.

• No other potential developer is positioned to preserve the building in a way that incorporates a public component or integrates its textile, design, and female entrepreneurship history into its future incarnation.

• Our plan to preserve the integrity of the building and its historic interior layout is the most economic rehab approach and honors the property’s unique history. Our strategy of keeping the building as close to original in terms of design/layout requires far less build-out than other proposed uses of the property and complies with Historic Preservation regulations.

• As detail oriented artists and craftswomen we are uniquely qualified to handle some of the more delicate aspects of interior renovations. Having renovated the building at 14 Olneyville Sq, with bare bones resources, we’ve developed a wide range of technical proficiencies and insight into construction projects. While we plan to self-perform some of the detail work and be on site everyday while the project is under construction, we are intensely practical about what work is best suited for professional tradespeople, and have extensive experience with project management.

• Developing the building into a cultural space qualifies it for significant resources that are not available to other for-profit or not-for-profit developers.

• We have a successful track record: 17 years experience renovating and maintaining a 9,000 sq foot facility in Olneyville Square. Our current facility is a nationally recognized model for how artists can occupy a difficult to re-hab millspace, maintain and improve it overtime in a grassroots affordable way. We have been working in this community long term, with success in doing a range of difficult projects with limited resources. We have an on the ground knowledge of community needs, the assets and weakness or the regional cultural landscape, and art connections reaching well beyond the purview of the state.

• We have a demonstrated commitment to comprehensive neighborhood development through longstanding involvement in community organizations and planning efforts that strive to improve neighborhood services and the built environment while ensuring low-income and long-term residents are not displaced.
This historic building has stood empty for almost 30 years. It has deteriorated and been vandalized. The property has been listed for sale for the last two years with virtually no interest being expressed in the building. The Providence Revolving Fund with the assistance of various partners has addressed basic structural issues and protected it from further destruction by installing an alarm system and boarding up valuable fixtures. However, if not preserved and returned to use soon, it will continue to fall into disrepair and be a liability for the city of Providence. The design and structure of the space make it difficult and expensive to develop into condos or other types of housing.

However, the same features that are challenging for adapting to other potential and private uses, make it ideal for use as a residency facility and short term housing for arts/historical researchers and tourists. We believe our vision for the building to be the best and most viable way to preserve the building in a cost-effective, community-minded, manner.

The work that we have done to support women in art careers and design focused small business development is critical. Last May, the Providence Business News reported that RI ranked 40th in the nation in growth of women owned businesses in a study set between 2007 and 2016. The Dirt Palace fosters economic development by serving as an incubator space for a variety of arts and crafts based businesses. As a facility the Dirt Palace’s incubation of small women owned arts businesses is a valuable component of a healthy, diversified approach to economic development.

We conceptualize our program within the space as part of a larger project to build visibility around Providence’s incredible textile and design history while connecting dots to the contemporary creative art practices that are the cornerstone of our city’s cultural life and branding campaign.

In terms of expanding arts tourism in Rhode Island, The Dirt Palace already attracts visitors who are interested in our project specifically, as well as those more curious about the grassroots creative subcultures that have developed and thrived in Olneyville. The Dirt Palace has helped to put Providence on the map in terms of big picture art world awareness of the culture in Rhode Island. There are pages devoted to The Dirt Palace in The New Museum’s guide to artist run spaces, and in the MOMA’s book Modern Women, a compendium to work by women artists in the MOMA’s collection. Articles about the Dirt Palace and Dirt Palace artists have appeared in A&P quarterly, Frieze, The New York Times and Boston Globe, and numerous other art focused blogs. With the additional visibility of the new large scale mosaic, public art piece on the facade of our current facility, The Dirt Palace has become even more of a destination & a site that piques the interest of both local passers-by and visitors from afar.

Strong Leadership and Partners

Xander Marro & Pippi Zornoza have worked together for seventeen years stewarding the Dirt Palace facility in Olneyville Square through a variety renovations and capital improvements. They both also have professional experience in not-for-profit finance and in managing an assortment of project teams. They serve as co-directors for the Dirt Palace at the Wedding Cake House project.

The Dirt Palace at The Wedding Cake House Project Advisory Council includes professionals with experience in:

- not-for-Profit accounting,
- historic tax credits
- not-for-profit executive management,
- foundation granting
- curation
- museum exhibitions
- community based arts initiatives
- artist residency programs
- alternative education
- entrepreneurship and micro-business support services.
- community development
- preservation
- architecture
- engineering
- restoration of historic structures
- neighborhood history
- art and museums
- labor and apprenticeship programs
- artist spaces
- communications
- cultural initiatives

Advisors bring both local and national perspectives to the project.

Partnerships

- Core partnerships with The City of Providence and The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts are not new: we have previously worked with RISCA through the State Cultural Facilities Grant Program, and have previously formally intersected with the city on a variety of initiatives.

- We have on the ground knowledge of community needs, and the assets and weaknesses of the current regional cultural landscape.

- Neighborhood partnerships and relationships are part of our development process
The Dirt Palace is an art space founded in 2000 in Olneyville Square that supports women artists by providing affordable studio space, facilities, shared resources, opportunities, a culture of cooperation, and maintains visibility in the community through a committed public arts presence and long term relationships. Members work together to create an environment conducive to challenging thoughts and radical actions in order to cultivate our personal growth as individuals, and to foster the development of strong, thoughtful, independent women who use their creative awareness of the world to change it. At any given time there are seven artists in residence or “members” of the Dirt Palace, with residencies lasting on average 2-3 years. Together we have built and maintained studios and shared facilities that include: seven live/work artist in residence spaces, a library, a large shared kitchen, a print shop (specializing in screen print and letterpress), a music rehearsal space, a wood shop, an animation/film editing suite, and a workspace for large projects. Members co-curate the Dirt Palace Storefront Window Gallery - a monthly rotating public art exhibition space. The gallery has showcased work by hundreds of international, national and local artists as well as neighborhood groups and community organizations.

Dirt Palace Public Projects - 501 C3, Not for Profit whose mission specifically is:

- To enhance the cultural life of the Olneyville neighborhood of Providence RI by producing public arts exhibitions, facilitating artist residencies, and building relationships between artists, educators, and the community at large, through educational events focused on street-side public displays, as well as lectures, artist-talks, and workshops.
- To create opportunities for female-identified artists and other people historically marginalized within the arts.

Dirt Palace at the Wedding Cake House Advisory Council

Cait Amirault - Director of Strategic Communications, New Harbor Group
Sara Archambault - Program Director, LEF Foundation,
Mary-Kim Arnold* - Independent, Writer
Jon Chambers - Architect, Jonathan Chambers Architects
Paul Connelly - Art Educator/Neighbor, Meeting Street School
Andrew Cortés - Director, Building Futures
Deb Dormody* - Deputy Director, Alliance of Artists Communities
Shauna Duffy* - Managing Director/CPA, AS220
Elizabeth Francis, Executive Director, RI Council for the Humanities
Jennifer Hawkins (Advisory Council Chair) - Principal, Farnum Associates
Nat May - Arts Administration, Independent/Common Field, Hewnoaks
Lynne McCormack - Director of Creative Placemaking, LISC
Reba Mitchell - Artist/Performer, Dirt Palace Alumna
Taylor Polities - Writer/Researcher, Wilkes/RISD
Brent Runyon - Executive Director, Providence Preservation Society
Lucie Searle - Real Estate Developer, AS220/Farm Fresh
John Smith - Director, RISD Museum
Anne Tait - Associate Professor of Art, School of Architecture, Art & Historic Preservation, Roger Williams University
Sharon Ullman - Acting Executive Director, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation
Jamie Uretsky* - Exhibition Manager/Artist, New Bedford Art Museum
Anabel Vazquez* - Curator/Artist, Leica Gallery Boston/Independent Curator

*Dirt Palace Public Projects Board Members