

# Contemporary art museum still on track for Railyard

By Bruce Krasnow

The New Mexican | Posted: Wednesday, December 28, 2016 7:00 pm

Backers of a new contemporary art museum in the Santa Fe Railyard remain on track to raise some \$10 million for the project and open in 2020, even as a state budget crunch has forced layoffs and reduced hours at museums and cultural sites around New Mexico.

The effort to convert an old state archives center in the Halpin Building on Guadalupe Street is part of the \$20 million Centennial Campaign by the private Museum of New Mexico Foundation to celebrate the 100th year of the New Mexico Museum of Art. As part of the campaign, the foundation is offering naming rights to the new museum for \$4 million.

The contemporary annex to the downtown art museum is envisioned to be a focal point in the Railyard and one of the first public buildings visitors see as they disembark from the Rail Runner Express commuter train at the Santa Fe Depot, said Jamie Clements, president and chief executive of the Museum of New Mexico Foundation.

“The centennial is really driving this — to inspire the community to do something really important to secure the future,” he said.

Among those backing the project include a bevy of retired corporate executives living in Santa Fe, real estate entrepreneur Dan Burrell, La Fonda on the Plaza general manager Jennifer Kimball and *Game of Thrones* writer George R.R. Martin, whose Jean Cocteau Cinema would be adjacent to the new museum.

As part of the effort, the New Mexico Museum Foundation on Wednesday released an economic impact report for the new Halpin space, which would be part of the state-supported Museum of New Mexico system when it opens in four years. The report from O’Donnell Economics and Strategy suggests the contemporary art museum would attract 61,000 annual visits, most from outside Santa Fe, create \$20 million in annual economic activity and support 345 jobs.



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The home of the proposed contemporary arts annex of the New Mexico Museum of Art on the corner of Guadalupe Street and Montezuma Ave., shown Wednesday. The New Mexico Museum of Art has begun a campaign to raise \$10 million for the contemporary art museum and renovation of office complex. Naming rights for the museum are \$4 million. Luis Sánchez Saturno/The New Mexican

“A contemporary art annex at the Halpin will solidify the Railyard Arts District as a contemporary hub, benefiting all Railyard tenants and visitors by enriching the arts community and magnifying their collective appeal,” the report states.

The foundation has already secured commitments of \$2.3 million from 30 donors. Other large contributions are expected in early 2017.

Some remediation work in the building, which was home for the state archives, was completed by the state, and 23 architects toured the 34,000-square-foot building last month as part of the state selection process. An architect has not yet been chosen, but some sketches have been circulated to supporters to generate interest in the project.

The new museum is the focus of the foundation’s fundraising campaign, but the effort also involves \$10 million for upgrades and improvements throughout the 1917 Museum of Art building and \$1 million for foundation employees to relocate to the organization’s new home at the historic Eugenie Shonnard House, 1411 Paseo de Peralta.

Other arts organizations and businesses in the Railyard expressed support for a new state contemporary art museum in the district.

Andrew Wallerstein, chairman of the board of SITE Santa Fe, a 2-decade-old contemporary art museum on Paseo de Peralta, said, “I think it would be good for all of us. I think the Railyard after all these years of struggle is beginning to reach its potential.”

SITE Santa Fe, which is undergoing an expansion set to be finished next year, does not collect art but hosts exhibits and new installations from around the world. Wallerstein said it does not see the new project as competition.

With the New Mexico School for the Arts charter high school planning to move into the old Sanbusco Market Center space in 2018 and the SITE expansion, he said, the new museum can give the contemporary art scene the critical mass it needs.

“Santa Fe is still a big attraction and a big brand, even with contemporary art,” Wallerstein said.

Charlotte Jackson, whose Charlotte Jackson Fine Art on South Guadalupe Street was among the first galleries to open in the area 27 years ago, said the museum will be another anchor for the emerging Railyard arts scene.

SITE Santa Fe and the Center for Contemporary Arts display exhibits, but do not have permanent collections, she said, so the new museum could serve as a magnet for contemporary art donations.

“There are lots of amazing collections in Santa Fe,” she said. “I’m hoping to see a location in Santa Fe where people could offer a part of their collection or all of their collection so the rest of us can see it as well.”

The state has pledged to provide the necessary operating money for the new museum, but that comes at a time when funds are tight.

At a budget hearing in November, Cultural Affairs Secretary Veronica Gonzales told lawmakers that “nothing is really off the table” for spending cuts, including selling or transferring property, closing historical sites for entire seasons, and further cutbacks in operating hours and days at state museums.

New spending rollbacks ordered after Gov. Susana Martinez called the Legislature into special session in October come on top of earlier austerity measures that eliminated 11 Cultural Affairs employees, sliced the number of free Sundays at museums for in-state residents and trimmed hours at many libraries and historical sites.

Meanwhile, the department raised admission fees at many sites and has 100 job openings — a vacancy rate of 20 percent.

Still, Gonzales and Gov. Martinez have pledged a \$1 million increase in the Cultural Affairs budget to operate the new museum, according to backers, and the governor has sent a letter to donors supporting the expansion.

“We know these are tough times,” Clements said. “We do advocate for state funding for state museums, so we need to up our game. We’ll be out there to see that the added funding comes to pass.”

Though Santa Fe lawmakers might back the museum project, those elsewhere are likely to be hesitant about new projects while the state struggles to pay for basic government services.

“Almost anything that’s going to require new money is going to be tough to do,” said state Sen. Stuart Ingle, the Republican minority leader from Portales. “The main part of the state budget is education, and before we do anything else, we’re going to have to make sure we can pay for that.”

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### **Museum of New Mexico campaign**

The Centennial Campaign of the Museum of New Mexico Foundation hopes to raise a total of \$20 million for restoration and projects at three buildings, plus the main Museum of Art across from the Plaza:

- The Halpin Building, a 1917 warehouse building at the corner of Montezuma Avenue and Guadalupe Street with a noted exterior mural by Gilberto Guzman. The building used to be home to the state archives and would be repurposed into a contemporary art museum operated by the state Department of Cultural Affairs.
- The Eugenie Shonnard House, 1411 Paseo de Peralta, across from Restaurant Martín, was built in 1890 and served as the home and studio of sculptor Eugenie Shonnard until her death in 1934. The estate is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was donated to the

museum foundation, but has been leased for 30 years to Margo Cutler Realty. The 15 foundation employees would all relocate to the property, but there is needed expansion.

- Hewett House, 116 Lincoln Ave., was built in 1870 as part of the Fort Marcy compound. It was one of seven officers' quarters built along Lincoln and Grant Avenues. It was purchased in 1920 by Edgar L. Hewett, director of the Museum of New Mexico, who lived there until his death in 1946. The home and its offices would revert back to the Museum of Art when it is vacated by the foundation. Backers also hope the campaign can raise money for improvements at the Museum of Art itself, including new event and education spaces.