Vibrant Spaces Podcast - City of Baltimore (1)

**Emily Craven:** [00:00:00] Welcome, Tonya. Thank you for joining us.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Thank you for having me. I'm really excited about today's interview.

**Tim Souza:** So are we. I'm excited about this conversation and all of the amazing things that you are doing in Baltimore and to dive deeper into what that place making vibrancy looks like in the efforts that you transform, the conversation around arts in the community.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Absolutely.

**Emily Craven:** We like to start all of these podcasts with a little bit of a getting to know you. We know from our previous conversations that you did not originally live in Baltimore. So when did you move to Baltimore? What has been the biggest change you have witnessed in the community from when you moved until now?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** So maybe we missed this. So I actually grew up in Baltimore, but moved to New York when I was 21. And spent most of my adult life and built a career in New York for nearly 25 plus years. So in some ways most of my adult experiences happened in New York city. [00:01:00] And I returned to Baltimore, Now, five years ago.

So in 2018, I believe that's five years ago.

**Tim Souza:** Okay. So then let's ask a better question. What's the biggest difference from growing up in Baltimore versus the way that you've seen Baltimore over the last five years?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Baltimore is a different place than it was when I was growing up.

Certainly. There's just more intention. I think the spaces, the city feels the same, but I think that there is a more robust, creative community. Certainly when I was here, I felt like an outlier. I think the community felt more underground. Sort of those, cool kids over there, like not sure what they're up to.

So it wasn't a part of a mainstream existence where now. There's artists and writers and, literary writers and poets and sculptors and all sorts of folks hanging out in spaces together where I just felt like I was. like the outlier in my space. [00:02:00] So that's why I had my eyes on New York.

Thought my tribe would be there.

**Tim Souza:** And what brought you back to that Baltimore vibe?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Love. So, um, you know, you have all of these experiences all over the world, and then you meet a guy. That's from Baltimore, your hometown. So in some ways it was serendipitous. I have, but I guess I was supposed to be back here.

We dated for about six years. So it took me about six years to be convinced that I could find a space in Baltimore. That, you know, sort of, work with my creative energy. So,

**Tim Souza:** And with that, what is like one of your favorite places in Baltimore? Do you have a place that's special to you specifically?

Maybe. When you can reflect on being a kid and then now that can be maybe two spaces, but what is, what does it allow?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Yeah, to think about that. I think that Baltimore is a very enchanting town. It's got [00:03:00] great little pockets of neighborhoods. So I think the discovery of new neighborhoods that maybe weren't fully fleshed out or develop or have transformed since I was a kid is really.

Special like I find that really interesting. There's a space and I believe it's like Hampton. It's kind of off the beaten path, but it's the underpass of the Jones falls expressway. And the river, the Jones falls runs by there.

And then people can jog and ride their bikes and. That sort of thing. And then there's like, of course the graffiti artists have taken over a wall or two. So this is a very interesting sort of underground space. I had two years ago, I'd hoped to do a music festival there. Cause it's really off the beaten path.

And I think. It kind of lends itself to a cool event space. So still got, still have my eyes on [00:04:00] it.

**Emily Craven:** I love that. That would be super fun. Okay. So if you had a giant billboard anywhere in Baltimore, it could be under a bridge if you wish, but if you had a giant billboard anywhere in Baltimore, that could say anything, metaphorically speaking, what would you want that message to be?

What do you want to leave the planet or the city with as a message?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** I would say be bold, think big. Honestly, I mean, those are words that I live by. So, to be bold and to think big is really the ticket.

**Emily Craven:** I think that people will see that mentality and that vibe throughout this whole interview as we talk through some of the wonderful things that you've been implementing in Baltimore over the last year and a half. So in some of our prior conversations you mentioned that Baltimore doesn't have [00:05:00] a cultural plan, even though it has become a much more cultural place than when you left and that you were wanting to build one out.

And so I want to understand what happened in the city to create the environment that you see today and that you're trying to give more fuel to that fire. You touched a little bit of history when we last spoke. Maybe we can start there.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** So I will say I, to your point, I've been in this world for about a year and a half, much to the Scott's administration thinking boldly, there had not been an arts and culture liaison.

person in the mayor's office, sitting in the mayor's office since the nineties. And Baltimore is a city of creatives. It's always been the city of creatives. But when you think about the number of cultural institutions that we have, we have some of the finest museums. on planet earth. We also have Micah, which is an arts school arts [00:06:00] institution.

We also have Peabody, which is a musical dedicated to music. And so you have all of these cultural spaces. And to not have someone sort of represent the art at a cabinet level within an administration seemed out of sync. So I'm glad that the mayor was thoughtful enough to create this role, but, and also to have me in this role.

So with that, Then how do you really start to leverage the resources that I have available to me at the mayor's office and really come up with a cultural plan, an ethos, things that people can lean into and understand why the city is a cultural destination and that we're a world class city producing world class Talent, musicians, the BSO, the BMA, all of these institutions speak to [00:07:00] that.

And so I think a cultural plan would be the next best step for the city.

**Tim Souza:** What is your kind of vision for that cultural plan? Just high level, we can jump into some of these crazy examples that you've been talking about of the actions you have been taking, which I assume will inform that cultural plan.

 What is your elevator pits of that cultural plan? So

**Tonya Miller Hall:** I think I've never created a cultural plan before, so. Um, I think I've been doing a lot of research looking at other cities, seeing how they're putting together their cultural initiatives. I'm going, I do the mayor's office.

I lead the mayor's office of arts and culture, a committee of 22 individuals. So leaning on them, they're from different practices and disciplines. So also tapping into that, I As a resource, but I think that once we start to come up with a sub group to really help me put a soft blueprint together my plan is to go out to [00:08:00] market and start to talk to the various cultural institutions.

What would they like to see in this plan? How should they be represented in this plan? So that could vary from. The culinary arts to the literary arts to hire cultural institutions that name the B. S. O. or Micah, any of those institutions how should they show up in this plan as well? And so I think, Baltimore is a metropolitan city.

Sometimes it operates as a small town. And so if people don't have buy in, there is. There's how to pay. So I definitely want to make sure that I'm thoughtful in that way. And people are wildly invested in this role and wildly invested in the future of the role in the office. So I want to make good on those things.

**Emily Craven:** That's wonderful. And I think you even mentioned that [00:09:00] even now you're starting to get individual Artists and creator picking up the phone and calling you and giving you your opinion. So I imagine that would also take a huge part in the plan . Yeah,

**Tonya Miller Hall:** and the things that I hear, you know, I get so much positive feedback, so sometimes it's a little overwhelming.

I don't wanna believe my own hype, right. So, but folks. you know, what people will say to me is we've never had this kind of access to the mayor and to the mayor's office. And so I try to make myself available. I try to be thoughtful. My response is I'm not going to please everyone. I've stepped on a few landmines, but I'm always a quick to, to try to make good on a conversation.

And just leaning into all everyone. I'm not here. I often say I don't have all the answers. And Going out to market and talking to those [00:10:00] individuals who do have the answers and sometimes people who are smarter than me to lean on them to help me come up with this plan is which is what's going to be key.

**Emily Craven:** I think the thing that I loved the most about the conversations that we had previously was that. Even without a cultural plan, you are doing some really amazing things in the city. And so you mentioned everything from a pocket park to a gas station to a graffiti task force. And so I really want to, in this episode in particular, dive deeper into these.

I would turn the guerrilla efforts that, you're transforming each of these spaces. You're not waiting for some strategic plan to fall down from on high. You're actually doing stuff now as you're also doing the planning. And You've gone out and you've garnered that community support and you're starting to garner that city support.

So I would really love, I suppose, to start off with the pocket park that you mentioned [00:11:00] where you were able to build it in, I believe you said six weeks. Can you please tell us that story?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Oh, my goodness. And if I back to Tim's earlier question, one of my favorite places is the Artscape Pocket Park.

So the Pocket Park is located on the corner. For those who are listening from the States, it's on Charles and 20th Street bedded in the arts and entertainment district, which we call Station North. The Artscape Festival is an annual festival that's been, activated for the last 40 years. Of course, it was down during the pandemic.

So, last year was the first year that we were bringing it back online. And I had the opportunity to lead those efforts as the producer. And instantly, Thinking about the needs of the people, right? So often, there's always, listen I like to have fun more than anybody I've been to more parties or [00:12:00] events than most people, most humans.

However, for a city, the size and with the limited resources and with some of the challenges that we know about accessibility and some of the blight generations, decades of blights, vacant houses, how can we really use this festival to be transformational to communities and also have lasting impact, right?

Because once the good time is over, you're like, what's left? Like, that was great, but what's left? How did that, really impact my life. And so, did some walkthroughs and identified a vacant lot that was in pretty bad shape. The lot was partially owned by the city of Baltimore. So when you think about this vacant lot It had individual row houses on the lots, right?

So it was three different parcels but had been cleared [00:13:00] many years before. So the city had a parcel and then another property owner. Had two parcels of the three. So it was easy for me, I use air quotes, easy for me to get usage of the city property, but then having to talk to the private property owner to convince him that this was the right thing to do because for him, the lot was just sitting there.

He hadn't been successful in selling it. That said, it was overgrown, you know, weeds, trees, had these weird pebbles that I found out that weren't environmentally sound. So we had to cleared a lot of these stones first to even level the ground, et cetera, et cetera. But once I got all of the permits and I had an Architectural firm do the rendering.

So that was the blueprint. That was the start and we made it really [00:14:00] simple. The architectural firm, we looked at a couple of pocket part, I mean, not pocket parts, but like these parklets that cities were popping up during the pandemic that were really like clean and simple, but how do you use the environment?

You know, like would frame things. So that was it. So we really made the park. We had to lay down more , like sand, what they call pea gravel. My husband does construction. So I leaned on him a lot to translate what the architects were saying to me, because they speak a different language than I do.

But we managed to clear the light, remove the stones, and the cool thing was. Lot also had a lots of trash, but it also had a bin with a bunch of trash in it. And next to the lot is a 300 plus 350 plus residential space, like resident low income senior citizens, veterans are [00:15:00] there.

And it struck me as I was , surveying the space, there was no green space for these seniors, right? So a lot of times they were just sitting on the stoop out front, like, on a stone, a concrete wall or a standing under a tree canopy, just this, so they take cover from the sun.

So I was like, this is egregious, right? So This thing is right next, like adjacent, an adjacent wall. So we were able to put some seeding, some trees, some , greenery. We did these mounds with trees and plant, shrubbery. Cause you wanted shrubbery that was sustainable.

And instantly it was an instant hit. It took about six weeks. They watched me carefully, the residents next door. They kept their eye on me. Like, what is she up to? I think that the beautiful part of the story, the unexpected or the heartbeat of the story is that I didn't expect to fall in love with the residents [00:16:00] and they certainly, We're distrusting of who, what my mission was.

And once we took the fence down, I was like, this is your park. This is for you guys. And they, it was really a beautiful moment because. No one had actually ever come in the sort of bought a gift, uh, of that magnitude and then to think about, you know, often in these spaces, the developers aren't and aren't necessarily intentional and talking to residents.

So to see somebody peer to peer almost, representation matters, I should say, I'm a black woman. The residents are mostly black. And so to see me show up in this way and with this park was really great. And instantly a few of the locals was like, I want to help maintain this park.

We're going to take care of this part. And they have, and so I was able to carve out a maintenance budget [00:17:00] from the, for my overall budget to not only pay for this one individual who is from the community to take care of the park, but I also pay for the association, the community association cleaning crew to take care of the park and they like, Okay.

Take care of the shrubbery and they water the plants and they've replanted since last year, some new trees. And so it really has become, every time I drive past there, there's 30, 30 people, 20 people just sort of hanging out. And so it's a really cool space. And then we also put up a mural on the wall that, that adjoins the park.

So it really did make I mean, that's what placemaking is all about and, placekeeping transforming space. But now we name it, we named it Artscape Park because the festival was was What's the means of getting it done? I think that's beautiful. And I feel like

**Tim Souza:** that's the kind of story that you want [00:18:00] to hear coming from cities.

And the transformation that happens within that community that is also, I think it's beautiful that you had such community buy in. And I know that a huge part of that is the way you have conversations with people around those spaces. And I remember you talking to us about the conversation with the individual who's working in that community or to take care of it now and to be that point person for maintaining the park.

So if, I guess the question I would have for you is, For other, people in different cities, right? Maybe even in adjacent communities who are listening, what, what would be your recommendation for, how they could build out this space? You kind of gave us a, Hey, I did A, B, C, and D.

How could we start? How did you start? How could you start on that?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** So, back to my earlier point, I mean, I've always been a big thinker. And so, how do you make, One, the festival in the three years that it was down, I felt like it was important to make a huge impact, but also if you're spending, thousands of [00:19:00] dollars, it should make sense.

I like nice things. I feel like everybody should have nice things. And but if we're spending that kind of money, how are we investing in communities? It's one thing to have a nice, band or listen to music, but those are the questions people ask no matter what you're doing.

Whatever the mayor may post on any given day, somebody will say, but what about the air conditioners in the schools? Like this totally unrelated, but People want their lives, their livelihood to be improved no matter what. And so there's always going to be that. So I think to the listeners, if you have a budget and you are activating, whether it's a block party or some other kind of, festival or small thing, what are the small things you can do?

You can hire the artists or do a community day where you're painting tree boxes or [00:20:00] those kind of things just to make some beautification and some small improvements in your neighborhood , goes a long way

**Emily Craven:** for sure. And I think something that I'm curious about is that for the property owner who held those other two lots, what was your argument to them as to what. Why they should let this park exist

**Tonya Miller Hall:** that part. So it's so funny. People ask me this all the time. So not only was, the property owner of the vacant lot.

It was probably owner across the road who had the gas station. I was like, can I do this mural project on this 10, 000 square foot Um, I'd like to say my New York training has prepared me for this role. When you're in New York, you raise your hand for just about anything.

You're in the room with the most ambitious people on planet earth. People move there to be even more ambitious. And so I think. [00:21:00] I'm just really good at pitching ideas. And I think it's just the way I show up. I try to talk with some integrity and talk with some authenticity and just show up as my honest self.

Like this is the right thing to do. And so I did for the property owner who owns the vacant lot I asked him if we could just do six month lease. Like incrementally so now it's been a year so we've done two and we're coming up on the next six and so not to get in the weeds too far, but the contract with his lot aren't with the city, it's with the community association.

So, I work closely with the community association in that district to one, get the approval to make sure the community actually, who's this woman, put it apart. But to get by and with the community associations and different leaders, I had, letters of references and that sort of thing.

So now they hold the [00:22:00] lease for the park. I still continue to pay for the maintenance out of my original budget. And he might be on the hook for Park forever at this point. I'm not sure.

**Tim Souza:** I love that. You've structured it and got him into this buy in. And I love that you've also created an economic benefit for him too, right. To want to financially be incentivized to maintain this. Collaborative community space.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Absolutely. and he doesn't pay for the cost of the maintenance before he had to, continuously, he was either getting fined or something because of the trash and all of these things.

So in some ways I did him a small favor. So we'll see how it goes. We're already here. And then the auto repair shop. That's literally across the street. It's owned by a gentleman called Mr. Kim who had owned the gas station was previously a gas service station for 20 years. And then.

into an auto repair shop. So the [00:23:00] actual gas tanks are removed but it still looks like a service station with the garage and the overhang of where the gas tanks were. And it has an adjacent wall. And so that was about a 10, 000 square foot project. And I showed him some. images of other gas stations that had been reimagined in Miami and various places.

And I say, Hey, would you be interested in doing this? And he was like, absolutely. With little to no convincing. I came in hot, too. I thought I was gonna be like, I was gonna have to like Come up with a big song and dance. And he was pretty agile in his thought. He just wanted to see what it was going to look like at the end.

So we did renderings of the actual color palette and introduced him to the artists. And this is important because the space. So this district, Station North, [00:24:00] is a really mixed demographic. While it's an arts and entertainment district it also has a heavy LGBTQ community residents. And it used to be touted to be like a Koreatown Asian community.

At some point. Somewhere in the 90s, it was touted to be like little Korea town, but it never popped off. But there are Korean or different Asian descents that have property ownership there. So you get this mixed bag of different communities in a way you have to communicate with said folk.

Mr. Kim is Asian, but he's a lovely man. And he was fascinated because I don't. I don't think many people had really come to talk to him and include him in these kind of conversations. And so he was like, Oh, I'm so happy to come to work every day. And he just brought me so [00:25:00] much joy to make him happy.

And during the festival, the opening night of the festival, we hosted a party. That we walled off. We had bike racks walled off. We bought palm trees and a DJ and a bar and we had hors d'oeuvres. So we had a party there. And also in the park the first lady, the governor's wife attended. And at first Mr.

Kim wasn't going to come. And I had to convince him and his wife to both come and Oh my gosh, the photos are just beautiful and just very excited. He was just, it keeps us. Was blown away. And that's the part that I was not, I'm just a workhorse. So that's the parts that you're not prepared for in your job is like that.

The generosity of the spirit that you feel from communities from doing this work. So

**Tim Souza:** I think that's one of the things that I have to compliment you on. And both of the conversations that we've had so far as you do a really great job of [00:26:00] activating and bringing people together and collaborating. And I think that One of the biggest pieces that I have learned from you and the coolest projects that you, I think you've tackled, you've touched on a couple of points and that's the bringing in the artists, bringing in, these different community spaces throwing in, throwing barbecue kind of, events.

But I really would love to talk about that, graffiti task force that you've worked on. Been building, because I think it's a crown jewel in all of our conversations, at least thus far. And so , in the first year and a half you've built this task for, can you tell us about, this, task force that you have launched and a little bit of like how you are utilizing this now community and mention of artists to do all these other projects?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Yeah. Just a piggyback before I go into that is really around. Seeing people and meeting people where they are is really the secret sauce in all of this. I think [00:27:00] that, Baltimore is a different, it's not New York, but I think should I say growing up in New York, but basically in my twenties and thirties, growing up in New York you're forced to have conversations because it's, Such an immigrant city is so many dialects and so many communities.

And so you're having these conversations with people from all walks of life. And so I think that's also a really great training and superpower for me because. I'm not that people are afraid, but most people won't talk to people that they don't understand or don't know, or haven't been in touch or haven't seen before.

So they're like the guy over there or whatever. I mean, we talk, hey, have stories. People don't even talk to their own neighbors. Right. So the graffiti task force also is sort of like, On the margin. So we have a huge graffiti issue in the city. I've talked to other cities. It seems it's not [00:28:00] just a Baltimore problem.

The pandemic years when no one was on the street, really left these spaces open for. graffiti artists, and not all graffiti is the same. I think there are vandals who just throw up words and not necessarily have an artistic expression in them. And then there are true street artists and graffiti workers.

So we have a few artists or Taggers who their work is just everywhere along the highway, on top of buildings, on trash cans, on people's walls. And so I was like, we've got to do something about this. So I had been successful in bringing in some of the most, some of the premier graffiti street artists.

In the city, there's what they call the old G's that's been around since the 90s. And I'd hired one or two of them last year to work on different [00:29:00] projects during the Artscape Weekend. So I tapped into them and they said that they would join this task force.

And this is not really around penalizing people or putting people in jail. It really is. Can we come up with some real solutions to mitigate the city of unwanted and vandalism,

work? And so it's a task force comprised of a few artists. A muralist, some graffiti artists, there's portrait artists in there, and then some city service workers.

So the DOT team, the Department of Transportation because oftentimes they're charged with cleaning up graffiti mitigating graffiti work and then the Department of Public Works also has like a graffiti team that goes out and clears the work. And so now in the current system is if you call 311 and you're like, Can you come, somebody's tagged my wall, they would deploy one of the city agencies.

To go and cover the work. [00:30:00] Sometimes it's done in the same paint color. Sometimes it's just white. It's almost like white out. And so then you have like white out patches everywhere along the express way and on buildings. And I'm like, well, that's not attractive either. So I'm working on some rules of engagement.

Could we potentially. build a team of artists that we deploy. Once city agency knows that there's a target wall, they're going to go white it out. And then we deploy said graffiti artists. or street artists that we have now as a consultant on our roster to go out and put up sanctioned work. So we're creating sanctioned spaces for work.

Yeah.

**Tim Souza:** And I would say, , and you've really built relationships with these artists already. Can you talk a little bit about your art after dark program and how that has really transformed the way that community is seeing street art, [00:31:00] graffiti art. And what it means to have, color up on the walls and in the community,

**Tonya Miller Hall:** right?

So the, their recommendation to main artists, street artists was like, we need to put up better work. If we put up more work, it'll be less likely to get tagged. So we did our first installment of an event called Art After Dark. It was about three weeks ago now. I identified also off the beaten path space called Lexington Street, which used to be a huge retail corridor that's since been shut down.

It hasn't 10 years. So all of the people listening, the storefront gates that are on these retail shops, That's what we reimagined and repainted. So initially, How this was all going to play out, how we're mirrorless portrait artists and street artists and graffiti [00:32:00] taggers all going to play in the same sandbox.

Cause of course there's politics in everything, right? So I'm like, how are they all going to play?

**Tim Souza:** How did you get that to happen?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** I mean, I'm not even a nerd, but I felt like a nerd in this space. I was like, should we have an Excel spreadsheet? Should I, put numbers in front of each retail spot?

Should we assign, should we make an assignment? I'm like totally trying to nerd this out and they just came up. They just kind of rolled in with their cans and their backpacks and every, they just sorted it out amongst themselves. That's the beautiful part of it is that what I did was organize, closing the streets, making sure there was like, so.

The program was from 7 p. m. to 11 p. m. Sort of trying to capture this nighttime, which is where most graffiti artists start to play, but they're actually out at two o'clock in the morning. But [00:33:00] I wasn't doing that. I was like, this is the best I could do with the resources I have. We're going to pretend it's two o'clock in the morning.

And so we had a DJ and a bar. We had light projections. And. On the adjacent wall. So it was live stream. So as the artist was working, their work was projected on an adjacent wall by this light projection artists. And so it was really beautiful. And, we're going to do another installment of art after dark, because I think as we start to build this community and this muscle we will start to suss out, the bad actors in the space because they kind of police themselves too.

And people had crazy FOMO. People were like, I can't believe I missed that. But it was a moment because the artists that we signed up, we signed up about 15 artists. We knew that they were [00:34:00] coming, but in the end it was about 25 artists. Or it could have been more because then a gang of like street artists showed up based on a call and then, everybody had, and we have more than enough wall space.

So that's why I thought it was really beautiful because it was organic and they were willing to take a chance. In some ways I represent the man cause I work for the city, I'm that person, but I'm not a bureaucrat. So I think I also have that going for me. I show up as a creative and so I'm not, the guy in the suit or, you know, the gal and, pen stripes or whatever.

And so they're like, Oh yeah, this is cool. We can do this. And it was really cool. And we had, big bright lights, the DLT gave us and it was fantastic. Now I will tell you that the formula is, there are graffiti artists and street artists that work never gets tagged. And so on [00:35:00] that block, I think it was maybe 30 different gates that we touched.

Since then, only two of the mural pieces have been tagged. Pieces that look like murals, as opposed to pieces that look like street art. And so that's the learning curve. And that's what the street artists have been saying. Like there is, if it looks like legitimate work, they're not going to tag it.

But if it looks, like daisies and sunshines, maybe they don't have respect for it and they'll tag it. That's, listen, that's not my code. That's just how they're interfacing with each other. So I'm excited about it because people have reached out and when is the next art after dark?

And so I'm right in the process now of identifying a few spaces and then working on the sanctioned mural projects or art projects that we can deploy once [00:36:00] our agency team goes out and whitewalls, whitewall it. And then we can deploy said artists to go and put up sanctioned work and come up with a very cool logo so that other agencies understand that this is sanctioned by the city and this should be here and it's not.

So I,

**Emily Craven:** And so to get into, as you said before, that, the kind of get into the weeds there, because I know that the people listening are going to be like, okay, how can I take this and do this in my own town? So if, so the 15 artists that you had, I'm assuming that you paid those 15, but the ones that came up just came up and did it for the love of it.

I think that's very important. Yeah. Combo, right.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Yes. We paid the artists definitely negotiated fees in advance. Some of the artists is one premier artists. I don't know how he feels if I just, so they just blow up his name across the world. But so one of the artists who [00:37:00] really served as a consultant to help us tap into some of the street artists, he, we paid him and he parsed out additional fees.

Okay. To his crew that came in and it was just really interesting because some of them wanted to be seen. Some of them didn't want to be seen. Some of them took photos, some of them didn't, but the guys who just like, there were guys who, oh my goodness, I saw this on Instagram, like live feed and I just came down.

I live around the corner. I got my cans. I'm going to just. Go to it. And that was really cool. That was very cool, but it's very important to pay artists.

**Emily Craven:** And with the areas that you're looking to identify from memory, this particular avenue you were able to get that permission because a lot of those buildings were owned by the city.

Are you looking for other additional areas where that is the same thing? What's your criteria for the new areas you're looking at for other after? Um,

**Tonya Miller Hall:** some of the spaces. [00:38:00] Will be owned by the city and some of the spaces I'll have to do my dog and pony show and as the owner, if they would be interested and, participating in this.

So there's another retail corridor called Greenmount Avenue. It doesn't have a large stretch as the Lexington Street corridor did, but there's one particular property owner who owns a dry cleaners and he's been tagged. His gate constantly gets tagged. So one of the city council members was like, Oh, you guys should come to Greenmount and do that row.

So it's just be a matter of getting permission. And working out some agreement and to get that done. I don't know a world where people would be like, Oh, no, I don't want to do anything cool or put any art on my wall. Like, I mean, I'm sure there's one person on the universe. This is [00:39:00] like, no, no, no. Because the other thing is just the maintenance of it.

And it's also the heartbreak of it. Right. Because as soon as we finished Mr. Kim's we did Mr. Kim's service lot and maybe two weeks later it was tagged awful. Just horribly, he was heartbroken. And so we went back out, we. We did it, cleaned it back up, and then we put the graffiti sealant over it which you can power wash off.

So we had to do that twice, because over the winter it got hit again, and with like black, really deep black. Paint pigments that bled through. So it's a struggle. And the graffiti sealant is really, really expensive. It's like a hundred dollars a gallon. So it's an investment. So I can understand why someone, you know, they go home feeling great.

And then they come back the next morning and somebody has tagged it. That's really that emotionally, [00:40:00] It's that cool.

**Emily Craven:** Yeah. And I think that it's also a culture shift as well. Right. Is because it's happened for so long. You are starting the. the movement of that.

And it will take a while for it to set in and for that respect to set in. And and as you say, you learn who does get tagged and who doesn't get tagged and you use more of their work. Right. I'm curious as to what did this cost you versus a like traditional art installation. And I'm interested also in that conversation around, you said that you're doing a lot with.

a smaller budget. So I'm interested in how did you fund each of these activations that we've been talking about?

**Tonya Miller Hall:** So for the larger projects that I did last year doing the Artscape, I received a grant from the state because obviously there was huge investment to bring Artscape back as a festival because it had been down for three years.

[00:41:00] So I was able to garner the support of a senator and he helped me advocate and get a grant to bring the festival at large back music, soundstage, all of these bits. But this was also, for Artscape. We had four stages , and national and local talent, but also we installed about eight to nine mural projects.

And we wrapped electrical boxes. So we did a lot of sustainable art based projects. For the festival and so the art after dark project was a scrappy budget. I worked in concert with a capital grant. So there's another sort of like a neighborhood association that sort of takes care of the district and they had some capital improvement money.

So this was considered a capital improvement because [00:42:00] rusty gates. Versus beautiful glow, shiny gates. So we were able to get the paint. I work with another woman who's an artist. Really was a facilitator of this sort of capital side. And then we had a small budget, less than 10 K from the city for the light projection and the DJ and all the other cool things and then paying the artists.

**Tim Souza:** It sounds like, everyone wants the to have nice things like you were saying earlier, right? And so it sounds like you were able to tend to tap the shoulders of everybody who is invested in making sure that the community has safe spaces. That's nice. Thanks.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Yeah, I think that to Emily's point, it is a cultural shift.

It's community engagement in this urban revitalization using artists to do the work. Right? And we know how artists. can transform spaces quickly. Any community in New [00:43:00] York will tell you that, you know, Soho was built on the backs of artists. Unfortunately, then said artists get priced out gentrification unfortunately arises and then, you get priced out.

So that's not the intention here. Certainly we want to be More mindful as we start to think about how do we get artists at the table to have some of these conversations about their needs and the city and Brown housing about artist studios, all of these things. But I think that they're just excited , to have access to the mayor's office and to also be invited to the party.

**Emily Craven:** That's beautiful. I cannot thank you enough, Tonya, for chatting with us today. It has been phenomenal. Conversation. And a huge pleasure to have you here with us today. I wanted to have, one final personal question to close out with maybe a drop of wisdom on that is what bad [00:44:00] recommendations that you hear.

In your profession or area of expertise that you believe people should be ignoring. I

**Tonya Miller Hall:** don't have a keen example, but I will tell you that what people have said to me in most of my careers various jobs is, I think that my passion terrifies them. And so sometimes people ask me to slow down and literally can we just take a beat for a minute?

And so I would say if there is someone out here listening, who is a, Bold thinker and passionate about their work. Just keep pushing and you'll find, you'll eventually find the gig where people appreciate all of those assets and you'll just be able to just do the work.

**Emily Craven:** Beautiful. I love that, Tonya. Thank you so much for [00:45:00] joining us today.

It has been an absolute delight and a pleasure.

**Tonya Miller Hall:** Thank you guys very much. It was so much fun talking to you both.

**Tim Souza:** It's great to have you. Absolutely.