



May 4, 2026

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Hope Chávez

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My name is Hope Chávez and I am the Executive Director of the Arts Council of Greater New Haven. I am writing to share my perspective on the essential value of LM-2026-0109 to permit cultural activities as-of-right in Light Industrial (IL) Districts.

New Haven has long been named the “Cultural Capital of Connecticut.” While that is no accident, the legislative priorities of the City do not always align with such a superlative. The community-informed Comprehensive Plan (Vision 2034) demands more collaboration between the arts and city planning. When I talk to our local artisans—the ceramic artists, the jewelry-makers, the small-batch clothing designers—they don't wish for fewer factories; they wish for more local, specialized manufacturing support. Their artistic innovation creates a demand for specialized production, forging a powerful, symbiotic relationship. Our industrial future and our cultural future are not two separate stories; they are interwoven.

The challenge we face in our Light Industrial (IL) zones is not a clash of sectors, but an issue of vacancy and unrealized potential. IL zones in New Haven provide ample opportunities for solving numerous economic and cultural challenges for the City. These buildings are not meeting the modern needs for manufacturing and warehousing, so they remain empty, non-revenue generating, and deteriorating. We can change that with this policy.

I'm aware of some concerns regarding how as-of-right use impacts economic development, traffic, pedestrian safety, and collaboration with abutting neighborhoods. While these concerns are reasonable, the idea that a high volume of cultural nonprofits are poised to instantly buy up all the space is not grounded in reality, nor is the notion that cultural institutions are not inherently value additive for their neighbors. Look at spaces like NXTHVN, Erector Square, and

City Seed. These are spaces of cultural activity and community gathering in reimagined industrial buildings. Their presence in these communities drives economic development, creates safe gathering spaces, and increases opportunities for neighbors to collaborate.

Changing this legislation is a strategic move that provides the gentle incentive necessary for thoughtful, community-focused cultural organizations to reuse and preserve vacant IL buildings. By allowing cultural activities as-of-right, we are extending an invitation for creative investment beyond the downtown core and breathing new life into our neighborhoods. We are transforming liabilities (vacant buildings) into community assets: rehearsal studios, performance spaces, galleries, museums, and creative businesses. When arts and culture thrive, [the city stands to gain](#).

I urge you to approve this petition so we can invest in the long-term, synergistic growth of both industry and culture.

Sincerely,
Hope Chávez

arts council
GREATER NEW HAVEN

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