



Lenox Cultural District

Stakeholder Convening - Meeting Notes

Monday, June 29th, 2020, 4pm, via Zoom

Attendees: Laura Brennan, BRPC; Luis Cotto, MCC; Beth Tracy Gamble, LCC; Andrea Goodman, Cantilena Chamber Choir; Derrick Holt, Color of the Berkshires; Amy Lafave, Lenox Library; Gwen Miller, Town of Lenox; Marybeth Mitts, Lenox Select Board; Mindy Morin, Canyon Ranch; Natalie Neubert, Berkshire Music School; Jenn Nacht, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Hilary Field Respass, BUTI; Cassandra Sohn, Sohn Fine Art; Veronica Ramirez Martell, MCC program officer; Scott Barrow, Lenox artist; Suzanne Pelton, Lenox Rhubarb Festival; Paul Green, Berkshire Music School/Williams College; Olga Weiss, Historical Commission; Arlene Schiff, Lenox Cultural Council; Tom Hoadley, Hoadley Gallery; Larry Oberwager, Tanglewood Business Partners; Alexandra Fuchs, BSO; Deirdre McKenna, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Clarence Fanto, Berkshire Eagle

The meeting was called to order by Gwen Miller at 4:04pm. She provided an overview of the expectations for the meeting, then asked for a round of introductions.

A PowerPoint presentation guided a discussion of the Cultural District's brief history and goals for the coming year.

1. **Update from the Massachusetts Cultural Council** - Luis Cotto from MCC provided information about how MCC staff is assigned to coverage of various geographic areas. Luis oversees the Cultural Districts program, but Veronica is responsible specifically for the Berkshires. MCC staff was sent to work remotely in mid-March, and they do not anticipate being in the office in the near term. At the onset of the pandemic, Anita Walker had just recently announced that she planned to retire at the end of the fiscal year. He shared an update on the search process for a new executive director which will likely take at least six months. Cultural District check-ins are occurring every two weeks by Zoom and will continue to be held in order to help districts to connect and share ideas. Veronica added that she misses being in the Berkshires, had been visiting frequently when she first started with MCC in November of 2019, and is excited to return when possible.
2. **Cultural District Designation: What it Means** – Laura Brennan provided a reminder that the Cultural District designation recognizes the density of creative and cultural activity in Lenox. This designation is distinct from the Local Cultural Council program but is still connected. We are not a grant-making organization, but rather exists with the goals of attracting artists, encouraging job development, establishing or enhancing the district's reputation as a destination, and is in many ways an economic development tool, including through historic preservation and increasing property values.
3. **Our Cultural District Goals** – Gwen Miller shared an overview of the goals the community set for ourselves developed during the application process. These are to: raise the profile of smaller organizations within and around the District, Explore new collaborations among venues and across industries, Expand range of audiences, Improving physical connectivity through signage and pathways, Consider new programming and events in "off-seasons", and Work with fellow

Berkshire County Cultural Districts (North Adams, Williamstown, Pittsfield, and Great Barrington).

4. **Review of Steering Committee Concepts for Summer 2020 (and beyond)** – Representatives from the subcommittees provided overviews of the three main programmatic goals identified by the Steering Committee as priorities for 2020:
 - a. Beth Tracy Gamble, Communications
 - i. Goals are to grow the district’s audience to increase awareness of the Cultural District among community stakeholders, residents, and visitors; Inform the larger communities of district activities and events; Update community stakeholders on the steering committee’s activities. Cultural District information is available on the landing page, housed on the Lenox Chamber of Commerce website. There is also information on the Town website including agendas and minutes. A monthly e-newsletter is published that recaps news from the steering committee, activities, and events in the District. The District has a Facebook page and information is also shared via various Chamber social media accounts.
 - b. Hilary Field Respass, Live Music
 - i. The idea of music in public spaces came up during discussions of gradual, safe re-openings. There are a lot of questions still to be answered, but the hope is to identify a group of people interested in pursuing this concept for the Summer of 2020. Despite the fact that major venues cannot present live performances, smaller experiences may still be possible. Hilary asked that anyone interested in participating on a sub-committee say so in the chat feature and email Gwen Miller after the meeting. Jenn shared that the Lilac Park concerts would be starting on July 8th, with very minimal promotion in order not to attract large crowds. Jenn, Gwen and Hilary all expressed enthusiasm for the live outdoor music concept as particularly fitting for Lenox.
 - c. Cassandra Sohn, Art Walk
 - i. Looking for ways to continue to create public engagement with the visual arts in a safe way. There have been previous Art Walks in Lenox, and those events were very interactive with artist talks, demonstrations, and behind-the-scenes activity. Those may not be possible now, so focus is shifting to safe engagement given the current conditions. One possibility would be involving merchants and galleries in an outdoor or window art presentation with informative panels for viewers to learn more about the artist and their work, guided by a walking tour map, inspired by the recent Story Walk hosted by the Lenox Library. Specifics have not been nailed down and the subcommittee is open to ideas and additional volunteers. Again, email Gwen Miller to express interest in helping. Jenn encouraged the Art Walk to occur in conjunction with activity during the traditional Apple Squeeze time frame, Cassandra indicated that the Art Walk

could be available prior to that date. Jenn encouraged the Art Walk subcommittee to make items available for sale to the public.

d. Marybeth Mitts, Scavenger Hunt

- i. This would be a self-directed and guided activity to help celebrate and promote local history, businesses and spaces, inclusive of over 120 artisans, historic venues, shops, organizations and places of respite within and around the Lenox Cultural District. This could be done electronically, and finished maps presented to the Lenox Chamber in exchange for coupons or gift cards. Alternatively, a paper “passport” could be developed, and a custom rubber stamp used as people visit various sites. Mindy M. shared information about “Click A Clue” app that would allow for touch-free participation. Olga shared that the Historical Commission has a website with historic sites that could be incorporated into the scavenger hunt content.

5. Additional Concepts – examples from other districts around the Commonwealth as well as out of state were shared by Gwen Miller, including:

- a. Plymouth Bay Cultural District’s “Couchella” concert broadcast on local television. Gwen suggested reaching CTSV about broadcasting any performances we organize.
- b. Natick Center Cultural District’s audio tours produced by their local Historical Society, as well as recording contemporary experiences of COVID for archival material.
- c. Cambridge “Starlight Square”, a shared outdoor space for diverse programming and activity, funded through their Business Improvement District (BID). Will also host local farmer’s market.
- d. “Shirley Jackson Day” in Bennington, Vermont, with a celebration of literary legacy in Bennington involving galleries, businesses, and local library.

6. Other Business

Open discussion included thanks to Gwen Miller for compiling the presentation. Cassandra S. raised an additional topic from recent Steering Committee meetings of raising virtual engagement. She suggested that if stakeholders have virtual content such as recordings of performances, virtual tours, artist talks, etc., they should share them with the Cultural District so that we can share the content via our social media accounts. Content should be funneled to Beth Gamble so that she can coordinate posting.

Hilary R. asked attendees who are not part of the Steering Committee what their expectations are in terms of timing for rolling out the programming discussed. Olga W. stated that it is difficult to predict what will be appropriate or comfortable for people at what times, so focusing on virtual programs is the surest bet at this time. Jenn N. agreed that it is a fine line between wanting to bring regional residents to town vs. potentially attracting too large of a crowd. Paul G. suggested that very small events handled with care are possible, and he is working with local health departments to produce these semi-private events. Gwen shared that these low-tech, pop-up experiences are forcing local government to get more creative and nimble.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15pm.