



Lenox Cultural District

Stakeholder Convening - Meeting Notes

Monday, January 25th, 2021, 4pm, via Zoom

Attendees: Laura Brennan, BRPC; Becky Cushing-Gop, Mass Audubon; Sue Elliott, BSO/Tanglewood Learning Institute; Beth Tracy Gamble, LCC; Clarence Fanto, Berkshire Eagle; Colleen Henry, American Arts Marketing; Amy Lafave, Lenox Library; Deirdre McKenna, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Gwen Miller, Town of Lenox; Marybeth Mitts, Lenox Select Board; Eileen Mahoney, Trinity Church; Kristen Moriarty, Shakespeare & Co.; Jenn Nacht, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Natalie Neubert, Berkshire Music School; Larry Oberwager, Tanglewood Business Partners; Hilary Field Respass, BUTI; Cassandra Sohn, Sohn Fine Art; Lynda Strauch, Wit Gallery; Karen S., Ventfort Hall;

The meeting was called to order by Gwen Miller at 4:02pm. She asked for a round of introductions.

A PowerPoint presentation guided a discussion of the Cultural District's work in 2020 and goals for the coming year.

1. **Overview of Agenda** – Gwen M. provided an overview of the expectations for the meeting, touching on each item on the agenda. The last stakeholders meeting was held in June of 2020 and a lot has occurred in terms of District programming since then.
2. **Lenox Master Plan** – Gwen M. also provided a brief update regarding the ongoing work on the Town's Master Plan. She shared a calendar of upcoming public meetings regarding plan content.
3. **Our Cultural District Goals** – Gwen M. gave a brief overview of the District goals 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 2020 Activities** – Gwen listed four major activity areas from 2020, and invited members of the Steering Committee to give more detailed updates on past programming:
 - a. **Natalie Neubert, Lenox Loves Music series**
 - i. Natalie described the program to the group, which was to present live music safely downtown, keeping things lively and festive and contribute to the atmosphere for restaurants offering outdoor dining. The Lenox Dining Terrace with about 40 seats at small tables was the setting for this program. Music included classical, folk rock, klezmer, etc. These performances were offered on Sunday afternoons for six weeks. In 2021, there will be performances offered in both shoulder seasons, and we anticipate 12-14 performances between the two segments. This program has an open submission policy for local musicians and was a good opportunity for out-of-work musicians to receive a stipend and gain exposure to local audiences. There is a pending application for funding support for this program from the Lenox Cultural Council.

- b. Jenn Nacht, **Art Walk**
 - i. The Chamber was not able to offer Apple Squeeze in 2020 because it would have drawn too large a crowd. Instead, Jenn worked with American Craftsman Gallery/American Arts Marketing to offer an Art Walk in late September. Artists were selected by invitation only, and 38 were featured in seven separate “villages” throughout the downtown to keep attendees disbursed. Jenn estimated 1500 visitors over the two days of the event. An information table at the entrance to each village provided information about the artists, and helped to ensure safety and offer PPE if needed. Weather was great for this event, and feedback has been very positive. Promotion included a billboard, postcards and posters, lawn signs, and plentiful digital marketing. There are plans for Art Walks in both June and September of 2021.

- c. Deirdre McKenna, **Winterland Tree Walk**
 - i. Tree Walk was a new component of Winterland in 2020, pairing up artists with local businesses willing to sponsor a tree by funding the decorations. Trees were made available at no charge, and 30 trees were placed at lampposts throughout the downtown. A hunt for pickle ornaments helped to engage families and children. The Chamber and Cultural Districts will continue to partner on this aspect of Winterland in 2021, and the goal is to increase to 50 trees.

- d. Beth Tracy Gamble, **Communications**
 - i. The Steering committee spent time during the early portion of the pandemic organizing the ways we wanted to communicate with stakeholders throughout the District. A subcommittee for communications formed, including Beth G. and Deirdre M. Ongoing connections with Mass Cultural Council have helped us to compare notes with other Districts, and receive and share information about available grants for arts and creative economy organizations. Beth has been maintaining an extensive list of stores, restaurants and venues with their hours of operation and any special information to include in each monthly e-newsletter. The District operates both Facebook and Instagram accounts, and Instagram has been particularly active.

5. Upcoming District Activity

- a. Marybeth Mitts, **Scavenger Hunts**
 - i. The Scavenger Hunts did not get off the ground in fall of 2020 as planned, but we are working toward launching in spring or summer of 2021. Marybeth M. is looking into a specific smartphone app that could help us to deliver a wide range of themed scavenger hunts to our audiences. Some possible themes include Lenox cottages, trailheads and outdoor recreation sites, haunted sites/spooky stories, literary figures from Lenox’s past, etc.

- b. Laura Brennan, **Lamppost Banners**

- i. Laura B. shared preliminary plans for a placemaking effort, designing and installing banners on lampposts throughout the District footprint. These banners would feature cultural themes and venues, and we anticipate installing two dozen banners as a start. This project would reinforce the District as a destination, but would also feature partners from surrounding neighborhoods, to raise awareness of all that Lenox has to offer.
 - c. Laura Brennan, **Countywide Collaboration**
 - i. One of our goals is to work with fellow Districts in Berkshire County. Leadership from the Districts has been meeting periodically to compare notes and consider ways to work together. Although the statewide ArtWeek program has ceased to operate, we are considering doing something similar as ArtWeek Berkshires. Tentative dates for 2021 are September 18th through the 26th. Cassandra S. added that we will need to determine what types of ArtWeek events are viable depending on what public health restrictions are in place at the time. One thing we will consider is Open Studio Tours, some of which may need to be virtual. Another possibility is a joint social media campaign to cross market and demonstrate a unified team of Districts throughout the region.
 - d. Jenn Nacht, **Chamber Updates**
 - i. Jenn N. proved an overview of upcoming activities. Many of these are partnerships with the Cultural District and the Town. The viability of offering other programs such as Apple Squeeze will be determined at a later date. A possible expansion of Winterland includes the possibility of a downtown lighting installation. Marybeth M. thanked and congratulated both Jenn N. and Deirdre M. for their efforts over the past year. Rooms and Meals taxes were above what the Town budgeted in the early part of FY21, and their careful and thoughtful work in establishing and promoting these programs are much appreciated.

6. Open Discussion

Laura B. invited attendees to share any reactions or suggestions to build upon the programming ideas that were discussed during the presentation. Natalie N. requested that slides be made available, and they will be posted on the landing page hosted by the Chamber of Commerce.

Marybeth added comments of recognition and thanks to staff of the DPW who helped with so much of the logistics and setup for events that occurred in Lenox over the past year. Jenn reinforced how much everything was a team effort, including individual businesses stepping up to get involved. Becky G. commented that she sees many ways that Pleasant Valley can get support District programming. She asked for more information about next steps and ways to stay informed. Laura B. shared a slide with contact information and links for our various social media accounts. Those interested in serving on the Steering Committee or a subcommittee should email our Gmail address to connect with Beth G. The group is specifically hoping to hear from some volunteers interested in helping with District communications efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 4:57pm.