



Lenox Cultural District

Steering Committee Minutes

Thursday, January 14, 2021, 9:30am, via Zoom

Attendees: Beth Tracy Gamble, Amy Lafave, Lenox Library; LCC; Eileen Mahoney, Trinity Lenox; Gwen Miller, Town of Lenox; Marybeth Mitts, Lenox Select Board; Kristen Moriarty, Shakespeare & Company; Deirdre McKenna, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Jenn Nacht, Lenox Chamber of Commerce; Natalie Neubert, Berkshire Music School; Cassandra Sohn, Sohn Fine Art; Laura Brennan, BRPC

Absent: Derrick Holt, Color of the Berkshires; Rebecka McDougall, The Mount; Hilary Field Respass, BUTI

The meeting was called to order at 9:34am

Gwen indicated that she would like the Cultural District Steering Committee's permission to provide a letter of support for the Lenox Library, which is applying to MCC's Cultural Facilities Fund. The group was in support of this, and Jenn will also sign a letter on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce. The dome ceiling is showing cracks and problems are getting worse. The grant deadline is January 15th.

MCC updates – Cultural District signs have been installed. Gwen shared that the signs were installed on the 13th. Beth asked for pictures to be taken so that we can share on social media and in the e-newsletter.

Approval of December 10th meeting minutes: Beth G. provided a correction to a typo in page 2, (roles rather than rolls in Misc. paragraph). Gwen M. moved to approve as amended, seconded by Beth. No discussion. Approved by roll call vote, Kristen, Amy, and Jennifer abstained.

MCC updates continued – budget has been approved and Cultural District grant applications are now open. The maximum award for FY21 has grown from \$5,000 to \$7,500. Grant guidelines indicate that funds are for recovery and relief efforts. Laura B. will be participating in a webinar to clarify any questions. The list of sample costs includes marketing and promotion, artist and vendor fees, etc., which does not differ from previous guidelines. Applications are due by February 19th but earlier submissions are encouraged. MCC has indicated that funds should be expended by June 30th. Cassandra asked about programs that may start before June 30th but are not complete by that date, and whether encumbering funds for activity after the end of the fiscal year would be permissible. Laura will confirm during the webinar.

The group began brainstorming ideas for projects for the coming year, both FY21 and FY22 budget years, and the following were mentioned: Art Walks in June and September, memberships in Lenox Chamber and 1Berkshire, Lenox Loves Music series in shoulder seasons including increased musician stipends, other paid advertising opportunities beyond the regional Guidebook published by 1Berkshire, outdoor sculpture program, Lenox Winterland Tree Walk, collaborations with fellow Cultural Districts in Berkshire County, lamppost banners, an MCLA intern to work on communications, and hiring a grant researcher/writer.

Laura B. asked the group to fit in an extra meeting to fine tune the budget for the MCC application. The meeting on January 25th with stakeholders will also inform these decisions. The group identified Thursday, February 4th at 9:30am for this discussion. Cassandra S. will not be able to attend but will provide input to Jenn N. ahead of time. Beth G. and Laura B. will also convene in advance in order to tie proposed budget items to the communications plan. Gwen M. will provide information about what we currently have in our accounts after expenditures in late 2020. Marybeth will be advocating for the Town to match at the \$7,500 level in the coming budget year.

The group had further discussions of potential costs related to the lamppost banners, including graphic design, digitization, hardware and installations. Cassandra suggested considering asking featured institutions to support the project by paying for their particular banner. A template could be developed and a single image would be featured on each banner. Jenn N. will speak to Bill Gop at DPW regarding hardware and installation.

Stakeholder Meeting – Laura B. included proposed agenda and corresponding PowerPoint slides in the agenda for today’s meeting. These include overviews of recent programming, as well as summaries of proposed future programming. The group agreed to include the lamppost banners in the list of future projects. Each person responsible for a slide was asked to email Laura B. all content for those slides by Tuesday, January 19th. The draft presentation also includes placeholder slides for open discussion and a call to those who are interested in serving on the Steering Committee to reach out to Beth G. Prior to the meeting Laura B. will review current membership to see what gaps might need to be filled within Steering Committee membership. The ask will be for an expression of interest, which will then be considered by the existing committee members before final determinations are made. Cassandra also pointed out that volunteers are also needed to support various subcommittees, which does not require full membership in the Steering Committee.

Regional Report: The plan to convene with other Berkshire County Cultural Districts on January 12th did not occur, but has been rescheduled for the 21st. Cassandra S. and Laura B. will plan to update stakeholders with any information from that meeting on the 25th.

Governance Structure – At a previous meeting, the group agreed to schedule ongoing discussion of the potential to evolve our governance structure. Currently, we have two co-chairs, and the expectation of subcommittees focused on general topics such as Marketing & Communications and Special Events & Festivals. In practice, subcommittee activity has been focused on specific tasks or projects, which seems to have worked well. Laura B. did request that Luis Cotto at MCC help facilitate discussion with fellow Cultural Districts during regular check-ins so that we could learn what others are doing. This began at the most recent check-in ran by Luis C. and will continue at the next one. We will be able to look at Luis’s notes to help inform our own internal discussion. Cassandra S. indicated that when we participated in a statewide convening we witnessed a very wide range of potential structures. Beth G. raised the concern that she will have to go off the Lenox Cultural Council in June of 2021, so someone else from the LCC will be appointed as the representative to the Cultural District. She is concerned about continuation of the newsletter. We have a high open rate and also a strong following on Instagram. The communications role will be discussed at the Stakeholder meeting in order to try to recruit someone to continue the work that Beth has begun. Jenn N. raised the possibility of enlisting an intern to specifically assist with communications. Natalie N. suggested looking at the Arts Administration program at MCLA run by Lisa Donovan for possible interns. She will reach out to see if someone is available soon in order to be trained before Beth has to step down. Overall governance discussion will continue and will be included on the agenda for at least two more meetings.

1Berkshire Report: Gwen asked if any images have been identified for use in the Guidebook ad. During the previous discussion the group agreed that it would be ideal to find a more populated image than what we initially submitted. Deirdre will review some newer photos to see what might work in the small space we have. Jenn N. suggested utilizing multiple images.

Next Regular Meeting Date: In addition to the budget discussion on February 4th, a regular meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 11th at 9:30am.

The meeting adjourned at 10:37am.