

**Franklin Cultural District Committee
Minutes of Meeting
November 21, 2019
Meeting held at Franklin Senior Center
10 Daniel McCahill Street, Franklin, MA**

TOWN OF FRANKLIN
TOWN CLERK

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RECEIVED

Culture District Committee Members: Nancy Schoen, John LoPresti, Pandora Carlucci, Roberta Trahan, Jamie Barrett, Evan Chelman

Presenters: Luis Edgardo Cotto, Cultural Districts Program Manager for Mass Cultural Council; Annis Whitlow Sengupta, PhD, Assistant Director of Arts & Culture, Metropolitan Area Planning Council

Town of Franklin Staff: Bryan Taberner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Anne Marie Tracey, Marketing and Communication Specialist; Judith Lizardi, Recording Secretary

Business and Other Attendees: Peter Rochat, Pete's Nerd Emporium; Rob Marcalow, Kuth Ranieri Architects; Melanie Hamblen, Franklin Agway and Town Council member; Steve Sherlock, Franklin Matters; Alan Mercer, Franklin Performing Arts Company; Raye Lynn Mercer, Franklin Performing Arts Company; Ginelle Lang, Franklin Resident; Chris Nayler, Lifelong Learning Institute, FPS; Sarah Cronin, Franklin Cultural Council; Lillian Gould, Franklin Cultural Council; Kaye Kelly, Franklin Cultural Council; Margaret Munson, Franklin Art Association; Sue Sheridan, Franklin Art Association; Mary Olsson, Franklin Historical Museum; Lisa Piana, Downtown Partnership; Jane Curran, Downtown Partnership; Marc Arentsen, Joan Phelps Palladino School of Dance and School of the Arts at Dean College; Deborah Pellegrini, Town Council member

Welcome: Chair Nancy Schoen opened the meeting at 7:02 PM and welcomed everyone.

Introduction of New Cultural District Committee Member Evan Chelman: Chair Schoen introduced Evan Chelman and stated he is the newest Cultural District Committee member; she noted he grew up in Franklin. Mr. Chelman reviewed his background and experience; he is currently an assistant principal at Hill-Roberts Elementary School in Attleboro. He stated he is very happy to be a committee member.

Franklin Arts & Culture Roundtable

Chair Schoen stated tonight's presentations will focus on the mission of Franklin's Cultural District. The presenters will provide information regarding culture, arts, and the humanities and supporting economic development in Franklin. She introduced Luis Edgardo Cotto, Cultural Districts Program Manager for Mass Cultural Council. She reviewed his background and experience. She noted he arrived in Franklin this afternoon and has been getting acquainted with the town.

Luis Cotto reviewed the Franklin Market Analysis Study. He discussed the process and requirements for becoming a cultural district. He stated there are 329 cultural councils in Massachusetts and noted these groups receive funds. He discussed the funds allocated to the Franklin Cultural Council. He reviewed grants that can be applied for and the importance of applying for available funding. He reviewed the Franklin Cultural District map and the Franklin study areas for the market analysis including the Mixed Business Innovation District, Downtown, and Franklin Crossing. He discussed the navigability of the Cultural District. He thanked everyone for inviting him.

Chair Schoen introduced Annis Whitlow Sengupta, PhD, Assistant Director of Arts & Culture, Metropolitan Area Planning Council. She reviewed her background and experience.

Annis Sengupta discussed that the purpose of the Arts & Culture Roundtable is to understand and prioritize needs of the Franklin Cultural District and its partners within Franklin as part of the Market Analysis Plan. She reviewed the Franklin Cultural District 2020 goals:

1. Develop FCD's long-term marketing plan, including further refinement of the cultural district brand, enhancement of social media resources, and development of wayfinding signage.
2. Continue to strengthen FCD's partnership and increase the number of collaborative projects.
3. Survey FCD partners regarding the impact from collaborative marketing activities, as well as lessons learned and suggestions for the future.
4. Advocate for redevelopment of industrial properties with the Town's new Mixed Business Innovation District, which is the at the southwest corner of FCD.
5. Conduct a substantial economic development research, analysis, and planning project Foundational Market Analysis & Market Position Summary for Franklin Center and Surrounding Neighborhoods.

She stated the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) is the regional planning agency serving people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns of Metropolitan Boston. She stated MAPC's mission is to promote smart growth and regional collaboration. She stated they are working on a market analysis study with Franklin, and she reviewed the three areas of focus. She was brought in to see how arts and culture fit in with the town. She stated the overall goal of the project is to increase the number of businesses in three areas in Franklin: Mixed Business Innovation District, Downtown, and Franklin Crossing. She reviewed a slideshow presentation addressing Franklin's demographics, employment overview, average employment including largest to smallest employers, average number of firms and wages, housing costs, transportation, and commuter destinations. She noted Franklin's 2018 population of 33,743 and the expected population growth to 35,342 by 2023. She discussed the creative economy according to NEFA and noted that only 26 percent of Cultural District partners are represented in the creative economy data as the data is from 2016.

Steve Sherlock asked that since some of the data is missing, is part of the study to get the missing data and update the information.

Annis Sengupta said that is something that should be done but has not been started. She stated she did the creative economy on her own; she could share the data she has and others could add to it. She began the discussion portion of the presentation.

Key Questions for Discussion

1. What do you like about Franklin's downtown? How does the downtown positively affect the Franklin Cultural District and arts and culture in the town?

Luis Cotto stated the streetscape, infrastructure, new trees, and lights downtown are nice.

Melanie Hamblen agreed the lights are nice.

Mary Olsson stated she likes all the changes that have happened from what the Downtown Partnership has done. It used to be just a street; the Downtown Partnership brought in all the beautification and the growth including a theater and a number of restaurants. She lives within walking distance to the downtown area; there has been a lot of positive change.

Lisa Piana stated she has been working on this project for 16 years; it was a different downtown 15 years ago. There are so many things that are great besides the trees, landscape, and walkability such as the restaurants and the museum. It is great to be able to walk to the downtown, the post office, and the library. She stated more has been added in the last three years including The Black Box, Pete's

Nerd Emporium, The Little Shop of Olive Oils, and The Cake Bar. She stated having the train is great. As well, having a college helps the downtown.

Raye Lynn Mercer discussed the traffic pattern. She is thankful the downtown is now a two-way street as the two-way traffic positively impacts the Cultural District's success and slows down the traffic.

Nancy Schoen stated she loves the varied programming and events in the Cultural District including those at The Black Box and Dean College. Parking is generally easy and the town is lucky to have so many choices.

Pandora Carlucci stated she likes the opportunity for education that supports arts and culture. There are a variety of places to learn including Dean College, Franklin School of Performing Arts, Encore, Lifelong Learning Institute, The Drummers' Studio, and more. There is a wealth of education available. Even the Agway store has had classes such as how to make pickles. There is great education available in fine arts and visual arts; this is a great strength for the Cultural District.

Sarah Cronin stated that she grew up in Norfolk and now lives in Franklin. She stated that she is appreciative as a young parent that she can bring her daughter to free things happening downtown including the Harvest Festival and Strawberry Festival. The downtown is so vibrant that people want to have these free events.

Mary Olsson stated she is happy Horace Mann statue is downtown.

Lisa Piana stated there are three bronze sculptures in downtown as well as the Sculpture Park.

Roberta Trahan said that once they began the process of becoming a Cultural District, it opened everyone's eyes to what the District really is. It got the Committee thinking in ways they were not thinking before about what is in the District.

Ginelle Lang stated she enjoys that downtown is walkable from some residential areas.

Luis Cotto said the ladybugs around town are very intriguing.

Jamie Barrett said he came to Franklin 21 years ago for an interview. He described the good feeling he had when first driving into town, and he still lives here 21 years later.

Alan Mercer stated none of the area towns around Franklin have what Franklin has; they have no streetscape, no cultural assets in a condensed area, and no walkability. What we need to do is talk about the navigability. We really need to figure out how to get more people walking in the downtown. It is a great space, but not enough people are walking it.

2. How could the Town improve its services/processes? Are there opportunities for the Town to change certain processes or regulations to attract desired arts and cultural development?

Jamie Barrett stated the Intermission Café and The Cake Bar are great places which he loves. However, since Mel Diva Coffee House left, he misses the coffee hang out as it was a great meeting spot.

Steve Sherlock stated Mel Diva Coffee House was bigger, but The Cake Bar is very nice. It would be nice to have more such places. He noted there are some people walking but there needs to be more people walking in downtown.

Raye Lynn Mercer said that in order for the town to be able to support another coffee shop, there would need to be more people walking.

Roberta Trahan said she loves the signage in town as it is uniform and looks nice. However, she noted the Intermission Café is not known because there is no signage. This is a situation where signage could be done better.

Nancy Schoen agreed that signage for businesses is important.

Melanie Hamblen said the Town Council is going to meet on January 8, 2020 to review the goals of the Town Council. She noted that would be a good item to discuss. She said the Town's signage requirements are good, but there should be some loosening of regulations in this case so that signs can be installed to let people know where the businesses are.

Peter Roachat said the Town's sign bylaws are brutal and are designed in a bad way; the laws are archaic. There needs to be signage to show what businesses are in the back area in downtown such as the Intermission Café.

Raye Lynn Mercer said the Downtown Partnership is trying to work on beautifying the area. She is thankful and happy she was able to work with the Town in a positive way to be able to paint The Black Box building black and have a marquee. She said the regular sign process is difficult.

Evan Chelman discussed teaching third and second grades for 13 years. He stated Franklin Public Schools find it important to bring other cultures into the classroom so students know there is life outside of Franklin and what that life looks like. He would love for the Cultural District to be a multicultural district. He would like to see great Japanese and Mexican restaurants; he would love to see a voice so we can be more representative of the planet. He thinks how we decide to reach out is a concern. Tonight is a perfect venue but how we reach out to others is important.

3. How can economic development investments best support the goals of the Franklin Cultural District?

Steve Sherlock discussed that there are some grant capabilities. In terms of investment, there are some natural partnerships available within the organizations. There have been concepts of dinner and a show. It is important to get over the hurdle and bring two partners together. There are people around the table, but each business thinks what is in it for me. If there were some joint pool money, or seed money for collaborate projects, that would help such events.

Lisa Piana said she likes Mr. Sherlock's ideas. She stated the Downtown Partnership always has ideas about partnering people, but it comes down to time and money. The businesses are always so busy. If there was some sort of investment or seed money, it would be helpful.

Margaret Munson discussed having places in town where people could be working together to create art and projects, to do things on paper and canvas, and to work with the Art Association.

Marc Arentsen said a lot of people are working out of their kitchens and bedrooms. Space is expensive. There should be a way for an organization to subsidize space, especially when the space is vacant. Maybe taxes could be lowered for people to use those spaces; the spaces could be revitalized and people would have opportunities to use space.

Ginelle Lang discussed maker spaces or test kitchens. Does Franklin want to wait for someone to open such a maker space or could someone in the town make this kind of space available which could spur the Cultural District.

Rob Marcalow said there are a lot of different ways to incentivize arts including using legislation to promote arts. There might be opportunities through incentives or legislation and assistance with planning within the Cultural District.

Margaret Munson said it would be nice to have places in town where the Art Association could display art. They may be able to continue to use their current space; however, if they could display art in Town Hall or other places in town, there would be artists interested.

Discussion continued that the Art Association has always had difficulty finding space in town. The Art Association is a strong supporter of keeping visual arts in Franklin. There is a lot of support in town for music and theater; however, visual arts are lagging behind. The artists are out there, but where can they show their work? Is there any empty space? The Foxboro Art Association uses space at Patriot Place; Robert Kraft is very generous. Space is always an issue for Franklin's Art Association. Is there any collaborative workspace in the new Mixed Business Innovation District or somewhere else in town to bring artists in? It comes down to money. Who is going to rent the space, and who is going to support it?

Alan Mercer asked if the Mass Cultural Council provides funding for improving or creating art spaces. Maybe the Franklin Cultural District should look at these vehicles for providing grants and low interest loans. To look at the town as a whole and how the town can benefit could be a goal for the Cultural District.

Lisa Piana said she thinks it is important to find a home for the Art Association; it would make a huge difference and bring people downtown.

4. Can and should the Town do more targeted marketing to specific businesses or developers?

Mary Olsson discussed the Clark Cutler office building for a possible space for the Art Association. She does not know how to raise money for something like this, but it is within walking distance. The building itself is a perfect location.

Alan Mercer stated the person who bought the Clark Cutler building discussed that he would listen to proposals as he does not have plans for that building at this time.

Bryan Taberner said that as far as that specific building, it is a blank slate for the developer. The developer does want everyone's input; however, the developer does need to generate revenue. He noted the Art Association could end up with a home there. However, the Art Association would have to come up with some money to help make this happen. He noted the Food Pantry is also looking for a space.

Annis Sengupta asked the audience to think about the eco system and where there are things that you need but cannot get.

Lisa Piana said they have been working on this for a while. She stated that people want to come to downtown and physically buy things like gifts. That would help the walkability of people coming to the downtown area. For instance, after people go to the post office there are great services and businesses, but people want to be able to buy a gift in Franklin. They would like a card store, a bookshop, or a place to hang out. Audience members discussed the bookstore that was once located in the downtown area.

5. What is your vision for Franklin's downtown, The Crossing area, and the Mixed Business Innovation District? How could they be improved?

Melanie Hamble stated she would like to improve the walkability. She said Agway, the business she owns, is in Franklin Crossing. She suggested a public art walk and a green space to get people to walk around and find the art. Right now, there is a mural on the soil yard at her business which was painted during ArtWeek. Agway is not really far away, but how can we get people to walk there and go down to Union Street. There would have to be a reason for people to want to go there such as an art path.

John LoPresti suggested having something like the Boston Freedom Trail with markers and signage to guide people.

Alan Mercer suggested green spaces and noted that walkability is very important.

Mary Olsson stated that what should be seriously considered is providing something for the Dean College students to do. They do not have a place to go and dance or listen to music. The hope is that in the Clark Culter plans something will be developed for the students. She noted the movie theater and bowling alley used to be available in town, but they have since left.

Annis Sengupta summarized that entertainment destinations and gathering spaces for Dean College students are being suggested.

Mary Olsson suggested that if Dean College students have a good memory of their time in Franklin, they may come back to Franklin in their futures.

Mark Arentsen said Dean College tries to provide programs for the students because they cannot go anywhere else; the options are either out of the students' price range or the businesses are closed. It would be nice to have late dining or a coffee shop staying open past 8 PM. He stated he thinks there is opportunity for that in the downtown.

Luis Cotto discussed coffee shops and questioned if there are places with open mic and live music.

Mary Olsson said the former Mel Diva Coffee House had open mic and live music.

Lisa Piana noted two projects being worked on by the Downtown Partnership. The mural project involves people working on murals in the downtown area. This will bring more people to downtown and will also bring people from other towns to Franklin's downtown. The second project is putting historical photos put on the electrical boxes in downtown.

Annis Sengupta asked if there is a vision for the Mixed Business Innovation District.

Melanie Hamblen said she would like maker spaces, artist spaces, an outdoor pavilion, and a common commercial kitchen.

Annis Sengupta requested the attendees complete the Economic Development Survey and the Housing Survey. She stated that housing is not a focus of this study, but it is important and they want to understand what people want. She thanked everyone for participating in the discussion session. She reviewed the next steps:

1. Compiling open house, business roundtable, and arts and culture roundtable responses.
2. Hold the Dean College Roundtable on December 5, 2019; this is by invitation only.
3. Completion of the Town Economic Development Survey.

4. Creation of a Market Analysis and Market Position Summary with specific recommendations for growth in the three key commercial districts, and an outline of a business recruitment strategy.
5. Presentations of findings, community feedback, and recommendations to the Town Council.

She discussed that Beverly, MA, is a good example of a location that has gift shops and more in their downtown.

Luis Cotto discussed some of the available grants. He said MCC is on the cusp of designating Framingham as a Cultural District; that would be three Cultural Districts in MetroWest. He said he would like to return to Franklin to help. He would like to work together as a region.

Annis Sengupta summarized the discussion about what Dean College students are looking for and what they would respond to within the District. She encouraged everyone to keep talking.

Marc Arentsen said there is more data available that Dean College can share with the group.

Steve Sherlock said he is integrating into cable radio and TV. He stated he is updating and consolidating the list of non-profits in the community. He stated the entire community has a lot going on.

Chair Schoen thanked everyone for attending the roundtable and providing their feedback.

Next Meetings

2020 Cultural District Partners Meeting Dates: Tuesday, February 11th and Monday, May 11th.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary