

**Franklin Cultural District Committee  
Partners Meeting  
Minutes of Meeting  
May 12, 2020  
Held as a Virtual Meeting  
via Remote Access Zoom Platform**

***As stated on the agenda, due to the growing concerns regarding the COVID-19 virus, this meeting will be conducted as a Remote/Virtual Cultural District Committee Partners meeting. In an effort to ensure citizen engagement and comply with open meeting law regulations, citizens will be able to dial into the meeting using the provided phone number, or citizens can participate by using the Zoom link provided on the agenda.***

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

**Town of Franklin Staff:** Bryan Taberner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Maxine Kinhart; Judith Lizardi, Recording Secretary.

**Business and Other Attendees:** Jeffrey Roy, State Representative; Erin Lynch, Executive Director of the MetroWest Visitors' Bureau; Peter Rochat, Pete's Nerd Emporium; Chris Nayler, Lifelong Learning Institute; Lisa Piana, Downtown Partnership; Caleigh Keating, Franklin Public Library; Mark Plukas, Circle of Friends Coffeehouse; Melanie Hamblen, Town Council Member.

**Welcome:** Chair Nancy Schoen opened the meeting at 7:00 PM and welcomed everyone. She noted that despite these challenging times, it is amazing how creative organizations have been to provide online initiatives for people to enjoy. She highlighted some of the online events that are occurring such as live performances from people's homes, FSPA, schools, and studios, and noted some artists are offering online instruction, as well. She stated that the Franklin Public Library is providing story hour as well as two-minute book talks online. Mr. Mark Plukas shared that in his studio he has been editing two to three choral songs each week for Sunday church services. Chair Schoen said that arts can bring comfort during these challenging times, and they are an important part of culture.

**Massachusetts Cultural Council Grant Update:** Chair Schoen stated funds were awarded to seven events. Three of the events happened; four events did not happen due to the pandemic. She stated that they have encumbered the grant money and it can be used for future events. She said that the Mini Franklin event could possibly take place in the fall or next spring. She stated that the MCC conducted a survey to understand the economic impact on the arts in Massachusetts.

**FCD Photography Scavenger Hunt:** Chair Schoen reviewed the Photography Scavenger Hunt. Information has been posted on social media and the Cultural District website. The deadline is May 31, 2020. Winning photographs will be announced June 1, 2020; winners will receive a \$25.00 gift card to a Franklin Cultural District restaurant or business of their choice.

**Massachusetts Cultural Council Webinars:** Chair Schoen noted that the MCC has very good webinars; it is interesting to hear what other people and districts are doing and the challenges they are facing. Ms. Carlucci reviewed that she, Chair Schoen, and Ms. Trahan have attended some of the MCC Zoom facilitated gatherings. There is a wealth of information available and the

webinars provide information about other districts and what they have been doing. It is similar to a roundtable and people share their best practices. She stated that the Committee is working on an online newsletter. She reviewed the porch festival initiative where the audience travels from porch to porch for entertainment. Although currently that cannot be physically done due to social distancing requirements, it can be done in a virtual platform. She noted some artists in Franklin seem to be doing this in an informal way with online performances. The Committee is looking at a collaborative initiative to hold a virtual event in two nights or a Saturday through Facebook Live. She explained that Somerville held their CouchFest aka PorchFest on May 9, 2020 from 12-6 PM via Facebook Live. She stated that cultural districts learn from one another. She asked that if anyone has ideas, please let the Committee know. She encouraged everyone to go to the MCC site and noted that three people from Franklin received individual awards of \$1,000 grants: a photographer, drum instructor, and a dance instructor.

**Cultural District Data Collection – 2020 Annual Report & Data Requirements:** Ms. Trahan discussed that she and Mr. Taberner have been creating four different forms for data collection; they are almost ready. It may be difficult to collect data from businesses that are not even open at this time, but they are going to do the best that they can as they have to quantify what has occurred this year. Currently, there are no deadlines as to when the State requires the data.

**Newsletter:** Ms. Carlucci and Chair Schoen stated the online newsletter will focus on the cultural district and the arts/artists; they will look at the cultural aspect of the businesses. Constant Contact, an email marketing software, will be used. They hope to have the first online newsletter available in June. If anyone has any ideas, please let the Committee know.

**Economic Development & Cutler Plant PPE Update:** Mr. Taberner discussed the new development at the Clark, Cutler, McDermott plant. In general, the buildings need to be rehabbed and reworked; the new owners are working hard. They are trying to get some of the facility utilized. Whether this new PPE initiative is going to be temporary or permanent is not known. Representative Jeffrey Roy said he was at the facility, and they are getting ready to start production. He will be there tomorrow as well when the first garments come off the cutter. He said it is a remarkable story for Franklin and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. He reviewed how the production initiative began. He said the State set up an emergency response team to find out what manufactures were out there and who was prepared to start. Of the 348 companies interviewed, 11 were given the green light to get started. With a lot of involvement by Franklin Town officials and others at the local and State level, this was put together. This will be the first company in the Commonwealth making reusable Level 3 gowns for surgical use. It is a long-term idea. They want to get into making masks, also. This was a great effort and a great boost to a factory shut down in 2016; it is now coming back to life. Rep. Roy said the facility will employ 15 people. If that business can grow, they can build from there. He noted that it would be good to include a manufacturing component in the Clark, Cutler, McDermott location as it becomes revitalized. He said it would be great to get cultural businesses in that location to fill up the space. Mr. Taberner stated the facility is over 200,000 sq. ft. The older building would be great for multi-use such as for arts, cafés, and crafters. The large building in the center will be for the manufacturing of the gowns. He stated there was a lot of work to do; the investment is long-term. He noted it is located within the cultural district. He also discussed that there are a few things being worked on in the Planning Department. The economic development study is almost done; the final copy will be ready at the end of the week. They are doing some zoning bylaw amendments including inclusionary zoning. He stated that he has been asked to look at the Nu-Style property and some adjacent areas for redevelopment.

Chair Schoen introduced guest speaker Erin Lynch. She stated Ms. Lynch is a Franklin native, and she reviewed Ms. Lynch's background. She noted that prior to Ms. Lynch's current position, she was the executive director of the Franklin Food Pantry.

**Guest Speaker Erin Lynch, Executive Director of the MetroWest Visitors' Bureau:** Ms. Lynch congratulated Chair Schoen and Ms. Trahan as new board members of the Franklin Food Pantry. She narrated a PowerPoint presentation. She stated she started her job at the MetroWest Visitors' Bureau at the end of January just prior to the onset of the pandemic. Their non-profit mission is to stimulate the MetroWest economy by marketing the region's assets to visitors and residents. They receive their funding from the State of Massachusetts. She reviewed the economic impact of the coronavirus on the travel and tourism industry. From last year to this year the travel industry was down 93 percent which is \$4.53 million. She explained that the travel industry impacts all other businesses. She discussed that 70 percent of Americans are already planning new, though modified, travel. She said that there will likely be less business travel and more travel to see family and friends through close/short drives. She reviewed the information consumers want to hear to feel more comfortable when travelling. They want to know how businesses are safeguarding them against the virus. The businesses will have to look at different types of signage, check in techniques, and disinfecting methods to make people safe. Communication will be very important. Businesses will have to be sensitive to where people are in their psychological readiness to return to travel. She stated it is important to make sure the small businesses are not becoming invisible. Collaboration is going to be very important as businesses look to recover. It will take the whole community to bring travel and tourism back to what it was. She discussed some next steps include MetroFest 2020 transitioning to a virtual event. She is hoping to start a weekly broadcast with an update on virtual events that are happening. She wants to celebrate that things are still happening. They will target local and day trip travelers and work with other regional tourism councils. She asked people to contact her with their interest as she would like to create a team of ambassadors.

#### **Questions/Discussion:**

Mr. Plukas said it was interesting to learn that people are going to travel locally; therefore, they will be looking for ways to participate locally. People may be nervous with concerns about social distancing; it may help to attract people if venues can move outdoors where people can spread out. He would like to see local entertainment and provide exposure for the smaller artists; he liked the porch idea where people could walk from porch to porch for entertainment. He said Circle of Friends Coffeehouse will support any kind of outdoor activity option. Chair Schoen suggested PorchFest can begin virtually. She welcomes feedback and suggestions people may have to get these ideas off the ground.

Ms. Carlucci suggested the Committee support talents from Franklin and the region by sharing information about what they are doing. Ms. Piana provided an update on the Downtown Partnership. She stated they are willing to get the information out to people and businesses regarding anything the Cultural District is doing; she looks forward to working with the FCD. She stated that the Downtown Partnership has been putting together a recovery plan; they will form a group to determine which ideas they want to move forward with when things start to reopen. She noted the Strawberry Festival was cancelled and they may have to cancel the fall Harvest Festival. She said the Downtown Partnership newsletter is open to non-members as well.

Mr. Peter Roachat stated that he has set up a type of chat room and a gaming platform online. Mr. Chris Nayler said all spring programs had to be cancelled, and they are now determining what they can do for summer; they are waiting for information from the governor on May 18<sup>th</sup>. Ms. Caleigh Keating said the Franklin Library has transitioned back to a limited curbside pickup.

They have been doing a lot virtually as they are not allowed in the building yet. She is trying to get the summer reading program to be totally virtual. As well, all normal story time sessions and performers are going to be virtual. She is finding ways to make it easy for families to get access to all of the library's offerings. Chair Schoen thanked everyone for attending tonight's meeting and sharing their ideas.

**Next Partners Meeting:** The next 2020 Cultural District Partners Meeting is Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup>. Chair Schoen stated that if anyone would like to host a Partners Meeting or present during a meeting, just let the Committee know.

**Adjourn:**

With no further discussion, a motion was made by Chair Schoen to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Ms. Trahan; voted and approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Judith Lizardi  
Recording Secretary