



AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE FOR ARTS  
AND CULTURAL INITIATIVES

# Arts & Culture in Franklin

2023 PUBLIC INPUT & RECOMMENDATIONS

## Overview

In Spring 2023, the Town Council appointed an Ad Hoc Subcommittee for Arts and Cultural Initiatives to conduct three public listening sessions for stakeholders and interested parties. The two-hour sessions were held on March 7th at Dean College, April 28th at the Franklin Public Library, and May 19th at Escape into Fiction. In addition, a public survey was distributed to residents.

This report overviews the findings of the listening sessions and survey, as well as provides tiered recommendations for the Town Administration and Council to consider. The process was conducted in advance of the Master Plan Update, which will expand upon Franklin's arts and cultural visioning.

In the FY24 Budget, the Town Council - informed, in part, by the findings of the Subcommittee - approved the funding of an Arts & Culture Director position. This report is intended to serve as a starting point and guide to the Director's larger strategic planning.

### Ad Hoc Subcommittee for Arts and Cultural Initiatives



Ted Cormier-Leger  
Vice Chair



Cobi Frongillo  
Chair



Melanie Hamblen  
Clerk

# SWOT Analysis

Following an open-ended conversation in the first listening session, the second listening session focused on identifying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) to Franklin's arts and cultural initiatives. The categories were initially populated by Chair Frongillo based on a review of the first session notes. Participants added to each of the categories to produce a robust SWOT analysis.

## Strengths

- Library
- Dean College
- Cultural District
- NHS/ HS Arts Director
- Art gallery
- Supportive businesses (ie. Escape into Fiction, 67 Degrees)
- Downtown Partnership
  - Business impact
- Rec Department
- Media
  - Franklin Matters/Observer
  - Local Town Pages
  - FranklinTV & Radio (PEG funds from cable)
    - Inc. studio
- Historical museum & assets
  - Red Brick School House
- Natural/recreation assets
- Events
  - Franklin Cultural Fest
  - MetroWest Arts Symposium
  - Farmer's Markets
  - Concerts on the common
  - Movies on the common
  - Storybook walks
  - Strawberry Stroll, Harvest Fest
  - ArtWalk
- Programming
- Pride event
- Groups
  - Arts Association
  - FPAC
  - LiveArts
  - Circle of Friends
- Senior Center
- Local artists/ individual creatives
  - Authors
  - Fibers
- Mill store
- Dance academies
- Gazette
- Black Box
- FPAC equity theater
- Halloween contest
- 4th of July (blues fest)
- Culture website, calendar, newsletter
- Public art (placemaking)
  - DPW hydrant painting
  - Utility boxes
  - Sculpture park
  - Ladybugs
  - Murals
- GIS department Storymaps
- FAA Scholarship
- Franklin Arts Academy
- Charles River Community Chorus (half from Franklin)
- Family concert series
- Live music performances/performers
- Town leadership (administration, elected) support and discussions

## Weaknesses

- Space for making
- space for showing
- affordability
- clarity
- volunteer attraction & retention
- money
- vision
- accessibility
  - Can't always participate in events (handicap parking)
  - Escape into Fiction not ADA
- buy-in
- cohesion
- Philanthropy
- Multi-day events
- Overlapping events
- Consistency
- Promotion
- Movies
- Culinary arts
- Connection with (& promotion through) schools
  - i.e. FPAC hosted Foxboro Jazz Ensemble
- Packaging of events
- Focus on moneymaking
- Adult singing groups
- Community chorus, band (regional)
- Elitism of organizations
- Removed community service hours

## Opportunities

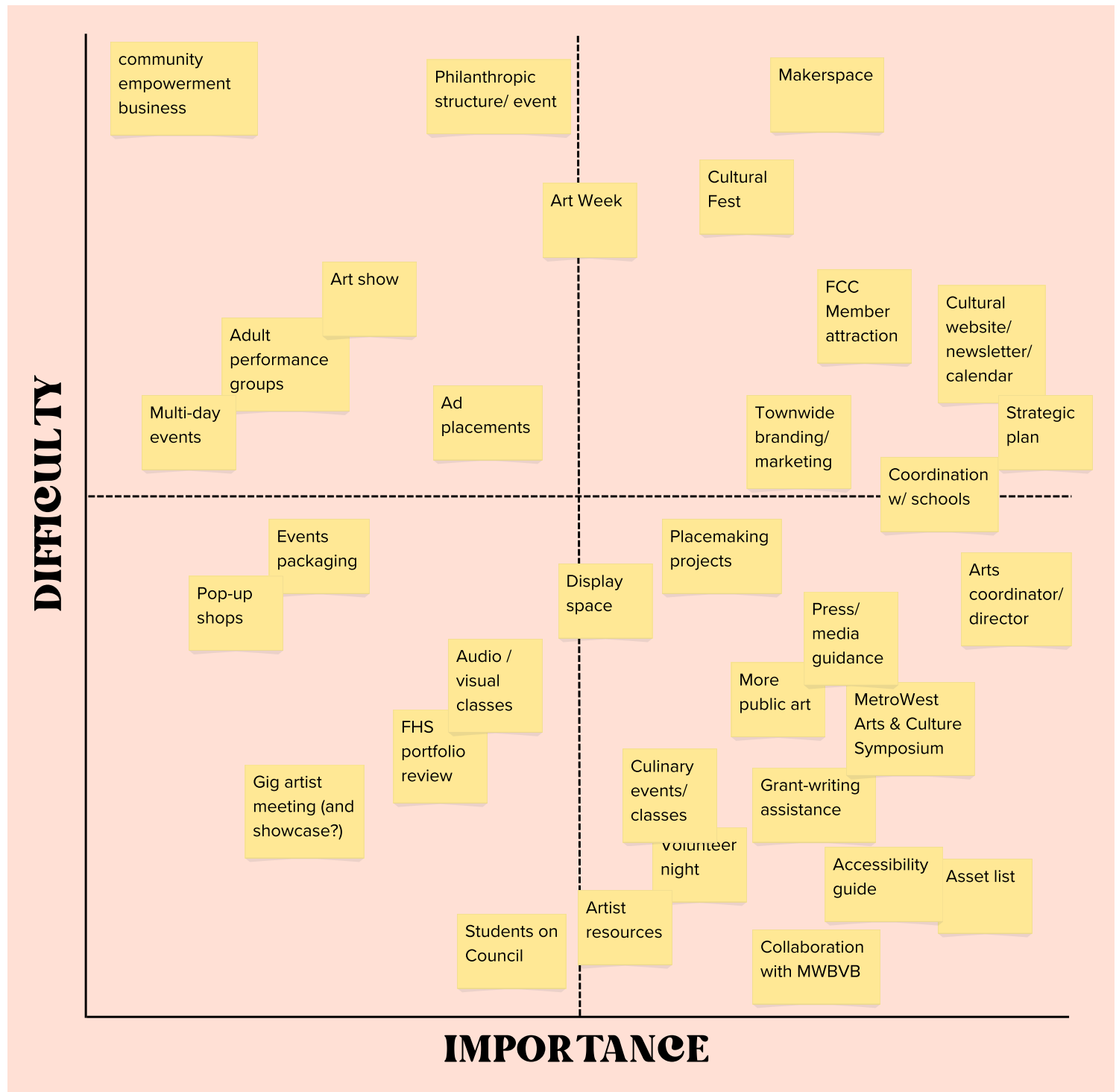
- New Dean leadership
  - Franklin is Dean's campus, Dean is Franklin's college
  - Take fences down
  - Diversity is asset
- Strategic plan
  - Vision people can get behind
  - Defined organizations
  - Defined volunteer expectations
  - Single sources of resources
- Coordinator
  - Sharing resources
  - Helping with turnover
  - Grant writing
  - Volunteer coordination
  - Scheduling
  - Organization
  - Promotion
- Artist resources
- Tap into what towns are already doing
  - Create the vote?
  - Hydrant painting
- Gig artist meeting?
- Student seat on board?
- Amego
- Charter schools
- Branding/marketing
- Space
  - Shared, affordable makerspace
  - Space to show visual, performing arts
  - Bring people to town
  - Courses for community members
  - Franklin Arts Museum (in library?)
  - Schmidt's Barn
  - Red Brick Schoolhouse
  - Davis Thayer
  - Highlighting Black Box as community asset
    - Exhibit space
  - Dean helping with display/maker spaces
  - Municipal building displays
- Community empowerment business
- Pop-up shops
- New and improved metrowest visitor's bureau
- Grants
- Accessibility checklist for event organizers
- Collaboration/empowerment of schools
  - HS graphic designers for local businesses
  - HS community service hours
  - Return community service hours
- Business community
- Indian community
- Franklin Freedom Trail?
- Scouts?
- Franklin TV
- MCC guidance
- Tri-County
- Asset list
  - Arts storymap
- Pantherbook/ school communication systems
- Art school portfolio review days
- First public library (historic libraries)
- Ben Franklin
- Packaging of events
  - Arts show with performances
- ArtWeek

## Threats

- cross-group tension
- lack of funds
  - override
- COVID
- Negativity
- Competing interests
- Limited space/land
- MONEY & DIVISION

# Impact/Difficulty Matrix

In the third session, following a review of and additions to the SWOT analysis, participants were asked to place action items on a chart of estimated impact and difficulty. Impact refers to the relative importance of the initiative on advancing and culture in Franklin, while Difficulty refers to the relative time and resources needed to complete the initiative. The initial action items were provided by Chair Frongillo based on a review of previous discussions; further items were added by session participants.



# Survey Results

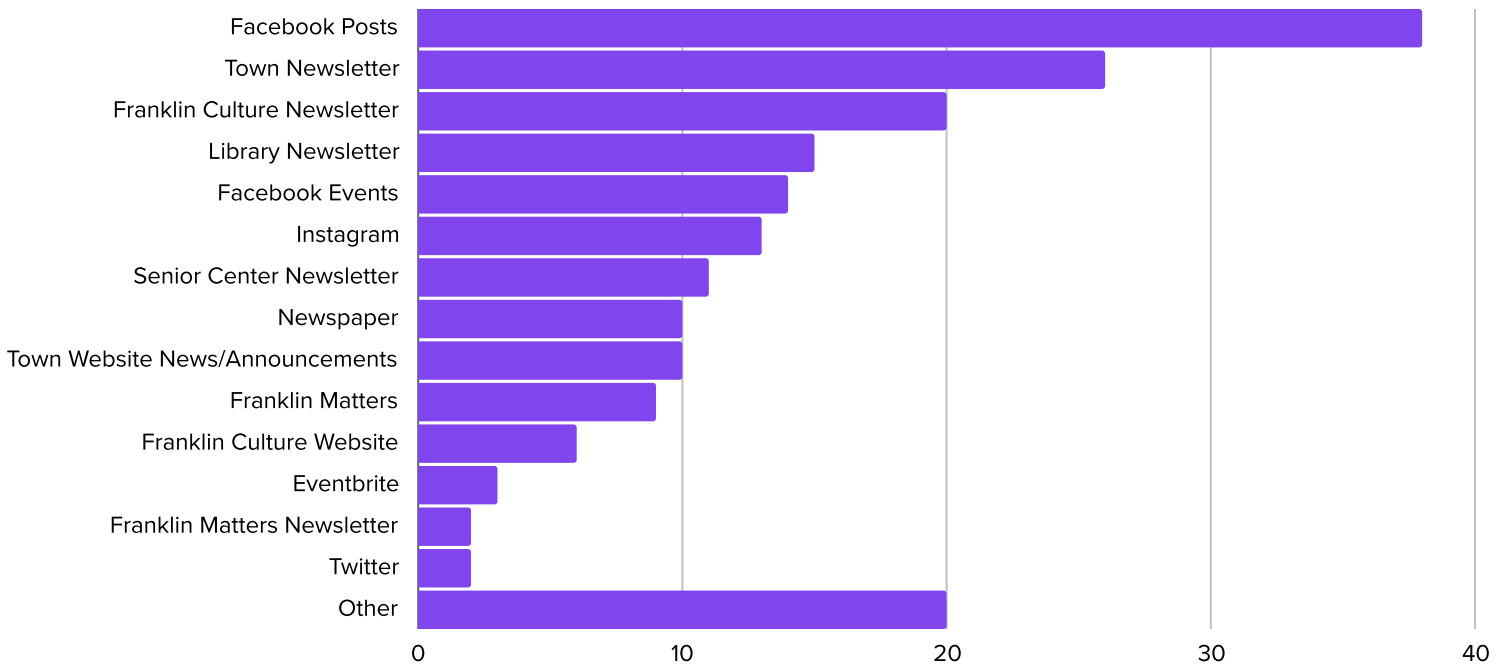
## Overview

An Arts & Culture survey was conducted and distributed through the Town of Franklin newsletter and social media. Listening session attendees were encouraged to participate. The survey received 64 unique responses.

Fifty-seven (57) of the respondents were Franklin residents, sixteen (16) were business owners and/or community leaders, and thirty (30) were artists and/or creatives.

Age	#
18-25	1
26-40	7
41-60	27
61 or over	28
Prefer not to answer	1

What is your **primary way of finding out** about Arts and Culture-specific programming in Franklin?

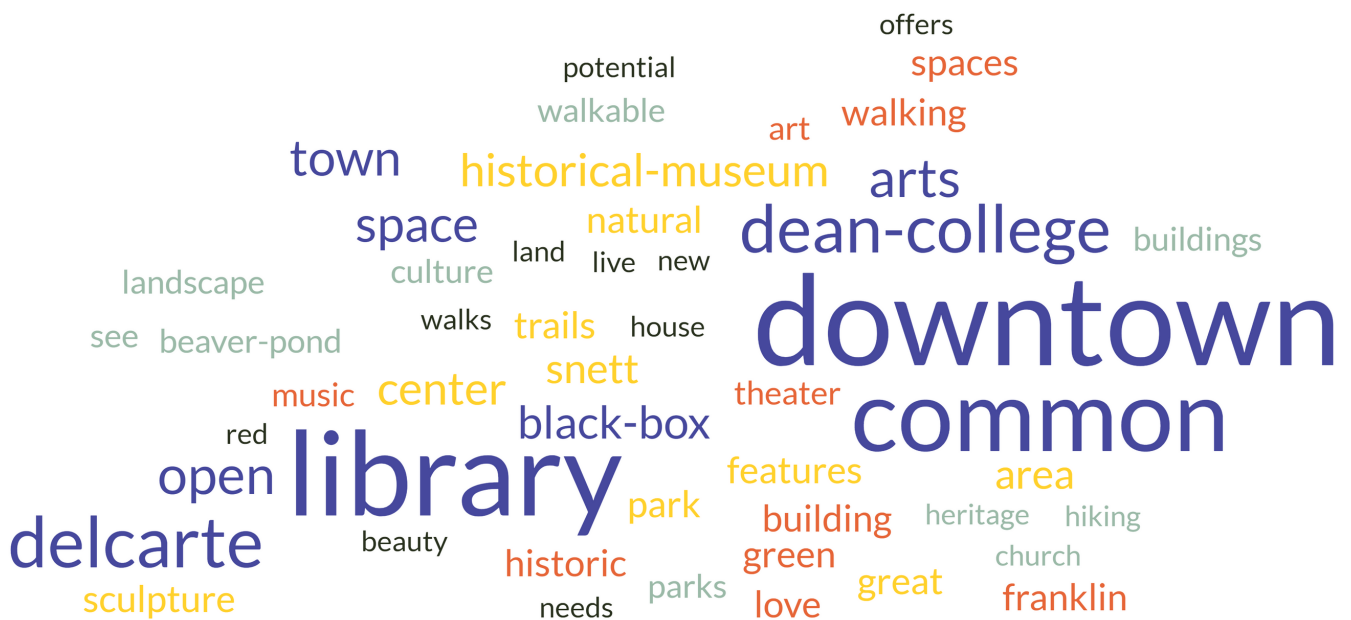


# Community Strengths

What gives Franklin its own unique identity; what makes it **special**?



What do you think are the town's key **physical assets**?



## DEEP DIVE: Artists and Creatives

**Thirty (30) of the respondents self-described as an artist or creative!** Their arts ranged from painting to theater to mixed media to music and more. These artists were asked specific questions about their local experiences; here were some *common responses*.

What are your **favorite things** about living in Franklin/MetroWest as a creative person?

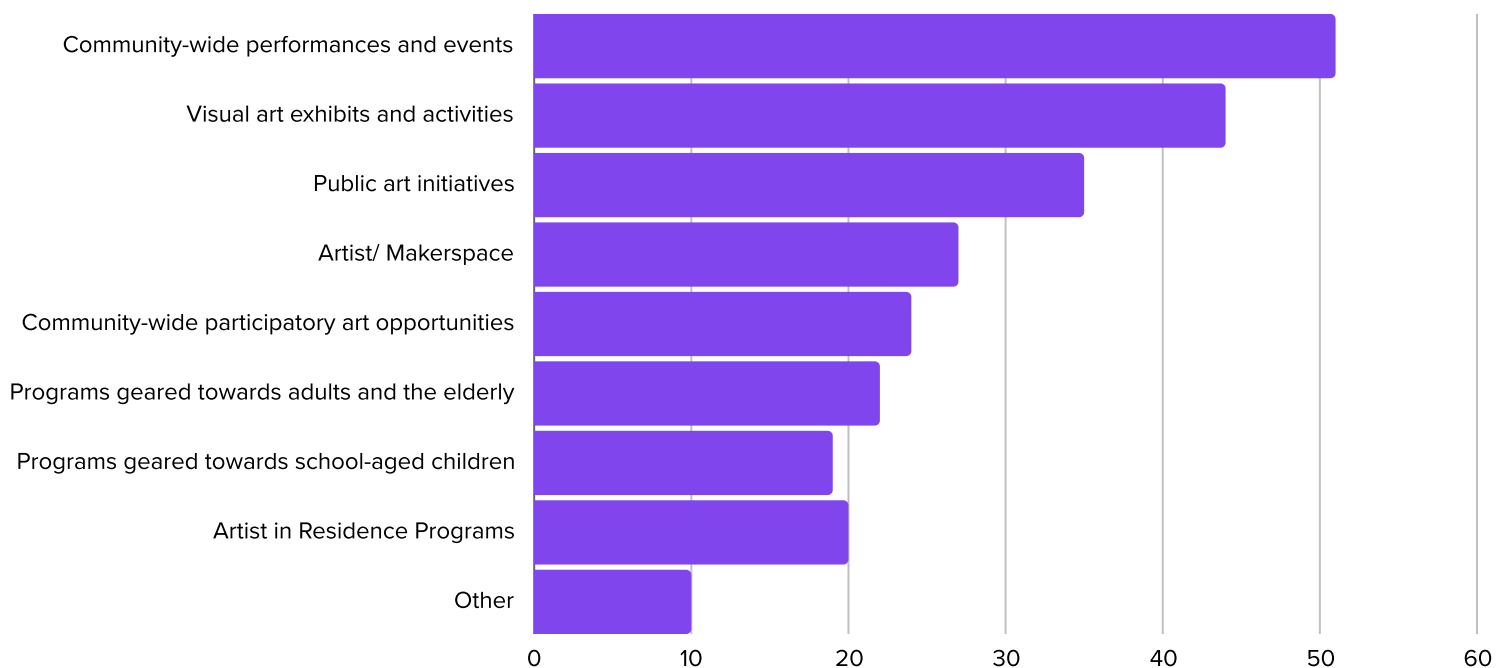
- *Support of local businesses*
- *Theater and other performance spaces*
- *Location*
- *Town appreciation and promotion*
- *Restaurants*

What things make it **most difficult** to thrive in Franklin/MetroWest as a creative person?

- *Lack of display spaces, particularly for the visual arts*
- *Lack of publicity, particularly centralized across region*
- *Lack of nightlife*
- *Lack of local government support*
- *Lack of workspace*
- *Minimal bus service*

## Ideas for improvement

**What events, programs, or offerings would you like to see prioritized in the future?**



**What can the Town of Franklin do more of to foster Arts and Culture within our Franklin Community?**



**Appoint a Director of Arts & Culture**

**Expanding marketing and communications around existing events**

**Support arts in the schools, to grow an arts-engaged population from the start**

**Create more ways to bring people downtown as a community...more events**

**SAMPLE RESPONSES**  
(SEE ALL RESPONSES IN APPENDIX A)

**Support volunteerism; make it easier for working parents, encourage all ages to donate time**

**Open mic and local music promotions**

**More art galleries, more art shows, & use of the town common for art events**

**Highlighting the work of local artists**

# Recommendations

Based on the placement of action items on the difficulty/impact matrix, the recommendations were tiered into the following categories: **High Return on Investment** (lower difficulty, high impact), **Strategic Priorities** (high difficulty, high impact), **Low Hanging Fruit** (lower difficulty, lower impact), and **Luxuries** (high difficulty, lower impact). The Committee supplemented and adjusted the Matrix results with any relevant information from the survey results or other references, including MAPC's 2020 [Town of Franklin Market Study](#).

The recommendations may be taken up by the Town itself, but many require collaboration or even initiation from private local stakeholders.

## High Return on Investment



These recommendations are intended to be completed first, as they can greatly improve Franklin's arts & cultural footprint and have relatively fewer impediments:

- Hire an **Arts & Culture Coordinator** (or Director) to coordinate initiatives - especially events - across the various cultural groups, increase grant-application capacity, and engage in further strategic visioning.
- Host **volunteer nights** where local organizations, including the Town's cultural committees, could introduce themselves to residents seeking volunteer opportunities.
- Provide **press and media guidance** for artists and cultural groups by consolidating key contacts and resources into a single document.
- Consolidate an **asset list** of all Franklin's arts and cultural groups into an accessible and engaging resource.
- Create an **accessibility guide** for arts and cultural events, with a checklist of key considerations for improving accessibility for all potential patrons.
- Retain the **MetroWest Arts & Culture Symposium**, even in its stripped-down 2023 form, which raises Franklin's statewide profile and facilitates regional partnerships.
- Offer **grant-writing assistance** to artists and cultural groups to take better advantage of the numerous state, federal, and private funding opportunities.
- Increase **public art** throughout Town, both empowering volunteer local artists for small projects and professional contracting for key initiatives.
- Increase collaboration with the **MetroWest Boston Visitor's Bureau** who have renewed energy and resources to elevate Franklin initiatives regionally and beyond.
- Increase the **culinary events and/or classes** to Franklin's cultural offerings, through grants and public services.
- Add more **placemaking projects** that use public art to celebrate key features of Franklin's history and culture.
- Organize **artist resources** into a single format in which local artists can understand the key partnership and grant opportunities, venues, tax information, and more.
- Develop more **display spaces** in Town - both in new and existing locations - particularly for the visual arts.
- Improve **wayfinding signage** to better guide visitors to Franklin's amenities.



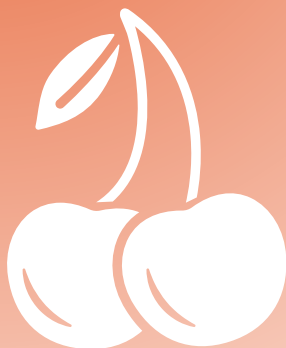
These are longer-term recommendations to take the Town's arts & culture ecosystem to the next level:

- Create a more holistic and action-oriented **strategic plan** to boost arts and culture in Franklin, including a designation of timeline and responsible parties. The plan should examine opportunities for structural changes that improve coordination across the key cultural committees and organizations.
- Reinstate the **Cultural Festival** as an annual event that highlights art across the region's many cultures and invites local artists to sell their products.
- Identify opportunities to develop shared **makerspace(s)** for artists, particularly of the physical arts, to develop larger products and connect with other artists.
- Better facilitate **coordination with the public school system** to connect students with cultural groups and initiatives in Town. That includes, but is not limited to, engaging regularly with the Franklin Arts Academy director.
- Market to improve **Franklin Cultural Council membership attraction**, a key group in improving grant-winning and dispersion, as well as possibly organizing cultural events.
- Improve marketing of and regularly update the **Franklin Culture website, newsletter, and calendar** to serve as the singular resource for residents seeking information on classes, performances, and events.
- Expand **town-wide branding and marketing** to highlight Franklin's strengths and cohesive community vision for both residents and regional visitors.
- Identify current uses in the **Mixed Business Innovation District**, and work with property owners to coordinate on areas of mutual benefit. Consider adopting a set of design guidelines.
- Reinstate the annual celebration of **Art Week** by facilitating connections between local businesses and artists to coordinate a weeklong stretch of arts opportunities town-wide.
- Create a **town palette** to be used for signage and standardized materials.

## Strategic Priorities



## Low Hanging Fruit



These are lower-priority recommendations that should nonetheless be considered for short-term completion as they may be relatively easy to implement:

- Inviting high school and Dean College **students on the Franklin Cultural Council** to engage younger residents in civic participation and invite greater diversity of perspectives.
- Offer more **audio and visual classes** for aspiring local artists.
- Invite professional artists, as well as residents, for a **Franklin High School portfolio review** to help students applying to art school and otherwise engage the community in student art.
- Identify opportunities to **package events** for symbiosis that encourages greater economic activity. Examples include pairing performance tickets with a restaurant discount or coordinating a weekend ticket package across numerous exhibits and performances.
- Reinstate **pop-up shops** that were successful in helping aspiring small businesses pilot their idea and increase visibility before finding a more permanent home in Franklin.
- When retail vacancies arise, work with property owners to provide the space for **pop up galleries and events**, or to allow artwork to be displayed until the space is filled.
- Organize a **gig artist meet-up** and/or showcase to facilitate connection and resource-sharing across otherwise independent artists.
- Develop a **public art program** to improve the streetscape environment and attract people to districts, including alternating lamp post banners for different events/seasons.
- Increase **beautification projects** for Franklin, including planters and landscaping at appropriate commercial districts.

These recommendations are of lowest priority but have still been deemed important actions for improving Franklin's arts and culture:

- Create a **philanthropic organization** and/or event to welcome and facilitate community donations to the arts, particularly from area businesses.
- Fund and otherwise increase regional **advertisement placements** for Franklin's arts & cultural initiatives, including pointing more residents to the Franklin Culture website and events calendar.
- Create an **Artist in Residence program** that welcomes a professional artist to take on key projects around Town.
- Host an **art show** for local and regional artists.
- Create and highlight **adult performance groups** – particularly for the vocal, theatrical, and musical arts.
- Found a **community empowerment business** that both offers a missing service or product and raises funds for arts & cultural initiatives.
- Develop an **arts competition** for new public art to be displayed. Promote having art displayed in vacant spaces.
- Coordinate more **multi-day events** that both increase awareness and particularly welcome regional visitors to stay overnight in Franklin and patronize local businesses.

## Luxuries



# Appendix A

## Survey Responses: What can the Town of Franklin do more of to foster Arts and Culture within our Franklin Community? (edited for clarity and anonymity)

- Appoint a Director of Arts & Culture
- Expanding marketing and communications around existing events
- Highlighting the work of local artists
- Identify overlapping tasks - fundraising, grant writing, event planning, reporting, meeting structure - and have a town-funded playbook or resource for those tasks
- Create clear definitions and scope of work for each of [the] organizations
- Support/advertise volunteerism; make it easier for working parents, encourage retirees and seniors to donate time
- Providing spaces for things to happen, upkeep
- More artsy Installments outside
- Art exhibits on the common
- Support arts in the schools, to grow an arts-engaged population from the start
- Bring back the feast of Saint Rocco
- It would be helpful to have a central clearing place for all arts and cultural activities to be posted.
- Continue to engage all stakeholders in the process. Encourage more community-based businesses in the downtown. Make the downtown more visually appealing. The cultural programs are here but we need an improved Main Street look to pull it all together. Think outdoor dining.
- Dining, bars, and entertainment should be concentrated downtown not spread out all over town.
- I think we need to create more events that draw the community together. The town can support by allowing use of the common, closing streets and allocating police.
- I wish we had something like the Hopkinton Center for the Arts--at least the art-making piece of it--to complement the performing arts. There isn't anywhere I can go locally to do pottery or jewelry-making.
- The Town of Franklin can support the arts by creating a permanent affordable space where local artists offer classes to teach children and adults about the arts. It can also be a place where artists join together to create in whatever medium they choose. A community space for creativity will encourage people to move into Franklin.
- Have more space for artists to show their works. Town hall exhibits, working with Dean on exhibits, work with restaurants to allow artists to show their work.
- Open mic and local music promotions.
- Relentless advertising for art and culture initiatives.
- More whimsical outdoor art like the ladybugs in surprising places. Murals. More cultural integration so that we can see East Indian residents' cultures represented & Eastern European/Slavic residents' cultures and so many other representative cultures. To that end, cooking classes and cooking demonstrations.
- Repair the Sculpture park installations that need repairing; Install art on the Common including sculptures or weather-proofed 2D art; partner with arts businesses (such as pottery studios) & art supply vendors to offer discounts to Franklin residents; art installations in coffeehouses; art demonstrations in restaurants/wineries.
- Coordinate with Dean.
- School children should be taught to accept all cultures, library can host a program where people can showcase their ethnicity, culture-specific holidays/events/display.
- More live music venues welcoming to musicians, more theater and art galleries, more inviting to artists of color and more diversity.
- I would love to see more art galleries, more art shows, & use of the town common for art events.
- Advertise the many events we have more widely to bring in bigger audiences.
- Involve Dean College students.
- It would be good for Franklin to have an Arts and Culture administrator to develop and oversee the arts in Franklin.
- Build on what we have. (1) Post Franklin District Weekly Events signs with QR code at our train stations, our hotels, our library, our Town Common etc to link people to Franklin Cultural District newsletter for weekly events. (2) offer monthly Open Mic at FSPA's Intermission Cafe - Gelato & music go well together. (3) Offer Franklin by Foot Historical/ Cultural walking tours as an extension of Dean's Rob Lawson's "History in Your Own Backyard" series. Collaboration between Dean and Historical Museum. Pitch tours to public school for field trips and to the public monthly - a Fourth Sunday Series?. Topic examples: Library, Dean College, Town Common War Memorials, historic homes around Town Common, Churches, Mills, Downtown history - Franklin by Block (Metcalf building/block etc), Union St Cemetery. Encourage more public art. (4) Save the charming Hayward Carriage House and make it a visual art, craft, music, coffee/ice cream destination. Great location & parking. Expand in time with vendor bull carts (like Quincy Market), Food trucks & outdoor festivals (like SoWa Boston).
- To have things beyond summer months available to the community to come and enjoy. To better make use of the FHS auditorium for functions. The Black Box is nice, but it is small and limited in capacity. We should attract other performances to town that is not a bit of a "clique" when attending. My family attended something at the Black Box around Christmas time and it felt like we were the only ones that were not a part of that organization - the performances includes some "inside" jokes. We felt we did not belong. I think if the town broaden the events and held it at locations that would be more inviting to the larger community that would be wonderful.
- Create more ways to bring people downtown as a community...more events. Would love to see Summer Saturdays or Sundays where Main Street is closed weekends during the summer to allow people to gather for music, arts, events and safely sit, walk, eat, and explore downtown and businesses
- Large community events geared towards visual and performing arts
- Fix sculpture park. More installations around town!
- Bring in ensembles and artists for wind band concerts on the Common.
- Collaborate with artists and art instructors from Dean College. Hold festivals to celebrate music and the arts.