

Arts Council of Windham County Strategic Plan 2007-2009

From the report prepared by Craig Dreeszen, based on recommendations by 50 cultural advocates at the February 6, 2007 Regional Arts and Cultural Summit

I. MISSION OF THE ARTS COUNCIL OF WINDHAM COUNTY

The Arts Council of Windham County promotes the arts as a vital part of the life, education, and economy of Windham County through collaboration with the creative, business, and educational communities.

II. LONG RANGE GOALS

- 1) **Community Development** Link with other civic partners to build healthy communities and plan for sustainable growth and a vital regional economy. [Arts Council makes the surrounding community a better place]
- 2) **Cultural Development** Assist and encourage cultural organizations and artists.
- 3) **Arts Education** Promote access to lifelong education in and through the arts in schools and communities.
- 4) **Arts Participation** Promote increased and equitable access to cultural opportunities for all our residents and visitors.
- 5) **Advocacy** Help citizens and policy makers value and support arts and culture.
- 6) **Arts Council Capacity** Build the capacity of the Arts Council of Windham County to promote the arts and serve our constituents.

III. CULTURAL ASSETS

- **Strong creative sector** The New England Cultural Database documents 161 registered nonprofit cultural organizations and 103 creative businesses in Windham County. Dun and Bradstreet conservatively reports 455 people employed in creative businesses. The 2005 Creative Economy Symposium and the continuing Creative Communities Council are helping the region tap this vital creative sector for regional economic development. The county is a net exporter of cultural products to national and international markets. The region retains its population and young people.
- **Artists** Windham County is home to many fine professional and avocational artists. Artists are actively engaged in local government, engaged in schools, and involved in their communities.
- **Authentic sense of place** Brattleboro and Windham County has retained a real sense of place in a beautiful environment. Residents and community leaders share a concern for historic buildings, good design, and the preservation of local businesses, sustainable agriculture, and environmental protection.
- **Proud history of arts service** Volunteer leaders of the Arts Council of Windham County have worked for 35 years to promote the arts. The 50 cultural advocates who participated in this planning are indicative of the creative community's potential.
- **Town cultural planning** The Town of Brattleboro had the foresight to include cultural planning as an integral chapter of its Town Plan and is updating their plan in 2007.
- **Commitment to access** Cultural leaders and creative workers are committed to inclusive policies that work to remove barriers to participation in cultural programs.
- **Supportive news media** Cultural programs and events are well promoted.
- **Self reliance and mutual support** Citizens actively volunteer and sustain many nonprofit cultural organizations through do-it-yourself attitudes and willingness to share.

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IV. PLANNING ISSUES

Summit participants identified five areas of concern for Windham County residents

- 1) **Community and economic development** There is need and opportunity to engage the creative sector into the region's community and economic development and to sustain the artists and creative businesses that are the foundation of the creative economy. There is little public art.
- 2) **Cultural access** Residents need access to cultural opportunities so that all may participate in cultural programs and events and to promote area attractions to cultural tourists. Audiences are supportive, but relatively small.
- 3) **Funding and support** Artist and cultural organizations need increased funding and capacity-building support. This requires a clearly articulated case for public and private support for the arts, cultivation of allies and funders, and a local arts agency coordinating services.
- 4) **Education** All county residents need access to an arts-integrated education, which extends from schools into the community and benefits citizens lifelong.
- 5) **Coordination** The many creative initiatives, programs, and services create an opportunity to coordinate to take advantage of economies of scale, avoid duplication, and identify gaps in services, and promote cooperation.

V. VALUES AND VISION

Summit participants envisioned towns and a region in which the following ideals are valued and true:

- ❖ Artists are valued for their creativity, contributions to the community, and as citizens engaged in local democracy.
- ❖ The region is known for its accessibility, assuring opportunities for all to participate in education, creativity, and the collective life of the community.
- ❖ Citizens appreciate diversity and respect all people.
- ❖ Buildings, streets, public art, and landscapes reveal a widespread concern for aesthetics and an authentic sense of place.
- ❖ Members of the creative community, businesses, communities of faith, and environmentalists work together to sustain jobs, affordable housing, local businesses, local farming, and the environment.
- ❖ The arts enliven parades, festivals, and other intergenerational, indigenous events that gather the community in celebration.
- ❖ Citizens retain a commitment to volunteer action, mutual aid, and self reliance.
- ❖ Governments, businesses, and individuals value and support the arts.