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Arts and the Creative Sector

“Investing in the arts and cultural institutions can be the economic equivalent of bringing a manufacturing plant to a neighborhood and - from a cultural and quality of life standpoint - more than surpass it.”

-Luis Ubinas, President of the Ford Foundation

Introduction

The creative sector includes employees, organizations, businesses, and industries who engage and support creative work including visual, performing, and literary artists, music, museums, and collections. This often includes craftspeople, makers, small-scale artisan manufacturers, arts educators, and professionals in applied fields like architecture and graphic design.

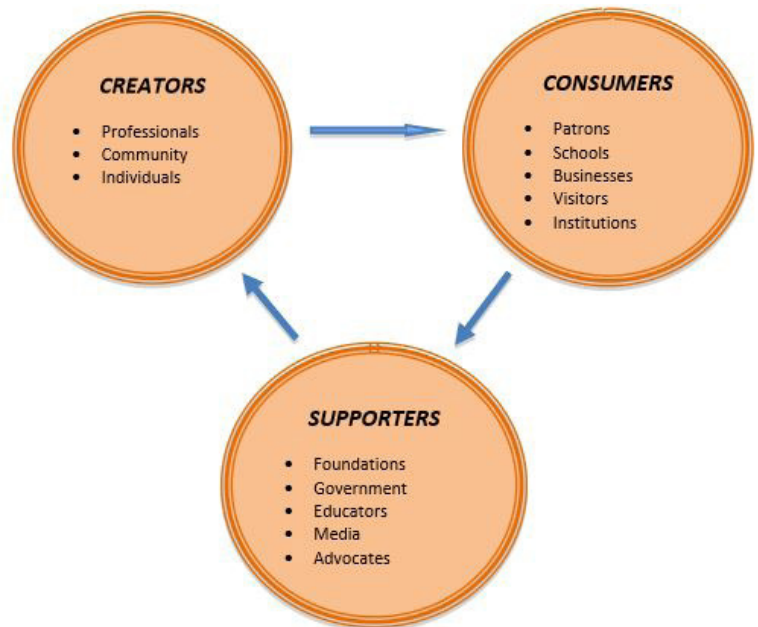
The New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) said in their “Strengthening the Creative Economy” report that “The creative economy is a powerful and positive global force. Together, artists, cultural nonprofits, and creative businesses produce and distribute cultural goods and services that impact the economy by generating jobs, revenue, and quality of life.”

According to the National Endowment for the Arts, there are 3,710 arts-related businesses employing 16,587 people in the State of NH. The Town of Littleton has a significant concentration of artistic and creative activity in the community ranging from performing arts spaces and small photography and art studios to public art throughout its Downtown. Additionally, the Town is part of a wider region that includes many creative professionals, small businesses, and arts organizations. This presents an opportunity to collaborate as a region to support the growth of the creative sector.

This chapter describes Littleton’s existing arts and creative assets, and outlines strategies for the Town to consider when planning for the growth of arts and the creative sector.

THREE VITAL COMPONENTS OF THE CREATIVE SECTOR NH CREATIVE COMMUNITIES NETWORK

The three vital components of the creative sector, pictured right, include: the “creators”, who may or may not be a professional, the “consumers”, who make the choice to attend the theater, film, or concert or purchase locally made artistic goods, and the “supporters”, who support the development of creative industries by establishing cultural councils, public funding for arts ordinances, and speaking in support of the arts to policy makers.



Investing in developing the creative economy and arts within the community has the potential to spur economic activity, and improve quality of life. The American Planning Association’s publication “How Arts and Culture Catalyzes Economic Vitality” identifies *four key points related to economic development* and community planning. These include:

- **CONCENTRATING CREATIVITY** through physical density and human capital stimulates economic development. By locating firms, artists, and cultural facilities together, a multiplier effect can result.
- **RECOGNIZING AND MARKETING A COMMUNITY’S ARTS AND CULTURAL ASSETS** is an important element for boosting tourism, attracting a strong workforce, and helping to sustain a positive quality of life.
- **THE PRESENCE OF ARTS AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES** in a town can attract crowds from within and around the community. This builds economic and social capital.
- **TOWNS CAN MAKE DELIBERATE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE ARTS AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES** and other economic sectors in the community, such as tourism and manufacturing, to improve economic outcomes by capitalizing on local assets.



Above: Bad Art, a modern art gallery in downtown Littleton.

A LOCAL ARTS AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY

As part of its public outreach, the Town coordinated an Arts and Culture themed focus group to collect input from citizens, artists, and arts supporters on the arts community in Littleton. This group defined the arts and culture community as:

- Part of an active and regional arts and cultural corridor in the state
- A promising and burgeoning part of the local economy and community life in Littleton
- Diverse, including many types of artists, creative workers, and arts and cultural activities (ranging from more traditional forms of art to more experimental, eclectic forms)

The following categories below identifies some of Littleton's arts and creative sector assets.

Arts and Creative Businesses

Businesses that create or support the arts and artisan products or services include entities like Northern Lights Music, Shaun Terhune Fine Art Photography, Schillings Brewery, and White Mountain Canning Company. Other creative businesses include the restaurants in Town, ranging from fine dining to bakeries.

Studios and Galleries

There are a number of places in Littleton's Downtown where residents and visitors can view or purchase art. These include Signs of the Times Gallery, Bad Art, Littleton Studio School, and the League of NH Craftsmen.

Organizations

There are a number of organizations in the North Country region and wider state of NH that support arts and creative economy activities and provide funding for various initiatives including the Arts Alliance of Northern NH, Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (WREN), NH Creative Communities Network, and the NH Council for the Arts. The Town also has a recently formed cultural arts commission as well. Littleton also has a long history of creative writing in the region, including the author Pollyanna,

HOW CAN CREATIVITY AND CULTURE CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT?

- *Artists highlight and support existing assets, attracting visitors and new residents to an area.* The presence of arts and culture in a community can increase attention and foot traffic, attracting visitors and new development.
- *The creative sector can improve a community's competitive edge.* A high concentration of creative enterprises and employees provide a community its competitive edge by raising its quality of life, improving its ability to attract economic activity, and creating an environment that support entrepreneurship and innovation.
- *The expression of culture creates a foundation for defining a sense of place.* The presence of arts, creativity, and culture reinforces the identity and uniqueness of a community.
- *The creative sector contributes to the development of a skilled workforce.* In rural communities, creative assets can be used to generate wealth and raise incomes.

and has inspired other writing studios and workshops to form.

Events and Venues

Venues like the Littleton Opera House, the Loading Dock, and the Bethlehem-based Colonial Theater provide flexible event space for a variety of performances that attract visitors from near and far. The Upstage Players are another local group that performs plays and other theater pieces for cultural enjoyment. The Town also hosts an annual Arts and Culture Festival in the fall that draws a large crowd to the region as well.

Public Art

Littleton's Downtown includes multiple displays of public art including music instruments by the River Walk, statues like Pollyanna, and suspended colored umbrellas. There are opportunities to expand on this public art, further contributing to the unique sense of place Littleton has to offer.



Above: Colorful umbrellas are suspended in mid air in Downtown Littleton, creating a display that provokes wonder and awe.

WHAT'S NEEDED TO EXPAND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES?

The North Country of NH is very similar to the Vermont's Northeast Kingdom region, which has seen economic success in growing their arts and creative sector. According to the Northeast Kingdom Report titled "Advancing Economic Development through the Intersection of the Creative, Recreational and Food Sectors in the Northeast Kingdom", creative industries depend on support from a variety of services, organizations, activities, and financial, spatial, and educational

resources to be successful. Support infrastructure identified includes:

- **Regular opportunities for networking** and sharing knowledge and experiences to spur innovation and creativity.
- **Access to formal and nonformal education for creative enterprises** and occupations and encouragement of appreciating the arts and creative products.
- **Accessible places and spaces to perform,** work, and exhibit creative endeavors.
- Festivals, fairs, and exhibits that serve as marketplaces for creative goods and activities.
- **Resources for business and technical assistance** and to encourage and support planning, business startups, and expansion.
- **Policies** that expand creative opportunity in a community.

Littleton already has some of this infrastructure, but could build upon and expand some of it to increase its reputation as a creative community where artists, makers, and entrepreneurs can live, work, and play.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

According to the arts and culture focus group conversation, there are a number of key opportunities related to expanding the arts and creative industries in Littleton.

- Littleton’s demographics of residents (ranging from families to young professionals to seniors) make the community a diverse audience mix for the arts.
- More can be done to brand Littleton as an arts-friendly community and to attract tourists to the area to experience arts and culture. **Use arts and culture to create a brand for the community** and promote storytelling around Littleton’s unique character.
- **Coordinated marketing and use of technology** for promoting the arts can be better utilized to increase the number of visitors

- to Littleton. Consider other innovative ways to promote arts and creative activities in Town such as an independent newsletter or paper.
- The town needs a **shared calendar** for uploading arts-related events, concerts, shows, etc.
- Littleton’s **sense of energy, creative spirit, and entrepreneurial activities should be capitalized** and built upon.
- Littleton’s reputation for being a good place to incubate businesses should be a strong selling point for the Town.
- Encourage **arts and culture to be embedded in all town planning activities** to promote integrated projects and solutions.
- Create opportunities for **cross-collaboration** between artists, local officials, business owners, recreation groups, schools, and others to ensure arts and culture is reflected in community initiatives.

The table on the following page outlines creative strategies that Littleton may consider when further developing and integrating arts and culture into planning and economic development initiatives.



Above: A sculpture (pictured center) gifted by the Senior Center for the a seating area along the Riverwalk.

CREATIVE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ECONOMIC VITALITY	
STRATEGY	Description
Promotion of Assets	Promoting cultural amenities for the purpose of attracting economic investment and skilled workers.
Development	Promoting community development through artistic, cultural, or creative policies.
Revitalization	Promoting community and neighborhood revitalization through artistic measures and strategies that emphasize creativity.
Economic/Job Clusters	Creating economic or job clusters based on creative businesses, including linking those businesses with non-cultural businesses.
Arts-Oriented Incubators	Creating arts-specific business incubators or dedicated low-cost space and services to support artistic, cultural, or creative professionals
Branding	Developing visual elements that communicate a community's character; using logo development and graphic design for advertising, marketing, and promoting a community.
Districts	Creating arts, culture, entertainment, historic, or heritage districts.
Live-Work Projects	Providing economic or regulatory support for combined residential and commercial space for artists.
Arts-Specific and General Public Venues	Providing public or private economic or regulatory support for marketplaces, bazaars, arcades, community centers, public places, parks, and educational facilities of various types.
Events	Using celebrations or festivals to highlight a community's cultural amenities.
Compact Design and Reuse	Implementing the reuse of existing sites or buildings for arts and culture purposes.
Public Art	Supporting temporary and permanent public art projects.

Table Source: American Planning Association's Report; "How Arts and Culture Catalyzes Economic Vitality"

POLICIES FOR GROWING THE CREATIVE SECTOR

State and local governments, businesses, and local/regional planning agencies can take initiative to create policies that establish and maintain support for building the creative sector. Littleton's recently formed Arts and Cultural Commission was an important step toward strengthening the creative sector and arts community in own. Possible activities of an Arts and Cultural Commission include conducting a cultural asset inventory, developing arts and cultural programming, applying and overseeing grants, and managing public art installations. Ensuring this commission establishes a strategic plan to guide their activities could be a useful next step.

Another policy initiative could be establishing an Arts and Cultural District. According to ArtistLink, a non-profit resource addressing artists' needs, cultural districts are a well-recognized, labeled area of

a community in which a high concentration of cultural facilities and programs serve as an anchor of attraction. Typically, cultural districts are geographically defined.” Oftentimes, communities choose to create an arts and cultural district in an effort to develop tourism and revitalize neighborhoods.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of organizations and programs that provide funding for community-based arts initiatives, public art, and arts and culture programming. These include:

- NH State Council on the Arts
- New England Foundation for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Arts
- New Hampshire Charitable Foundation
- ArtPlace America

RESOURCES

Please see the list of resources below for more information on strengthening the arts and creative sector in communities. These can be used for guidance for any of the arts and creative sector implementation strategies.

- **“HOW TO DO CREATIVE PLACEMAKING”** – National Endowment for the Arts
https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/How-to-do-Creative-Placemaking_Jan2017.pdf
- **“HOW ARTS AND CULTURE CATALYZES ECONOMIC VITALITY”** – American Planning Association
<https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/online/How-Arts-and-Culture-Catalyzes-Economic-Vitality.pdf>
- **“CREATIVE ECONOMY TOOLKIT”** – NH Creative Communities Network
<https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/online/How-Arts-and-Culture-Catalyzes-Economic-Vitality.pdf>



Above: The Loading Dock provides a performance space for live music in Littleton.