

New Bedford announces publication of first-ever strategic Arts & Culture Plan, “New Bedford Creative: Our Art, Our Culture, Our Future”

New Bedford’s first-ever strategic Arts & Culture Plan is complete. The 200-page plan entitled New Bedford Creative: our Art, our Culture, our Future, has a vision for the city as follows: “In New Bedford, the creative community is an engaged and powerful partner, inspiring social, economic, and cultural growth. In this authentic seaport city, each and every person enjoys an opportunity to experience a diversity of cultures. Art is everywhere, encouraging fun, provoking thought, and nurturing the soul.”

New Bedford Creative: our Art, our Culture, our Future, was financed through a combination of the City of New Bedford’s Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund, a donation from Bristol County Savings Bank, and the in-kind support of the NBEDC.

In recent years, New Bedford’s reputation has grown as the center for arts in the region and as a creative and inviting place for all types of artists to live and work. New Bedford was named the “Seventh Most Artistic City” by Atlantic Monthly, ranked Ninth on Matador Network’s list of Most Creative Towns, and sixth on Bustle’s Best Cities for Young Artists.

The Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund was proposed by Mayor Jon Mitchell in the spring of 2016 and approved by the City Council last year, and consists of half the revenue from the

city's lodging tax, capped at a total of \$100,000. Creation of the fund also required the passage of a home rule petition by the state legislature. The petition's passage in 2017 was led by state Sen. Mark Montigny.

Using monies from the Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund, the City selected the New Bedford Economic Development Council (NBEDC) to manage the search for the Cultural Coordinator. Area native Margo Saulnier was selected for the position in 2017.

Over a six-month period beginning in January 2018, the firm Webb Management Services worked in partnership with a 45-member Steering Committee to guide the vision and direction of the Plan. Compiling all of the assessment and community outreach, Webb Management Services provided a Critical Path Plan and timeline, detailing the steps, participants and paths required to fulfill the vision and goals, which has over 80 major action items, as well as a pro-forma operating budget and funding plan that outlines long-term financial goals and strategies to support the plan over time.

Some highlights of the planning process include:

- A 45-member Steering Committee, a dynamic and diverse mix of individuals, guided the vision and direction of the Plan, meeting 7 times in a 6-month period.
- Over 50 individuals (and only a small percentage of overlap with the Steering Committee) participated in one-on-one interviews.
- The consulting team held five focus groups and four public meetings
- Over 20 venues and locations hosted poster boards encouraging passersby to leave comments on the future vision of arts in the city.
- An estimated 10,000 people were reached, who supplied comments via public meetings, email blasts, one-on-one and small groups, or posters.
- A Facebook page was created and has over 300 followers.

- Local media chronicled the process.

The first initiatives outlined in the plan are already underway, including:

New Bedford Creative Consortium

The first initiative of New Bedford's Arts & Culture Plan is to create a leadership group of 15 to 25 members to be the conscience of the Plan and to provide the vision and leadership for the effective implementation of it. This open nomination process, recently completed, will soon produce a group of individuals with the ability, experience, expertise, and in-depth knowledge of arts and culture in New Bedford, be reflective of both the diversity of the city, and represent a broad cross-section of arts and cultural interests. The work of this group will be facilitated by the Creative Strategist for the New Bedford Economic Development Council.

Wicked Cool Places Grants

In April/May of 2018, a small pilot grant program distributed \$5,000 as a test run for a larger scale program launched this Fall. Grantees included the New Bedford Art Museum/Artworks!, the Seaport Artwork, SuperflatNB, and 3rd EyE Unlimited.

At Tuesday's press conference, recipients of a larger-scale pilot grant program were announced, with an investment of \$50,000 to creative placemaking projects in the city. This first round produced dozens of applications with total project budgets near \$1 million dollars. A second round will be instituted during the summer of 2019.

More highlights of the plan are included below. The timeline for some of these goals is one to two years, with others more long term, five to ten years:

Programming and Community

- Create a Shared Services Program, encouraging arts organizations, artists, and businesses open to working with creative enterprises to share resources (space, marketing

dollars, technical equipment, expertise, supplies, and so on) and administering programs that reduce arts production costs such as joint or co-op purchasing programs, affordable studio or rehearsal space, etc.

- Engage the assets of UMASS Dartmouth and Bristol Community College, allowing all parties to benefit from the other's skills, spaces, and resources, and draw a young, creative, and active demographic to the downtown.
- Develop a citywide policy for Events & Festivals, a strategy for long-term growth for public events and festivals.
- Regularly convene program providers, a Program Development Strategy, to discuss opportunities for partnership, collaboration, including opportunities for shared marketing.
- Add two more cultural districts in the north and south ends to develop branding and promotion in each district, and to unify the city's arts and cultural offerings.
- Enhance the use and programming of Fort Taber.

Support Strategies

- Institute a Granting Program, to support New Bedford's strong history of arts entrepreneurship and encourage continued collaboration (as previously mentioned).
- Create a Fundraising Plan to raise new monies from new sources for overall arts development, such as a united arts fund; a percent for art program; in-depth research for new sources of grants from both public and private organizations; a corporate sponsorship campaign that involves numerous organizations and/or artists.
- Develop a Capital Improvements Fund for existing facilities.

Public Art and Facilities

- Recognizing that public art can play a dynamic role in the livability, energy, identity, and wayfinding strategy of a

city is the first step in integrating the arts into the infrastructure of a community. A public art plan to build community support for and understanding of public art, and to develop policy for a funding mechanism as well as private developer inclusion of public art in projects.

- Develop an affordable artist live/work space database and pursue partnerships with private developers, WHALE, MassDevelopment, ArtSpace, etc.

- Create a Small Creative Spaces pilot program to encourage facility owners to allow temporary and permanent performances/installations at reduced or no cost.

- The release of New Bedford's Arts & Culture Plan is the culmination of a year of hard work by member's of the city's arts, culture, and economic development communities," said Mayor Jon Mitchell. "New Bedford's vibrant arts and culture scene is a major driver to the city's growth, and provides depth and breadth to the city's quality of life. I want to especially thank Margo Saulnier, as well as everyone who served on the plan's steering committee."

"This is a collaborative group achievement – each person who participated in the creation of this plan will soon see its impact. It's an immensely exciting time for New Bedford," said Margo Saulnier, cultural coordinator.

"Creativity and New Bedford go hand in hand. Our history tells that story. Innovation, open-mindedness, and pragmatism have created a culture here of collaboration and entrepreneurship," said John Vasconcellos, President of the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts. "Fishermen can be muralists, immigrants can fill the sky with beautiful kites, basketball courts can be vibrant and fantastical, Bach, Beethoven and Brahms can serenade the tenements, and hometown kids can create alongside world-class artists. Initiatives like our Creative Commonwealth, in partnership with the City's Cultural

Plan will create depth, sustainability and focus that this City deserves. It is not a nice-to-have and it is not just for a few – it is for all of us and it is part of our essence, it always has been.”

“I look forward to the New Bedford Arts & Culture Plan rolling out in 2019, which will bring together New Bedford-based artists from different cultural backgrounds and disciplines to shape the cultural and artistic growth of the city,” said Dena Haden, co-chair of the Seaport Cultural District, program director of the Co-Creative Center, and team member of New Bedford Creative Consortium and Superflat New Bedford. “Acknowledging artists as professionals who can assist in how conversations and actions are shaping the future of our city in addition to making art accessible to all is a wonderful opportunity.”

Along with the publication of the Arts & Culture Plan, the City announced the first grants totaling \$50,000 to 12 local arts and culture projects. Wicked Cool Places, the City of New Bedford’s granting program for creative placemaking, supports the goals of the Arts & Culture Plan by enhancing community development, arts entrepreneurship, and ongoing investment in the rich arts and culture of the city.

Major funding for Wicked Cool Places is the city of New Bedford’s Arts, Culture and Tourism Fund, with additional funding by Bristol County Savings Bank.

“We received dozens of great applications, with total requests of over \$350,000 and total project budgets of nearly \$1 million. The Review Committee diligently chose 12 high impact projects, leveraging the City’s investment of \$50,000 to over \$130,000,” said Margo Saulnier, cultural coordinator.

The following recipients of Wicked Cool Places’ grants represent New Bedford’s strong history of arts impacting community engagement, and embody the vision of the Arts &

Culture Plan, where “art is everywhere, encouraging fun, provoking thought, and nurturing the soul”:

- 3rd EyE Youth Empowerment, 3rd EyE Open: \$10,000
- Diana Arvanites, New Bedford Mobile Art Studio: \$2,500
- Tracy Barbosa, Kite Festival Workshops: \$3,500
- Co-Creative Center, Commune-n-Tea during AHA!: \$2,500
- Community Economic Development Center, Vacant Storefront Art Gallery: \$3,500:
- New Bedford Fishing Heritage Center, FISHTIVAL: \$2,500
- New Bedford Port Authority, Seaport Art Walk: \$3,000
- Mia Pinheiro, Vecinos: \$700
- Reggae on West Beach series: \$3,500
- Southcoast Lessons, “Open Season” Public Music Series: \$3,000
- SuperflatNB: \$5,300
- UMASS Dartmouth, Lighting Installation: \$10,000