# Biddeford Cultural Plan

### Community Conversation, Cultural Organization

### January 29, 2021

## What is wonderful about this community?

* Collaborative spirit, helped to keep the mills open, brings people to the table for processes like this
* Deep caring about, belief that Biddeford is a special and unique place
* Beautiful built environment, architecturally significant,
* Strong sense of place
* Size of the city, small enough that you get to know people
* Walkable village
* Diverse population
* Saint Joseph’s church
* Pride and resilience, even when things weren’t great, people were proud of their community
* Heritage and history
* People like to work together and support each other
* Location… close to ocean
* Mills are being revitalized
* Young population… Lots of new energy as young people moving in
* Welcoming and engaging community
* People are helpful and talkative; A familiarity, personability and desire to see people as whole humans
* Collaboration and not competition.
* Willingness to work together and think creatively.
* Main street has a palpable energy, things are changing,
* The build environment and landscape have unique relationship.
* Business community has a collaborative vibe; support each other rather than compete
* Participation from city has grown; Strong planning for cultural sector; Perspective of ‘what can we do together’
* City Theater is an amazing asset; a 400-person volunteer organization
* Pace of development and diversity of age (young demographically), natural resources, welcoming.
* Location, proximity to Boston and other hubs
* Unique character

## What needs to improve?

* Planning in advance for changes that are happening
* Ensuring greater access and equity; strategically handling development, securing affordable housing; mitigating gentrification
* Still an old guard way to politics among city council (not very progressive in many ways), tied to council members holding seats for decades, too strong a focus on property taxes, lack of investment in the future
* Resistance to investing in cultural organizations; Library is one of lowest funded in the state
* Lack of understanding of economic benefits of arts and culture – need to do a better job speaking their language
* Lack of access to natural resources – many Biddeford residents have never been to the beach in town because of lack of public parking, transportation, poor access in general
* Strong divide in perspective, awareness/interest in culture; this could be tied to a lack of access
* Need things besides restaurants and breweries that are open throughout the week. Daily arts presence throughout the week. Make programming available 7 days week.

## What role, if any, do you think arts and culture could play in addressing the needs identified above?

* Events bring diverse populations together for a shared experience
* Placemaking tool – making a place where we belong, connected to each other
* Quality of life is lifted through the arts
* Biddeford cultural heritage center – museum in the streets – approved 5 new signs, draws people throughout the community – engages folks
* History can bring people in – promoting community in different light – City is more than just a main street –
* UNE, what role could they play?
* Establishing a collective digital presence that builds on the character of city, defining Biddeford as arts and culture destination – maps, digital tours, virtual tours – more promotion, stronger presence through print and digital
* Venues for community programming
* Library has the longest open hours and is busiest, programs are a social service; it does not have a good space for rotating arts
* Arts should be available 7 days a week. Need things besides restaurant and breweries, the museum and ENGINE gallery are great, but we need a regular daily arts presence
* City theater has a lobby that could be better used
* Pearl point park, in process of being developed to include art installation and public performance space – downtown development commission is involved

## What events and programs are available in the region?

* Children’s theater is available through collaboration with Saco
* Biddeford Recreation Department provides youth programming
* Escape room
* Venues offer music and trivia
* Flourish, offers sound healing classes and alternative therapies
* Yoga studios
* Circus School
* Game store downtown – used to hold game night one night a week, probably stopped through pandemic
* Improv theater group – closed for pandemic, usually do 2-3 nights a week
* Engine, programming typically includes classes and Fab Lab (due to pandemic programming is limited to online)
* Virtual concerts, virtual holiday show
* Teen bicycle building
* Biddeford Mills Museum has space, opened in November of 2019, currently closed for pandemic – all volunteer group – 170 years of mill history
* Skating rink
* Biddeford pool gives lighthouse tours
* Museum in the Streets

## What do you hope to see 5 years down the road?

* Establish a BCC Coordinator position to focus on what is happening in the arts; BCC should provide a hub, a unified understanding of what is going on, a unified approach
* App to promote different organizations, that includes map, links to offerings, brings people around town, draws people to all offerings and businesses
* Facility that would house numerous organizations; community programming; resource center
* Biddeford as a destination
* Shared community space
* Enhanced visibility through collaboration between arts and heritage, shared programming
* Biddeford historical society and Biddeford genealogical society, lack of public access to their space
* Permanent space and infrastructure for all organizations and artists (Community arts stabilization trust in California is a potential model); having properties deeded in perpetuity for arts, TIFF, zoning; something that’s permanently subsidized for the arts; Artists are priced out and need permanently affordable workspace; Engine owns property on main street and offers maker space at a subsidized rate
  + Marble block (Brownfield site, Phase 1 cleanup complete)? Owned by Engine and was put on market at beginning of pandemic to explore options; could be center for arts and culture in Biddeford but would require significant investment
* Public art that’s connected to community and engages people; interactive and approachable; something people can stand in front of and take a picture and adds to sense of place
* Indigenous monument somewhere in city – current initiative
* Has history of arts and cultural uses
* Place like Engine being open multiple nights a week
* More diversity of offerings; Comedy club was starting to be open more regularly before pandemic