

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 built 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