

TWIN CITIES CULTURAL PLAN

NOTES FROM ARTIST FOCUS GROUP #2

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2005, 7PM

PARTICIPANTS

Phil Grime – Antiques dealer, former director of Arts Council in Stowe, VT

Andrew Horvat – Professional musician, UNE media services employee, union roadie

Renee O'Neil – Director of City Theater, actress, choreographer

What's Good About Biddeford/Saco?

- A lot of local talent exists
- Incredible local history and built evidence of it (mills, downtowns)
- Strong local institutions and organizations
- Strong arts programs in local schools

What Needs Improvement?

- Most local artists are not appreciated by local population
- Very small market for high-end goods within community
- Very little coordination right now
- Artists/musicians tend to be self-centered—it is hard to force them to work together

What Resources are Needed?

- Dialogues were built during cultural assessment in 1990s, but no vehicle exists for that today—it was very valuable at the time
- Arts center/arts council provides focus for whole community
- Funding—it's hard to push the creative envelope when you depend on funding from local banks, businesses, individuals

What Communities Have Done This Already?

- Stowe, VT – very affluent community, huge volunteer effort created a self-supporting organization that raised money through art fair, Taste of Stowe, dues
- St. Johnsbury, VT – brought culture to rural community—local concerts aimed at kids by noted classical musicians. Built appreciation for the arts
- Doesn't have to be a “hotspot” issue—in Germany, there are few cultural centers, but the level of cultural appreciation is high throughout the country

What Opportunities Exist?

- Think long-range—arts events cannot exist in a vacuum
 - Shaker exhibit was great, but it came and went in three months. If it had been around for a whole year, all local arts groups could have created an annual theme around Shaker arts and culture—raises whole profile
- Develop local icons and disseminate to kids
 - Print postcards of most noted items in Saco Museum collection and distribute to all 4th graders—they can identify with what it means to be from Saco

- Define what culture means
 - It used to signify ethnicity and geography—now we often use it to signify art objects and performances
- Celebrate current industry, not just industrial history
 - Our industrial jobs are in “invisible” industrial parks, not visible mills. Could do tours of today’s industrial businesses for schoolkids
 - Today’s fishermen don’t live in Camp Ellis—changing economics have forced them to live inland, though they still make their living on the coast
- University presence is critical. Approach both UNE and USM for arts partnerships
- Move beyond MERC—it just leads to negativity and division
- Plug into civic groups like Rotary

What are Visions for Arts & Culture in Area?

- Develop a theme each year and have all organizations plug into it
 - Coordinate events at museum and theater with school curricula
- Choose iconic images that symbolize the community and use as part of effort
 - Steeples, clocktowers
 - Personalities
 - Art objects
 - Cultural groups—Abenaki, French, etc.
- Grow multidimensional arts scene
 - Avoid becoming “furniture town” or “music town”—it makes you more vulnerable
- Work together, don’t fall into the “circular firing squad” mentality like Portland did. All arts and cultural groups should share similar goals—they are not in competition
- We are just stewards of our culture
 - Honor the past, deal with the present, pass on for the future

Comments on Arts Council

- Would provide the equalization that doesn’t exist in Portland—all groups share its resources
- Balance arts/non-arts representation—make sure money people are represented
- Provide networking/forum opportunities
- Possibly combine resources from existing organizations
 - Do Saco Spirit and Heart of Biddeford do the same thing?
 - Are these organizations just aimed at downtown redevelopment, or is there more to it—are they really arts groups?
- Use creative economy model—it forces unorthodox partnerships that are for the betterment of the community