

“Community Arts for Our Town”

Peterborough NH - Arts Center Assessment

Webb Management Services – Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

Peterborough is a small, aging community with limited economic prospects and an uncertain future. And while the community has an amazing cultural heritage and a set of legacy organizations carrying on those traditions, the prospects for the arts and the continuing cultural development of the community are daunting.

There is a small but active audience base in the community made up of full-time and seasonal residents who are likely to be older, educated and relatively affluent. There is a set of cultural organizations that cater to that audience base, but few others finding a younger audience. And the current set of facilities, though not in great condition, is close to adequate for the current set of users.

There is also a set of challenges around the arts as a community and the sector’s relationship to the larger community. Namely, the arts community is divided and not behaving and collaborating like the constituency it needs to be. And there is little understanding in the larger community about what role and value the arts bring to Peterborough. So, whatever the outcomes of this work, it is critical that we push and pull the community together and motivate greater efforts to work together, mostly to build understanding and support for the catalytic role of the arts in advancing community goals.

Community Facility Recommendations

We would not recommend the development of a new community arts center. But we would endorse the idea of improving existing facilities, most importantly the Town House Auditorium. Here, we would contend that physical and operational investments would make the hall more usable and beneficial to the cultural community and the Town itself. A similar case might be made for the cinema, GAR Hall and the Historical Society.

School Facility Recommendations

There is an excellent opportunity to partner with Conval High School on the development of a new auditorium. We would encourage the Town to join with the Committee exploring the idea of a new larger hall. At the basic level, this is an opportunity for the community to financially contribute to the project in order for community groups and regional promoters to gain access to larger, high quality facilities. The bigger idea here is to support the School’s (and District’s) vision to become the topranked school (and hopefully schools) in the state, to the extent that families will choose to move to the community. Conval’s principal and his team have been working hard over the past several years to build the schools performance and ranking in the State. And they now recognize that a new larger hall will support this effort by providing more and better opportunities for arts programs in the schools.

The Big Idea

The recent merger of the Sharon Arts Center with the NH Institute for the Arts creates new opportunities to bring accredited post-secondary arts education to Peterborough. New MFA programs will begin next year at the Sharon Arts Center campus. This is a good thing all by itself. But we would suggest a further step, in which the Institute partners with the Town, private developers and Comcast on the development of a new media center – a place of teaching for NHIA but also for the community and based on the idea of bringing new technologies to artists and arts organizations as new means of creative expression, new ways to deliver artistic work to audiences, and new tools to help artists and organizations sustain themselves.

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This is a new type of community arts center, one that is based on new technologies that provides new opportunities for artists of all ages to explore and express their creativity. This then becomes a starting point in the development of a larger strategy to make Peterborough a center for the exploration of creativity and technology.

“To-Do” Checklist

Town House Improvements

All activities to be directed by Town Staff and completed by Contractors – In Process

1. July 1st, 2015 – Historic Building Assessment - \$20,000 = \$10,000 LCHIP Grant + \$10,000 Town
2. Dec 1st, 2015 – conceptual planning of improvements and budget estimates
3. May 2016 Town Mtg – request funding for bid documents
4. July 1st, 2016 – begin developing final plans and bid specifications for renovations
5. May 2017 Town Mtg – request funds for construction effort
6. July 1st, 2017 begin renovations for 100th birthday on Nov 11th, 2018
7. 100th Anniversary Nov 11th, 2018

Big Idea: Monadnock Art X Tech, A Maker Space Initiative

All Activities to be completed by board and volunteers. Town to serve as project advisor - In Process

1. Business Planning
2. Begin Programming – Awareness and Benefit
3. Recruit Membership
4. Space Planning
5. Equipment Planning

Enhanced Broadband

All Activities to be completed by Economic Development Authority Work Group with assistance from Broadband Consultant and Town Staff - In Process

1. Form Planning Work Group
2. Develop Build-out Goals
3. Research Successful Municipal Initiatives
4. Develop Funding Strategies
5. Build Public Support