

Lee Cultural Council PLAN OF ACTION

What can the Lee Cultural Council offer to our town?

Through planning and initiating cultural events and programs, the council will enhance the quality of life and encourage community and economic development for the town of Lee, its residents, and its businesses.

How will the council accomplish this goal?

As programming becomes more established, the anticipated impact for Lee businesses is an increase in foot traffic. This can also encourage a more attractive environment for potential investors. Programs and events also offer a variety of low-cost options for local families as well as educational opportunities for students. In addition, they encourage collaboration among other local boards and organizations.

Why is this important?

The economy is struggling and budgets are being cut nationally, which trickles down through the state and on to local communities. By utilizing other successful models and adopting the recommendations of several studies and surveys that have encouraged an increase of programs and events in Lee, we create an opportunity to increase brand recognition. As residents and visitors seek alternative means of interaction, education and entertainment, Lee can become a more attractive as a place to live, visit, and do business. *Cultural programming is directly linked to economic development.*

In what other ways will the council raise money?

The council will generate funds from additional sources, local and otherwise, including banks, grants, fundraisers, solicitation drives, sponsorships (cash and in-kind), and donations.

Self-imposed strings

The council's request for a town appropriation is conditional upon raising its own funds first. For every \$1,000 independently raised by the council, it would receive only \$3,000 of the appropriation, with a maximum received of \$15,000 within fiscal year 2012.

If the council does not raise \$5,000, it cannot receive the total amount of the appropriation. Whatever money is left reverts back to the town. If the council raises any amount above \$5,000, it still cannot receive more than the total of the appropriation.

What surveys and studies support the fact that events and programs are needed and wanted in Lee?

1. The Lee CDC (Community Development Corporation) Downtown Strategy. In March of 2006, the Lee CDC and the Lee Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey of downtown businesses, which was also offered on the CDC and Town websites. Many downtown residents were also polled. The survey results state that “the issues of the highest importance to the largest number of respondents were: expansion of parking availability; development of the Bookless Block; and *encouraging more downtown events* [italics added].”

2. The Lee Downtown Strategic Review (DSR) (Feiden Associates of Northampton, 2007). This review included input from the Lee CDC, business owners, town officials, and the Chamber of Commerce. Points and recommendations of the Lee DSR include:

- The Lee CDC can help with specific projects, but its success depends in large part on its ability to stay focused and not suffer from mission creep.
- The Chamber of Commerce is a partner in downtown, but its mission of tourism, marketing, and member services does not allow a specific focus on downtown.
- A new organization or semi-independent organization within town hall is needed to focus on downtown. Ideally, such an organization would have a full-time or near full-time presence.
- Seed money might come from fundraising and a town match, and long-term funding must be sustainable from town contributions and other sources.
- It is important to build a stronger Lee identity to help the community attract business and build a brand beyond just “Gateway to the Berkshires.” Lee’s current brand is that it’s a good place to go through toward somewhere else but its target brand should be that is a base from which they can reach everywhere else.
- Lee is well positioned to have a vibrant downtown.
- Identify how Lee can capture more of the Berkshires creative economy.
- Street fairs and special events can help build a sense of working together and shared goals and not merely a series of separate businesses. Founders Day is just such a successful model to build on.

3. The Harvard University Field Study (2008). ”A great asset for Lee is the opportunity to tap into and contribute to the larger Berkshires Creative Economy. A recent report found that the Creative Economy of the Berkshires generates tremendous revenue for the local businesses. Tapping into this and other existing networks, we believe, is critical in maximizing Lee’s potential...We propose that Lee consider adopting cultural programming.”

4. Turning Around Downtown (Brookings Institution, Washington DC). The most important benefit of entertainment is to get “feet on the street.” Just as a crowded restaurant is its best recommendation, crowded sidewalks are a town’s best recommendation, signaling a safe environment and providing an excitement that draws people to the area.

What other Berkshire communities are currently producing cultural events?

Monterey: AfroQuilt Worldwide, nature walks, photography shows, basketry, pottery and painting workshops, readings of Shakespeare, a variety of live music, and more.

West Stockbridge: The Zucchini Festival, sponsored by the West Stockbridge Cultural Council in partnership with dozens of local businesses and residents.

Cheshire: The Heron Cove Concert Series, sponsored by more than 20 businesses. Funded in part by the Cultural Council of Northern Berkshire.

Lenox: The Apple Squeeze, The Tub Parade, and the Western Massachusetts Nationals Auto show. The town of Lenox has recently suggested a \$54,000 appropriation to pay event planners for year round events programming.

Great Barrington: On the cusp of it's 250th Anniversary, Great Barrington is currently seeking more than \$100,000 in order to fund downtown events.

Pittsfield: Third Thursday, the International Ethnic Fair, Live on the Lake art shows, and more.

Specific use of council funding

The town appropriation and other fundraising would pay for project-related expenses including, but not limited to, planning, administrative costs, development and marketing, and the like. Depending on the stage a project is in, the expenses will vary. These varying costs could include talent fees, mailings, printing, equipment and space rentals, staging, lighting, signage, surveys, permits, and so on.

Services provided by the Program Director include, but are not limited to:

- Fundraising, donation solicitation, grant writing, and other initiatives
- Expansion of membership, community outreach and other committees
- Public relations
- Website design, maintenance, and operation
- Correspondence and meetings to further the council's goals and objectives and to promote and plan events
- Negotiation of contracts/ service agreements (to retain services of artists or others), whose terms are subject to council/ chair approval and acceptance, with said contracts to be executed by the council chair on behalf of the council
- Marketing and promotion of council events and programs

The Massachusetts Cultural Council's vision

The arts, sciences, and humanities have the power to build healthier, more livable, more vital communities. They enrich, exalt, and provoke. They are an essential part of a strong educational system. *They contribute enormously to our economy.* They build bridges across cultures. They can be used to address - or better yet, prevent - some of our most stubborn social problems. They help us interpret our past and shape our future. They help us understand what it means to be human.

NOTE: This is a working document subject to change. April 14, 2011.

Lawmakers team up to beef up tourism
By Clarence Fanto, Berkshire Eagle Staff
Wednesday April 20, 2011

With steep slashes in funding for cities, towns and social services looming as the Massachusetts budget for the upcoming fiscal year advances on Beacon Hill, two lawmakers from the Berkshires and Cape Cod are on a mission to shore up support for cultural tourism that's crucial for those prime vacation destinations.

State Rep. William "Smitty" Pignatelli, D-Lenox, now dean of the Berkshire delegation, and a newcomer, state Sen. Daniel Wolf, D-Harwich, are leading the charge as co-chairs of the Cultural Caucus.

Interviewed from Boston, Pignatelli voiced disappointment in Gov. Deval Patrick's proposed cutbacks affecting local, regional and statewide cultural organizations. The Massachusetts Cultural Council has lost a third of its state support since 2008, and the Berkshire Visitors Bureau has cut its budget nearly in half during the same period as state funding dries up to a trickle.

"All the more reason we need a Cultural Caucus to raise awareness," said Pignatelli, who was elected by House lawmakers for another term as co-chairman for the organization's second year.

Citing the need to lure younger audiences to area attractions, he contended that "Tanglewood has recognized this." By booking Grammy award-winners like Train, he said, the Boston Symphony's summer home can "bring in a whole new audience of young people who love that group" in order to "get this younger generation exposed to the orchestra."

"This is very positive," he said, "but it will take time and leaders with vision to keep things moving in that direction."

Train is among the rock and pop acts slated at Tanglewood this summer for its Popular Artists series, along with Earth, Wind & Fire, Steely Dan and James Taylor.

In Pignatelli's view, "there's a lack of understanding of the need to generate wise investments" that can boost the region's culture- and tourism-based economy.

"Budgets are tight," he said, "so it's all about how we spend the dollars we have. We're not looking for any quick fixes; there are no easy solutions."

Within the Berkshire Creative Economy, a broadly defined cluster encompassing a wide range of occupations, the focus of the Cultural Caucus is on support for performing-arts venues such as Tanglewood, Shakespeare & Company, Jacob's Pillow, the Berkshire Theatre Festival-Colonial Theatre alliance, the Norman Rockwell Museum, and the Berkshire Museum, among others.

While "donor fatigue" is a factor hampering bottom lines at many organizations, Pignatelli stressed the need to "cultivate the next generation of donors."

"That's where we're lacking," he said. "We can't keep going back to the same people time and time again."

According to Pignatelli, "there's still a great deal of wealth in the Berkshires that we're not tapping into."

The state Legislature's Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development formed the Cultural Caucus last year to help advocate for funding and legislative changes favorable to tourism and the creative economy, and to help educate state lawmakers about the importance of that sector.