

Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District Minutes of January 26, 2023

Members in Attendance: Robin Helfand, Seth Keyes, Ed Abrahams, Elissa Haskins-Vaughan, Barbara Watkins, Jeff Gagnon, Betsy Andrus, Jeffrey van de Visse, Karin Watkins, Talya Leodari

Also Attending: Chris Rembold (Town of Great Barrington), Laura Brennan (BRPC), Wylie Goodman (BRPC), Dennis Iodice (guest)

Not Present: Kris Kanter, Carli Scolforo, Sally Michael Keyes

This meeting was conducted by remote participation as stated on the agenda. Quorum was reached at 9:02 a.m.

Approval of Minutes of 12/15/2022 – Ed A. made a motion to approve the minutes. Elissa H-V. seconded the motion. The minutes were approved.

Treasurer's Report – Chris R. reported that since December the group has received a \$1.5K refund for the Wi-Fi equipment previously provided by the Cultural District. The Town was reimbursed the same amount. The current balance is \$4,556.13. The group does not yet have this FY's \$15K from MCC but it is anticipated soon. Laura B. separately applied to MCC for recovery funds on behalf of the Cultural District, for which all Districts were eligible. The formula to determine how much each applicant gets is unknown but she is hoping for an additional \$5K.

Bills to Approve for Payment:

- \$96 for the next six months of Constant Contact (Feb – July)
- \$260 annual dues to the Southern Berkshire Chamber of Commerce **Betsy A. will recuse from vote*
- \$289 for annual website domain listing (through Jan 2024).

Elissa H-V. made a motion to approve. Ed A. seconded. The motion carried.

Social Media Consultant Search Update – Chris R. reported several promising responses in November and December. The Town's HR has person screened applicants to narrow the large field of candidates. There will be one interview today and another next week.

MCC / DEIA Check-In – Laura B. discussed with A.J. Enchill from the Berkshire Black Economic Council the Cultural District's needs around DEIA and shared with attendees a document on the BBEC's website about [best practices in DEIA work](#) and recommendations to avoid unethical practices. The group may want to hire one of their consultants as an example. A.J. suggested Dr. Frances Jones Sneed who is familiar with Great Barrington and could speak from the historical vantage point. BBEC prefers that the potential clients approach them with a brief overview about their needs which will then be distributed to their practitioners who can choose to respond or not. This is to ensure that the same people are not requested all the time and more people get an opportunity to interact. One idea presented was to pool funds among

cultural districts so that any training offered would reach more cultural districts across the county. Ed A. noted that, given the size of our organization and budget, he would be inclined to have more people attend and split the cost. Jeff G. thought that more cross-district networking could also empower an event like this. Jeff V. noted that the radio station could support such an event as well. Karin W. shared about the DEIA work being done at the Mahaiwe and suggested an interesting step would be for the Steering Committee to offer training on DEIA to District constituents and stakeholders, too. She noted that diversity can also include LGBTQ, abilities, language diversity, economic diversity, etc. Karin W. would be happy to help with this and Talya L. agreed she would be interested in helping too via her work at the library. Ed A. suggested a sub-committee be formed around this topic. Robin H. wondered if the DEIA focus is sector-specific to the arts or could be inclusive of non-cultural organizations. Laura B. reiterated that there could be a broader cross-cultural district focus or the group might favor a local focus to Great Barrington, but broader in terms of business types. Robin H. suggested there be a local component to address GB's specific demographics. Seth K. said he was able to potentially offer St. James Place to host an event assuming a date of availability. Next month's meeting will include a report-back from the sub-committee.

MCC FY23 Reporting Check-In: Business Openings/Closings – The group reported the following developments: Dennis Iodice the owner of Berkshire Dry Goods who is also connected to other local projects (Farmer's Market; BFCC, BMB) attended as a guest to share about the soft opening for his business and his interest in staying connected to the group to see how we can help. A woman is planning to open Belia – a non-alcoholic aperitif facility -- in Sheffield; the product is sold at Guido's and possibly The Coop. Byzantium is closing. A woman is looking to open a reuse/refill store. Luke Parker Bowles and CinemaLab will be part of the Triplex changing hands. An investor is buying the building and then CinemaLab will be renting with a lease-to-buy situation. They plan to combine theaters, replace seats, and make it a more luxurious venue for live performances. Kelly from BIFF is involved. There will be a food component with food sourced from a local purveyor and a liquor license and a second space upstairs for events that can be rented out.

Artist to Highlight in February Newsletter – Wylie G. re-shared the potential to have as the focus of each month's newsletter a feature profiling local artists and people working in the creative economy. Karin W. suggested a staff person at The Mahaiwe.

Adjourn – Ed A. made a motion to adjourn. Karin W. seconded. The meeting adjourned at 9:28 a.m.

2023 Steering Committee Meetings, all at 9 a.m.:

February 16	September 21
March 16	October 19
April 20	November 16
May 18	December 21
June 15	
July 20	
August 17	