

**Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District
Minutes of May 8, 2020**

Participating: Ed Abrahams, Betsy Andrus, Jeff Caminiti, Robin Helfand, Kris Kanter, Seth Keyes, Talya Leodari, Barbara Watkins, and Karin Watkins, Tate Coleman

Also attending: Chris Rembold, Laura Brennan (BRPC), Tim Newman, Joe Grochmal, Sharon Gregory

Not present: Kate Burke, Jeff Gagnon, Julie Hannum, Casey McShain, Ken Roht, Bridgette Stone,

Karin called the meeting to order at 9:05am.

Minutes of 5/1/20: Ed A. made a motion to approve, Barbara W. seconded. One typographical edit from Karin W., one correction from Ed re: discussion group participants (Ed A., Robin H., and Ken R). Talya was not present, needs to be removed from list of attendees. Roll call vote, all in favor.

Karin W. asked Laura B. to provide an overview of the Cultural District's background for attendees. District is one of the youngest of 45 districts in Massachusetts. Only newer is Lenox. When district was given designation by MCC, steering committee members deliberately established communication tools as their first priority, with the overall goal being promotion of activity in and around the district. These tools include social media accounts, a tri-fold brochure, an e-newsletter, and a website, which has taken the longest to be developed. Not every district has a website, many simply use social media. Laura B. stated that this information is offered as encouragement and perspective on how much has been established and achieved.

She also shared that the steering committee has repeatedly determined that their primary role is to promote activity and programming that is being created by stakeholders, and that the first intention is not to be program or content generators though in some cases it may be appropriate. As a volunteer-run organization, it has been recognized during the short history of the district that each member also must prioritize their own business or organization. As other examples have been shared from other districts during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also true that there are also many other districts which have not been generating programs during this time.

Karin W. reminded the group that some of the other districts have paid, full-time staff dedicated to their work. We may think of ourselves as a presenting organization rather than a producing organization.

Robin H. thanked Karin W. for the reminder, and shared that she was inspired by some things that she had seen in the Rogovoy Report, as well as the Town's initiative to paint rainbows on the crosswalks. She posed the question of whether the District might partner with an organization which is a producer of content or programming, and stated that she would like ours to be a district that does, with the help of a partner if possible, pursue a project.

Karin W. reminded the group that we do have a Special Events and Festivals sub-committee, and that we do want to have an active role in events, as appropriate.

Ed A. stated that if anyone would like to pursue one of the ideas we have previously discussed, they are encouraged to do so through the sub-committee format, but that the full Steering Committee would not be able to focus their time or efforts in this way. Karin W. reinforced that individuals should work outside of the Steering Committee meeting timeframe to do so, and also that we would go back to a monthly meeting rather than meeting weekly which has been occurring recently.

Marketing & Communications

Ed A. moved the conversation to strategic planning discussions which have been occurring between Ed A. , Robin H., and Ken R.. Emphasized the importance of regular messaging and communication, especially asking for stakeholders to let us know what they are doing so we can share that news through our channels.

Karin W. stated that our year 2 goals included establishing the website and getting word out to stakeholders asking them to review. We had intended to have a meeting to launch the website, but that will not be possible in person at this time. We should instead share the website link with our list so that they can review their listings and provide any necessary corrections. We also want to ask that businesses and organizations link back to the new website. Laura B. confirmed that the new website would be prominent in the next Constant Contact e-newsletter. Karin W. also stated that we need to figure out how to activate our social media accounts, as has been discussed previously. Ed indicated that we had passed social media off to Andrew Sagarin, but little content has been available lately. The committee had authorized \$500 for a six-month period for this purpose which has not yet been expended. Joe indicated that he has experience managing accounts and is happy to jump in. Ed A. will work with Joe G. after the meeting to establish access.

Tim N. discussed two tasks related to social media: determining content and pushing it out. He suggested that additional people remain involved to send information to the person posting. Having specific days and times during which posts occur is important, as well as regularity. Karin suggested that the most important thing for us to do is share/re-share posts from our stakeholders. Laura suggested that Bridgette also be looped into the conversation with Ed A. and Joe G., and also that committee members that already have access should continue to post and share as they have been.

Special Events & Festivals

Art Week at Home is drawing to a close, participants are encouraged to share activity and use the hashtag #ArtWeekatHome.

Betsy A. asked about the potential for public installations (i.e. multi-colored umbrellas hung in between buildings) which would be temporary and could be pulled together by a small group of committee members. Karin encouraged this or similar ideas to be worked on by committee members outside of the timeframe of regular Steering Committee meetings.

Tim N. asked if we have an inventory of the ground-floor businesses within the district and their landlords. He fears that there will be empty storefronts and brought up the possibility of installations in these spaces, and asked if we should be contacting artists and landlords to try and coordinate something. Barbara W. indicated this plan may be premature and hopes that landlords will work with tenants to remain open and that this plan should be shelved at this time.

Other Business

Ed A. stated that the Select Board has an upcoming agenda item of “local economy meeting” and wanted to let the group know that they would be brought in on this discussion at some point in the future.

Citizens Speak

Sharon G. brought up the parking issues downtown and asked if it is appropriate for the Cultural District to have a sub-committee addressing parking needs. Karin W. indicated that this would be outside of this Committee’s scope. The group concurred.

The meeting adjourned at 9:48 am.

Next meeting: June 5, 2020 at 9am via Zoom

Submitted by:
