

Downtown Great Barrington Cultural District Minutes of January 28, 2021

This meeting was conducted by remote participation (video/teleconference) as stated on the agenda.

Members in Attendance: Betsy Andrus, Jeff Caminiti, Jeff Gagnon, Robin Helfand, Seth Keyes, Richard Le, Talya Leodari, Barbara Watkins, Karin Watkins, Neel Webber.

Also Attending: Abi Rollins, Sally Michael Keyes, Eugene Carr, Chris Rembold (Town of GB), Laura Brennan (BRPC)

Not Present: Ed Abrahams, Tate Coleman, Kris Kanter, Talya Leodari

Karin W. called the meeting to order at 9:20am.

The group all introduced themselves to Eugene Carr, who attended the meeting to provide information regarding Berkshire Busk.

Berkshire Busk – Eugene had shared a link to a video describing the project prior to the meeting. This particular idea has been refined over time. He has floated the idea by some members of the select board and town staff. Although the plan does not call for facility rental or artist fees, there are significant operational costs. He is currently reaching out to potential sponsors and donors to see if there is sufficient interest. He is optimistic at this time. He is also putting together a team to help run the project, including some interns from Oberlin College. He is also in contact with Williams College. His plans include utilizing technology to help handle the logistics of performances, locations, etc.

Karin W. indicated that she is enthusiastic about the project because it reflects the desires of the Steering Committee over the past many months to encourage outdoor performances in downtown, and also is a project that someone outside of the Steering Committee is responsible for managing but which we may be able to help in promoting. As a volunteer committee we may not have the capacity to get involved in event production ourselves but can lend a hand to something managed externally.

Karin W. asked whether people will be able to donate to buskers using an app rather than in cash, and Eugene indicated that he plans to do so and performers can utilize QR codes on sandwich board signage at performance locations.

Robin H. shared with Eugene her hope to get local musicians' music playing in local stores and restaurants. She suggested that the idea may be merged with the Berkshire Busk project plans by working with the local radio stations (WSBS, WBCR) to also become a promotional partner. Seth K. has already preliminary conversation with Asa Hardcastle at WBCR. Karin shared the name of Dave Isby at WSBS as another lead.

Robin H. also suggested that permits may be needed for these live performances, and encouraged Eugene to contact the town about this. He has already been working with Mark Pruhenski for some time and will continue to ensure that the town is fully informed and aligned. Robin also indicated that retailers should be in the loop so that he does not encounter any resistance regarding performers or signage being placed on sidewalks.

Seth K. expressed enthusiasm and support for the project, and asked whether there was a date by which plans would have to be canceled if funding is not secured. Also concerned about the potential for the town or state regulations to prevent outdoor performances to occur. Eugene responded that all promotion would reinforce masking and distancing protocols.

Jeff C. shared that he has already been in contact with Eugene and he will likely be involved with planning. He encouraged Seth to be involved considering his background in entertainment. He asked whether retailers would be likely to participate in a "rounding-up" program so that partial proceeds from retail sales could support performers. Robin H. shared that most of the retailers are already doing this but in support of the food pantry, and she did not think it would be good to ask them to move their support away from food pantry work at this time.

Eugene would like to find a way for visitors who eat or shop locally to get some sort of coupon or sticker to participate in a gamification feature to Berkshire Busk. He has not fully fleshed out this idea but encourages committee members to suggest refinements. Some ideas may not be able to be implemented in the first year. He will talk to Karin about how to keep dialogue going and involve committee members in future planning.

Neel W. expressed enthusiasm for this idea taking form, which will help draw people downtown. Eugene will connect with Neel offline to discuss an idea for a communal poster or mural in support of the event. In closing, Eugene indicated that he is very hopeful that the performances and performers will represent a wide range of mediums and backgrounds.

Minutes of 12/17/2020 meeting – Seth K. made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, Barbara W. seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

Treasurer's Report – Barbara W. informed the group that we have spent \$216 for 6 months of Constant Contact subscription, and the balance remains at \$3,355.

Steering Committee Membership – Sally Michael Keyes and Abi Rollins introduced themselves at the previous meeting. Betsy A. made a motion to accept the candidates to the Steering Committee, Jeff Caminiti seconded. The new members were approved unanimously. Karin W. thanked Sally and Abi for their willingness to join and support the Committee.

MCC Update – Laura B. shared a draft budget for FY21, which she has built in coordination with committee co-chairs in preparation for applying to MCC funding application. Cultural Districts are eligible to request up to \$7500 this cycle. As much of the funding as possible would need to be spent or at least encumbered by June 30th of 2021. Proposed budget items are drawn from previous committee discussions and Laura reviewed each item briefly. Betsy A. shared that she had reached out to the Berkshire Map owners to secure prices for being featured on the printed map. Laura indicated that there is room in the budget for this if the group decides to do so.

Richard L. asked how the e-newsletter and social media accounts are being managed. He has noticed that the social media accounts have not been being regularly updated, and was unaware of an e-newsletter from the District. Laura explained that the e-newsletters go out approximately once every two months, and that she is responsible for gathering content and building each newsletter within a template. Richard suggested looking at other pricing tiers and revisiting the annual subscription level. Also some discussion of the budget line for upgrades to the website. The budget item ensures that if Silo Media needed to make structural changes to the site, we would be able to make these changes. Richard L. indicated that we should be making sure we have full administrative access immediately. Karin explained that Silo has not been resistant to allowing access, but we have not yet pursued access or training. Regarding social media, Chris R. was able to update the group that the town is working towards a contract with a Dartmouth student and this student may also be able to take on social media work for the Cultural District. We are working with Housatonic Heritage to contribute toward the intern's stipend. We will need to clarify expectations and set goals for post frequency. Chris acknowledged that our accounts have been stale for some time and that this appears to be a good solution. Richard L. indicated that we should carefully guide the tone and approach of the prospective

intern and stated that he would like to speak with her to gain a better understanding of which tools she would be using.

Laura B. asked the group to consider the proposed dollar amount in support of Berkshire Busk, as this would be a new program in 2021 and is a substantial portion of the grant budget. The group discussed some ways to try to encourage participation in and support of Berkshire Busk by local business owners. We anticipate some concerns being expressed and Karin stated that Eugene and his committee will need to do a lot of advance outreach with local establishments to get them comfortable with the concept.

Lamppost Banners – Neel W. expressed that he has concerns about the productivity of students who are still working remotely. For the right student this type of project may serve as a catalyst to get them activated. Laura shared results from an online ranking exercise regarding venues and themes. She will forward the results of the ranking to Neel so he can use the information in making assignments. Some of the thematic priorities may be interpreted on more than one banner. Karin W. asked Laura B. to write up a paragraph to summarize our intentions for Neel to share with the student artists. Neel and Laura will meet separately to further discuss the list and the summary paragraph.

Meeting Dates and Times - After the last meeting we sent a Doodle poll around to see if there are better days or times to meet. Responses to options were fairly evenly distributed but Wednesday morning at 9 seemed to work for most. For the February meeting we will attempt Wednesday the 24th at 9am, and determine at that time if we want to change the rest of the year's schedule to the 4th Wednesday of each month.

Adjourn - The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 am.

Next meeting: February 24th, 2021 at 9:00 AM via Zoom

Laura Brennan / 

