

Brattleboro Town Arts Committee
November 10, 2015
Latchis Theater
Notes prepared by Angel Francia-Mackinnon

As stated in public invitation:

“Promoting Brattleboro The Town Arts Committee of Brattleboro (TAC) invites you to the next Special Meeting of groups interested in the promotion and prosperity of the Town of Brattleboro. As a follow up to the meeting on September 22nd, in which three new initiatives emerged, this meeting will continue addressing the goal of promoting Brattleboro in a bigger world, with the Arts as one of the media. This is an opportunity for those at the last meeting to report on the growth of their initiatives, and to seek further community involvement and support. For newcomers, bring ideas that you already have, and please be willing to see the results of what can happen in collaboration and with new forms of dialogue. The meeting will be held in the Latchis Theater on November 10th from 4-6pm. Please RSVP to this email if you plan to attend. Thank you for your time and future efforts. We look forward to seeing you in person on November 10th.

Meeting Convened at 4:07 pm with 5 TAC members present:

Hugh Keelan, Adam Salviani (TAC Vice-Chair), Dave Potter, Doug Cox, Angel Francia-Mackinnon (scribe), and Donna Macomber (TAC Selectboard representative)

Introductions by everyone present:

Susan Rosano- Vice-President of Arts Council of Windham County

Elsie Smith- Co-founder of NECCA. They are building a new facility on Putney Road.

Shanta Lee Crowley- An artist of many talents, President of the Arts Council of Windham County, photographer, bellydancer, etc.

Dick DeGray- Unofficial Mayor of Main Street, an interested party for the betterment of town. Looking forward to action steps from this meeting.

Greg Worden- Proprietor of Vermont Artisan Designs.

Meg Donahue- Interested citizen and artist.

Donna Macomber- Artist of human processes, Selectboard representative.

Keelan poses a question:

At what percentage is the following concept functioning-
“WE ARE PROMOTING BRATTLEBORO”

Going around the room, answers ranged- 10%, 15-25%, 10-30%, 35%, 70%, 25%, 60%, 0-90%.

-*DeGray* sees that we do a better job of promoting within the community than outside of Brattleboro.

-*Smith* sees 90% operating when people are at “the table,” but 0% operating for people who don’t know “the table” exists. She believes there are many demographic assumptions, and the majority of people have to focus on feeding their kids.

-*DeGray* wonders who is the target and who is “we?”

-*Worden* asks how many people at the meeting saw or know of the recent article about Brattleboro’s art scene in the Boston Globe? (About half of the people raise their hands.) He says it was a very positive promotional piece.

A conversation ensues about the direction of information and promotions about town and ongoing inside of it, using the Boston Globe article and it’s reach as an example.

Keelan Poses another question:

“PROMOTING BRATTLEBORO- WHY IS IT DESIRABLE?”

-*Francia-Mackinnon* gives a basic example of why promotions are important in her life. Working at duo Restaurant requires that a certain percentage of people traveling to parts beyond Brattleboro stop in town for dinner on their way home. People in the seats, meaning people knowing that duo and Brattleboro exist, is the first step. As an artist herself, *Francia-Mackinnon* cites the importance of a restaurant job in a successful establishment allowing time to work on her creative endeavors.

-*Crowley* emphasizes the importance of “young blood” being attracted to town, and wonders how to get them to stay.

-*Salviani* speaks about how promoting brings more money into the community to promote flourishing arts culture, to strengthen and stabilize what we have, which may not be as stable as we might like it to be. “If promotion, then the possible creation of stability.”

-*Cox* wishes to strengthen the identity as a whole, by bringing all of the little pieces together (NECCA, ACWC, Write Action, etc.)

-*Rosano*- To attract new and exciting arts and artists to offer the public.

-*Donahue* thinks Brattleboro needs to attract new TALENT, not just ARTISTS. By approaching it this way, we attract techies and more economy, to help “float the boat for all people.”

-*Francia-Mackinnon* mentions the extreme end of the attracting tech spectrum that Meg brings up, and how places like San Francisco have lost control of their creative identity and artists and regular people have been priced-out. (Gentrification)

-*DeGray* counters *Francia-Mackinnon*’s statement with the fact that on one hand, she needs people with money to come into duo for her to make a living, but doesn’t want people with money in town?

-*Francia-Mackinnon* clarifies that it is a far-off concern and extreme, but one worth taking into account when imagining what promotions will occur, and how to direct the path of growth instead of letting it take Brattleboro over.

-*Keelan* wants to draw attention to how respectfully we have been able to have a discourse of disagreement in this forum.

-*Macomber* distinguishes “ATTRACTION” over “PROMOTION.” She says that tensions exist, but “this is not a time for me to stop singing,” drawing on an anecdote about a member of her gospel choir who sang through personal adversity.

Cox says that Brattleboro is more than just a place, but a (70%) healthy community that he is proud of.

-*Worden* speaks to the importance of nurturing an ambassadorial quality with people who come to visit Brattleboro, then go home with their experience to share with others.

-*Crowley* agrees that Brattleboro is more than just a place, but more of an experience. She notes that she has friends who now come to visit 2-3 times a year and always want to know what festivities are happening in town (especially the Dance Festival).

Keelan poses yet another question:

“PROMOTING BRATTLEBORO- WHY IS IT NOT DESIRABLE?”

-*DeGray* speaks to how difficult it can be to promote a town that has a large population having moved from the city, wealthy enough to pay the rents as they are, and enjoy Brattleboro as a bedroom community that they don’t want to see change.

-*Keelan* asks *DeGray* how the fact that they feel that way renders him powerless?

-*DeGray* believes he needs to be respectful of that viewpoint, but still promote Brattleboro.

-*Worden* shares that Brattleboro has had a population of 12,000 for many years, and how it is mostly geographical that it has remained so stable. It lies in the valley and has “unbuildable” hills that have acted to keep the population from exploding.

-*Smith* compares it to Boulder, CO, where the city became too expensive, so artists live on the outskirts. It is the sort of thing that town planning needs to look at and investigate in advance.

-*Worden* says that there has to be a better balance in town. It cannot continue to have the percentage of people that it does who live here without the means to do so.

-*Salviani* says that we are much closer to the poverty end of the spectrum than the gentrification end, and that we must focus on sustaining what we do have.

-*DeGray* says that in one week we have news that Al Roker is coming to town AND the second drug-related shooting in 5 years. He notes that 70% of school children are on needs-based food programs, but that our affluent population is very generous, giving to many drives for the less-fortunate. He wonders if we are promoting activities for day-visitors or to attract people to live here?

-*Smith* learned a lot about planning a town from a performance in Athens, GA. She says we need to get to know how we got the town we have now, know it’s history.

-*Rosano* believes that we should start out with the “simple” goal of appealing to tourists for visits. Not everyone who comes here wants to live here, but it would be great to open the town to those tourists.

-*Crowley* talks about the important step that ACWC is taking of promoting Gallery Walk outside of Brattleboro. ACWC is also planning a regional Arts Night celebration in May.

-*Keelan* says that we are all already doing something, but what are we not already doing?! That’s where the breakthrough happens. The new bit will almost always be with a new collaboration to break through the barrier.

-*Crowley* then wonders aloud what other Arts Councils are doing?

-*Donahue* speaks at length about how Wilmington, VT has the fastest internet connection in the state, and how that fact alone has attracted a lot of talent who desire that fast connection. She wonders what something like that could do for Brattleboro.

-*Potter* asks *Worden* if there are businesses who don’t like Gallery Walk.

-*Worden* admits that more sales would be a great thing that Gallery Walk can help facilitate. However, he says that if he doesn’t sell something, that it’s his fault, not the community’s. He mentions that tour buses now have parking available near the Youth Theater. He suggests that we could get local restaurants to work together to simultaneously accommodate tour buses.

The group broke up into two groups to come to specific goals for action steps:

Team A-

-More investment by the state is needed.

-Faster internet connection can attract techies. *Meg Donahue* will check in with Wilmington. (Accountability partner- *Greg Worden*)

-Find out why tourists don’t want to come back (survey). “You can’t fix a problem unless you know what the problem is.” *Elsie Smith* will work on this survey.

(Accountability partner- *Shanta Lee Crowley*)

-*Dick DeGray* suggests appealing to the town to use a portion of the 1% sales tax for promotions. *Adam Salviani* adds that having quarterly meetings with designated councils to divvy up the funds would be a great idea.

(Accountability partners- *DeGray* and *Salviani*)

Team B-

-To work on a branding Brattleboro with a logo that is stamped on every advertisement, etc. Should talk to the Chamber of Commerce.

-Shanta Lee Crowley talks about how the ACWC is branching out on social media for the Gallery Walk.

-*Angel Francia-Mackinnon* suggests creating a Gallery Walk Business Passport, intended to increase patronage to, and purchasing from, local participating businesses during Gallery Walk. It would be a booklet to get stamped, and when you have filled up (encouraging return visits to Brattleboro), then you get a prize.

(Accountability partner- *Shanta Lee Crowley*)

Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.