



## CHAPTER 8

# Arts & Cultural Resources

Brattleboro values the arts and our cultural resources, and recognizes the need to sustain and build on our environment of social vitality and artistic endeavors, both for its intrinsic benefits and as an important economic driver.

# Arts & Cultural Resources

## Goals

- A. Promote public appreciation, participation, dialogue, and support for the invaluable contribution that arts and culture makes to Brattleboro's economic vitality and quality of life
- B. Create a sense of community through the expansion of arts and cultural opportunities in the community
- C. Strengthen arts organizations
- D. Nurture the integration of art, architecture, and landscape architecture in Brattleboro
- E. Build a strong and viable arts and creative industries sector

## Policies and Actions

**Policy 8.1** Collect information regarding the cultural community's role in the economic vitality of Brattleboro

### Actions

- 8.1.1 Measure the economic impact of arts and creative industries in Brattleboro
- 8.1.2 Collect data on all artists, arts organizations, and art resources in the Brattleboro area and make the information public online as well as in a published directory

**Policy 8.2** Support the creation of prominent art activities, events, and art installations

### Actions

- 8.2.1 Maintain the Town Arts Policy
- 8.2.2 Use various media to increase awareness of the Arts in Brattleboro (i.e., brochures, self-guided walking and studio tours, banners and signs, web, mobile applications, etc.)
- 8.2.3 Continue to collaborate with the Town departments to integrate art into infrastructure work
- 8.2.4 Discuss the potential for an annual municipal contribution to the arts

**Policy 8.3** To strengthen the arts sector, support the creation of a comprehensive information-sharing network of artists, art organizations, and art resources in the Brattleboro area

### Actions

- 8.3.1 Create opportunities for artists and cultural groups to network
- 8.3.2 Create an online, interactive posting website for arts and cultural services

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**Policy 8.4** Establish opportunities for the participation of Brattleboro youth in public art projects

**Actions:**

- 8.4.1 Investigate ways to have youth representation on the Town Arts Committee
- 8.4.2 Plan with local educators to integrate youth into Town arts opportunities

**Policy 8.5** Address the economic, social, cultural, educational, physical, and age-related factors that limit accessibility to the arts in Brattleboro

**Actions:**

- 8.5.1 Gather pertinent data describing the current accessibility of art (activities, exposure, performance, instruction) in Brattleboro and use the data to identify gaps



For the purposes of this Plan, the terms “arts and culture” are defined in the broadest context, to include the visual, literary, performing (music, dance, and theater) and media (film, video, sound recording, animation) arts. Brattleboro recognizes the importance of arts and culture in defining the character of the community; promoting economic vitality; creating rich educational opportunities; and sparking innovation. Both the tangible and intangible benefits of arts and culture help make Brattleboro a desirable community in which to live and work. Therefore, the fostering of arts and culture is important to our quality of life.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

Brattleboro has a rich and diverse range of cultural resources, including a wide array of performing, literary, and visual arts organizations, performance venues, galleries, and museums, and a strong community of independent artists and craftspeople. An inventory of these assets is included in Appendix B. Brattleboro projects a lively cultural image, as demonstrated by the town’s designation as “One of America’s 20 Best Small Towns” in 2012 by Smithsonian magazine.

The activities offered by the Arts and Culture community include classes and workshops for adults and children, concerts, theatre performances, and art and historical exhibits. Brattleboro is home to numerous festivals, such as the annual Brattleboro Literary Festival and Women’s Film Festival and the monthly Gallery Walk, that provide opportunities for residents and visitors to experience the arts and culture.

Arts and cultural facilities are primarily centered in three locations: Downtown, Cotton Mill Hill, and West Brattleboro Village.

- **Downtown** is an active center that capitalizes on cultural resources. It serves as a major entertainment center for both Brattleboro and Windham County, with a museum, live entertainment venues, galleries, a movie theater, performance spaces, and arts and culture educational programs. It also hosts ongoing cultural activities and festivals such as Gallery Walk and the Women’s Film Festival. There have been ongoing efforts on behalf of several arts-related organizations to create an Arts Campus at the corner of Flat Street and Elm Street. The site is currently anchored by the New England Youth Theater.
- **Cotton Mill Hill** is a 3-story, 145,000-square-foot mill building dating to 1910 that offers business incubation space. It has attracted a high number of artists and creative businesses, serving as an important hub for arts industries in Brattleboro.
- **West Brattleboro**, both the historic village and extending west, is home to a museum, an art gallery, and several artist and artisan studios.

Performance, exhibition, and rehearsal space for the community is provided by private nonprofit organizations. The availability and affordability of these spaces are subject to the policies of each organization. This can prove challenging for struggling artists and fledgling arts groups. The general public and artists’ community have indicated the need to improve the handicapped-accessibility of existing performance spaces and to create additional performance space, in particular for youth.



## Economic Contribution

Measuring the impact of the arts and cultural institutions is difficult, as there are numerous methodologies with which to study it. A recent study, Economic Footprint of the Arts in Vermont, looked at the economic contribution of employment (including self-employment), compensation (including wages and benefits), and tax impact of the arts sector in Vermont.<sup>1</sup> The study revealed that art industries employ an estimated 4,342 people and generate \$19,438,480 in state and local tax impacts.<sup>2</sup> The employment figures indicate that the arts provide more direct employment than many well known Vermont industries such as food manufacturing (4,227), machinery manufacturing (2,900) and wood product manufacturing (1,992). More detailed information on covered employers and employees as well as a discussion of arts and creative industries clusters is available in Chapter 2 “Economic Development.”

In 2011, several arts organizations in Windham County participated in a nationwide study conducted by Americans for the Arts. The study found that the 39 participating nonprofit arts organizations in greater Brattleboro spent roughly \$7.6 million in 2005 and leveraged an estimated \$3.2 million in additional spending by arts audiences.<sup>3</sup> The report found that nonprofit arts and culture event attendees spend an average of \$20.94 per person per event, excluding the cost of admission. This is spending that affects the revenues of restaurants, hotels, retail stores, and other businesses.

The economic impact of cultural industries becomes even more significant if one includes for-profit groups such as independent artists, craftspeople, filmmakers, musicians, writers, and photographers, whose contributions are not included in this report.

## Municipal Commitment

The Town has demonstrated support for the arts in Brattleboro. In 2008, the Town Arts Committee was formed. This Committee has been an important bridge between the arts and cultural community, the community-at-large, and town government. They have been active in promoting opportunities for art in the public realm. A collaborative effort with DPW and local artists resulted in the replacement of portions of sidewalks already in need of repair with Horizontal Art—sidewalk slabs with art installations in them. Efforts to consider artistic design in street furniture (bus shelters, trash cans) have also been explored. This Plan includes an action to continue finding ways to integrate arts with infrastructure.

The Selectboard adopted a public art policy in 2009. According to the policy, public art is “publicly accessible original art that enriches the town and evokes meaning. It may include permanent visual art, performances, installations, events, and other temporary works. Public art should consider the site, its context, and audience. Public art may possess functional as well as aesthetic qualities; it may be integrated into the site or exist as a discrete work.” This Plan supports the maintenance of this policy.

The Town owns Union Station, now home to the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center (BMAC) for the operation of an arts center and museum. BMAC (a nonprofit organization) is responsible for the operation and maintenance of their space. Recent improvements include renovating the gallery space and the addition of a sculpture garden.

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## TOWN VALUES AND GOALS FOR PUBLIC ART

- *Stimulate excellence in urban design and public arts*
- *Enhance community identity and place*
- *Contribute to community vitality*
- *Involve a broad range of people and communities*
- *Value artists and artistic process*
- *Use resources wisely*

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Brattleboro has a rich and vibrant cultural community, and many organizations and individuals offer activities and facilities in the arts. Growth must involve the nurturing and strengthening of existing organizations, developing new cultural amenities, and focusing on gaps in service. To this end, the following needs have been identified:

- **Accessibility of the Arts:** While there is a high quality of cultural offerings in Brattleboro, they are not accessible to everyone. The community must continue to work to ensure that all residents, regardless of age, income, or ability, have access to the arts as participants and/or audience members. This requires partnerships between municipal and school entities as well as nonprofit and for-profit organizations. To understand what gaps exist, action step 8.5.1 of this Plan is to gather data from arts groups to identify accessibility issues.

Research shows that the arts are an important tool for developing an attachment to place, nurturing creativity, building critical thinking skills, and developing intellectual capacity and sensory function. Brattleboro's youth have repeatedly stressed the importance of arts to their educational experience. Ensuring high-quality arts education in the public schools is critical to enriching and enabling children's lives. Policy 8.4 in this Plan encourages youth participation in the arts. Actions 8.4.1 and 8.4.2 of this Plan are to encourage youth representation on the Town Arts Committee and to work with educators to get youth involved when there are art opportunities.

Brattleboro's youth and adults have identified Brattleboro's strong arts community as an asset and have expressed appreciation for the variety of cultural opportunities that result (this is also noted in Chapter 2 "Economic Development" as an asset to

be built on). In addition, maintaining and enhancing the cultural community in Brattleboro is important because arts and culture industries can play a vital role in attracting people, business, and investment, and in distinguishing Brattleboro as a dynamic and exciting place to live and work.

- **Administrative Structure:** There is a need to build the administrative and financial structure to support the arts. Creating a structure dedicated to building organizational capacity through education and mentoring, creating an information-sharing network, marketing and business development, and increasing public and private support for the arts will help artists feel less isolated.
- **Information Sharing:** Currently, there is little formal coordination among Brattleboro's arts organizations. There is no sole source for ticketing, programming,



promotion, marketing, or management, though some institutions do plan certain events to coincide with events or programs of other venues. In most cases, each arts venue sells tickets, advertises, plans, and promotes events individually. In addition, the organizations all raise funds separately, competing for the same funding allocations and foundation donations. To strengthen the arts sector, actions 8.3.1 and 8.3.2 of this Plan are to create artist networking opportunities and to create an online, interactive posting website for arts and cultural services.

- **Better understanding of the financial contribution of the arts to the area's economy:** The social and economic impact of arts and cultural industries is yet to be fully understood in Brattleboro. The quantification of these impacts can help establish the importance of the industries for policy and planning purposes. Action 8.1.2 of this Plan is to collect this information on the local level and publish a directory of arts resources, artists, and arts and cultural organizations.
- **Public Art:** Public art can convey visual interest and reinforce the community's identity as a vibrant arts community. Over the past several years, there have been great advances to integrate public art into the Downtown. The creation of a stronger cultural presence throughout Brattleboro through the creation of specific physical spaces and new initiatives that showcase arts and culture is desired. Actions included in this Plan to increase public art include the continuation of integrating arts into infrastructure and using different type of media to promote arts in the community. This Plan also supports discussions of a potential annual municipal contribution to the arts in order to expand public art.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This study looked only at artists, museums and historic sites, arts promoters and agents, and performing arts companies.

<sup>2</sup> Main Street Landing, *The Economic Footprint of the Arts in Vermont*, (November 2010).

<sup>3</sup> *Arts & Economic Prosperity IV: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences in Windham County*. For more information about this study or about other cultural initiatives in Windham County, visit the Arts Council of Windham County's website at [www.acwc.us](http://www.acwc.us).

