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February 28, 2023

Re: Manchester's Recognition as a Cultural District

To: Manchester Board of Directors, Steve Stephanou

From: Stacey Zackin, Manager of WORK\_SPACE & Dwayne Harris, Executive Director of Cheney Hall

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We take great pride and joy in the cultural offerings and opportunities throughout Manchester and are eager to engage residents, business owners, and visitors in what is currently taking place while planning future possibilities. To that end, a growing group of people and organizations are interested in Manchester's designation as an official State of Connecticut Cultural District (overseen by DECD). This group has met twice and includes the Town Troubadour, the Poet Laureate, and representatives from:

- African American Black Affairs Council
- Art FUD
- CAST Theater
- Celebrate Manchester
- Cheney Hall/Little Theatre of Manchester
- Dept. of Leisure, Family & Recreation
- Dept. of Planning & Economic Development
- Downtown Special Services District
- Greater Hartford Arts Council
- Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
- Lutz Children's Museum
- Manchester Art Association
- Manchester Arts Commission
- Manchester Historical Society
- Manchester Land Trust
- Manchester Pipe Band
- Manchester Public Library
- Manchester Public Schools
- MARC
- RiseUP / CT Murals
- Summit Studios
- The West Indian Community
- The Wit & Whimsey Poetry Club of Manchester
- WORK\_SPACE

We are excited to move forward and optimize the momentum that is starting to build. We have the support of the Arts Commission, which is willing to establish an advisory council subcommittee to serve as the Cultural District Commission that will facilitate the application process, recommend the geographic boundaries, and set a structure of expectations and sustainability for the District.

**What is a cultural district?** The Connecticut Office of the Arts defines a Cultural District as a walkable area of a city or town that features numerous cultural facilities, activities, and/or assets (both for profit and nonprofit).

- Compact area that is easy for visitors to recognize.
- Center of cultural activities – artistic and economic.
- Place where community members + visitors congregate and enjoy.

**Reasons to establish a cultural arts district:**

- Collaboratively market arts and culture attractions to visitors.
- Promote and encourage artists, entrepreneurs and creative businesses.
- Enhance Manchester's reputation as a cultural destination, increasing visitors and tourists
- Create pathways for unique funding from entities like the DECD's Office of the Arts, CT Humanities, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and for the Humanities
- Improve the quality of life for residents.
- Strengthen the distinctive character of our communities.
- Create a plan to drive economic growth and expand tax base.
- Support Sustainable CT certification <https://sustainablect.org/actions-certifications>.
- Contribute to Connecticut's cultural assets.
- Highlight culture and history of our community.

**The Towns that have already earned the designation:**

- **Ridgefield**, April, 2021
- **Torrington**, April, 2022
- **New London**, April, 2022
- **Wethersfield**, May, 2022
- **Bristol**, August, 2022

**More information can be found at:** [https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Arts-and-Culture/Programs\\_Services/Cultural-Districts](https://portal.ct.gov/DECD/Content/Arts-and-Culture/Programs_Services/Cultural-Districts)

**The State of CT believes:**

- Art & Culture are significant elements of making vibrant, vital, and sustainable communities.
- \$1 invested in Art/Cultural Tourism yields \$7 in return
- By working with NEA, funding and important economic and community health data will positively impact the people of CT

**Next Steps:** To be eligible for state Cultural District designation, Manchester will need to formally establish the Cultural District Commission whose members represent the shared interest of the district with the majority living or working in the district and ¼ representing the art/culture community. We suggest the Arts Commission take the lead on forming a commission that represents a diverse mix of organizations and businesses, including:

- City, town or borough
- Cultural council / arts council
- Cultural organizations (historical society, museum, ethnic heritage organization)

- At least one artist that lives and/or works in the district
- Organizations that represent artists (artist cooperative, etc.)
- For-profit creative business i.e., gallery, theater
- Local business and/or chamber of commerce

**Additional members could include:** Historic Preservation/History, Leisure Industry (including hotels and similar businesses), Educational Institutions, and Economic/Community Development

**The Cultural District Commission:**

- Could manage the district –obtain & direct resources, facilitate collaborations
- Might be asked for data on visitation, sales, employment, consumer surveys
- Place at least 2 signs with the state’s Cultural District branding

**Requirements:**

The commission would determine defined boundaries (walkable and accessible) of the Cultural District, which is to include: Cultural facilities, Artistic spaces, Creative businesses, Historic sites, and Locations of cultural activities (indoor and outdoor, such as festivals, etc.) The commission would also facilitate the completion of the application that will include listings of the town’s cultural facilities, assets, infrastructure and amenities, and a plan for future management of district. The Board of Directors will ultimately also need to adopt a resolution approving of the district.