

FINAL

ARTS & CULTURE TASK FORCE
Thursday, June 19, 2018
Dana House, Elm Street, West Lebanon, NH
7:00 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: Karen Zook (City Council Rep.), Susan Weber Valiante (Public Rep.), Joe Clifford (Local Art Rep.), Jessica Giordani (Local Art Rep.), Robert Welsch (Heritage Commission Rep.), Suzanne Prentiss (Mayor/City Council Rep.), Paul Coats (Director, Rec. Dept.)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sherry Fiore (Public Rep.), Chip Brown (Economic Vitality Rep.), Devin Wilkie (Public Rep.)

STAFF PRESENT: David Brooks (Director, Planning & Zoning)

GUESTS: Ben Van Vliet (Executive Director, Upper Valley Music Center)

1. **CALL TO ORDER – Mayor Suzanne Prentiss called the meeting to order at 7:09 PM.**
2. **Approval of Minutes: June 5, 2018**

*A MOTION was made by Robert Welsch to approve the June 5, 2018 Minutes.
The MOTION was seconded by Jessica Giordani.
* The vote on the MOTION passed (7-0).*

Mayor Prentiss spoke about the preservation efforts regarding the Dana House and the choice of the Dana House as a meeting place for the evening’s meeting. Mr. Welsch talked about the challenges of the location of the Dana House and the preservation work by the Heritage Commission.

3. Discussion Items:

A. Recap and discussion of 6/5/18 presentation by Nancy Pearson, Portsmouth City Councilor about Portsmouth’s Cultural Plan and Americans for the Arts information

Mr. Clifford commented on the wealth of information that was presented by Councilor Pearson and that it is important to have time to process all the points that were raised. Mr. Clifford restated an impactful comment from Councilor Pearson’s presentation that ‘Art is our thing at every table that matters.’

Mr. Welsch said that he would like the Task Force to have a list of goals. Mayor Prentiss said that in six months the Task Force is likely to only scratch the surface of the issues before the group. She would like the group to be able to provide guidance regarding future public art.

Councilor Zook would like to know how the City of Portsmouth navigates the issues of public policy and public art. Mr. Brooks said that there is a conditional use process that exists in Lebanon currently. Mayor Prentiss clarified which ordinances would be impacted by the conditional use process.

Mr. Welsch spoke about the Mill Project that was done by the Heritage Commission and suggested that engaging the public would be key in moving projects forward. Mayor Prentiss agreed that community involvement and public lobbying would be an important piece.

Mayor Prentiss led a language processing exercise to catalog similarities and differences between Portsmouth's Cultural Plan and what may apply to Lebanon. Mayor Prentiss asked the group to consider how long a timeline might be. Mr. Clifford said that he can envision phases that include having suggestions from one group being passed to the next group. He also suggested that public education is an important component. Mr. Welsch asked whether the group should consult with Hartford regarding incorporating art in the community. Mayor Prentiss agreed that there will likely be phases including plan development, execution, and sustainability. Mr. Clifford said that Hartford had developers that are also involved in the arts and were civically minded, which resulted in an organic growth of an artistic community. He suggested that Lebanon try to be 'friendly to the dreamers'. Mayor Prentiss suggested a round table to discuss this further.

Councilor Zook noted that the scale of Portsmouth's plan is much different than Lebanon. They have access to, and work alongside, developments on a larger scale. Mayor Prentiss said that perspective is an important concept to keep in mind. Councilor Zook said that we have large companies and community partners who may be interested in participating at some point in the future. Mr. Welsch noted that visibility creates momentum and that the group should consider how best to maximize visibility and generate excitement. Councilor Zook suggested mobilizing the public by interacting with citizens that are currently involved in arts and culture focused businesses.

Mr. Clifford noted Councilor Pearson's point about Portsmouth not having been considered an art town. Lebanon has a similar issue and there is an opportunity to craft a vision of Lebanon as an arts and culture destination. Mrs. Weber Valiante said that Portsmouth and Lebanon are similar in their sense of community and the willingness of people in the community to come together.

Mayor Prentiss asked Mr. Brooks and Mr. Coats to consider how best to move towards the Americans of the Arts credentialing or similar programs. Mrs. Weber Valiante suggested potentially involving Tuck students in a study. Mr. Clifford brought up the Creative Communities Program. Mr. Coats asked if there might be programs or arts programs that exist but that the task force is not aware of yet. Mr. Brooks suggested a calculator or similar tool to create a base line. Mayor Prentiss agreed that there should be a target for funding and businesses looking to partner with the task force will be looking for data that supports the requests for support. Mr. Van Vliet agreed that having data is important. He was at a meeting for the NH State Council for the Arts and while there he brought up the importance of being able to quantify the benefit of the arts on people's lives. Mr. Clifford suggested using quantifying examples from the Lebanon Opera House, the AVA Gallery, or similar businesses. Councilor Zook said that it would be easy to quantify ticket sales from the Opera House and there are nearby restaurants that likely have a sense of the impact to revenue that is generated from events. Mayor Prentiss suggested a pilot program to a targeted group that would ask specific questions to gather data. Councilor Zook suggested setting up a table at the Lebanon Farmers' market to solicit feedback from the community. Mr. Clifford reiterated his point that any data gathering should be measurable and should be focused on what the task force is trying to accomplish. Mr. Welsch said it would also be important to know who is visiting Lebanon and at what times of day. Mr. Brooks explained the rationale behind the numbers that the city uses now and suggested other ways that the city might be able to get at more data. Mayor Prentiss raised the question of how to get at the data in a simple and meaningful way. Mr. Welsch suggested that five questions might be sufficient. The group discussed what type of questions would be best. There should be a baseline, or an ordinary day, in addition to event driven data. Some examples of questions might be: Where do people come from? How much do they spend? Are they repeat customers? Portsmouth established a baseline and created metrics to help support funding requests. Mr. Coats said that this discussion is more appropriate for a future phase. Mr. Clifford said that the group is working on the assumption that the arts have a positive financial impact and that concrete data is needed.

Mrs. Weber Valiante agreed that simple and targeted data is important to know what the starting point is for the city. Councilor Zook said that it is important to engage the community and foster organic enthusiasm for the arts in Lebanon.

Mr. Clifford agreed with Councilor Zook's suggestions about community engagement and creating a signature event. Mayor Prentiss suggested using an existing event as a potential signature event and asked the task force to think about what event Lebanon might be able to rebrand. Mayor Prentiss said that the task force is in the beginning stages of a larger planning process and that in six months there should be some more concrete direction for the task force. Mayor Prentiss reassured the group that the brainstorming phase is a valuable part of the planning process.

The task force discussed the similarity between the population demographics between Portsmouth and Lebanon. Both communities have colleges, aging populations, state borders, and water nearby.

Mr. Welsch noted that the art and culture scene in Hanover is largely isolated within the Hanover community and does not look outward to other communities. Councilor Zook agreed that if there were vibrant opportunities for college graduates and youth, it could create connections for those populations. Mayor Prentiss spoke about moving to Lebanon in 1992 and the lack of options for youth at that time.

Mr. Coats said that Lebanon has the opportunity to be as successful as Portsmouth because the Lebanon community values quality of life. Mr. Clifford talked about the importance of working together towards a common goal and building infrastructure. Mr. Welsch noted the strong connections and networking that Councilor Pearson has done to be successful. Councilor Zook and Mr. Coats discussed the 'Friends of...' model to support city initiatives and departments. Mr. Clifford said that he sees three solid working groups around marketing and events, policy, and governance models. Mr. Coats said that the task force should be involved if the city undertakes a much-needed branding exercise.

Mayor Prentiss will send out pictures of the notes that were taken on the board and send out information to the group. Mr. Welsch said it is important to remember West Lebanon in planning and involving the community. Mayor Prentiss said that it is important to be as inclusive as possible.

The group discussed the parallel between medicine and art. The task force talked about the possibility of partnerships with Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center.

4. **Future Agenda Items:** Not discussed.
5. **Next Meeting Date:** **July 10, 2018, Ballet School**
6. **Other Business:** Not discussed.

7. Adjournment:

A MOTION was made by Robert Welsch to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 PM.

The MOTION was seconded by Karen Zook.

** The vote on the MOTION passed (7-0).*

Respectfully submitted,
Brandy Sailors-Dow
Recording Secretary