

Bridgeport Connecticut Cultural Plan

Approved by Bridgeport Cultural Assessment
Steering Committee
December 11, 2007

Planning was funded by the Greater Bridgeport Community Foundation and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism and organized by the Housatonic Art Museum, the Fairfield Arts Council, and the new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance.

The Bridgeport Cultural Plan builds on the 2007 "One Coast -- One Future, Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Assessment" funded by the US Small Business Administration through the office of Congressman Christopher Shays, coordinated by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and the Fairfield County Business Council.

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Authorization The Bridgeport Cultural Assessment Steering Committee voted to approve this Bridgeport Cultural Plan December 11, 2007¹. The Bridgeport Cultural Plan addresses Bridgeport's specific cultural community and creative economy sector. It complements the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Plan, which links Bridgeport to initiatives in Fairfield County.

Recommendation to the City of Bridgeport The Committee recommends this plan be incorporated into the City of Bridgeport's Master Plan and that the City establish an office of cultural affairs as outlined in this plan. The Steering Committee also recommends specific changes to draft Master Plan Policies and draft Master Plan of Conservation and Development.

Long-term Goals

Goal 1. **Cultural Development** Strengthen Bridgeport cultural sector's capacity with leadership, funding, and marketing, to advance the city's quality of life and prosperity.

Goal 2. **Jobs in the Creative Economy** Create sustainable jobs in the creative economy with policies, regulations, and facilities that actively encourage artists and creative businesses to live and work in Bridgeport.

Goal 3. **Equity of Access** Celebrate the city's diversity and assure cultural opportunities throughout Bridgeport's neighborhoods.

Goal 4. **Education** Assure quality education that includes arts, history, and science.

Goal 5. **Environment** Create a quality environment with good design and preservation of buildings, open spaces, and public art.

The Cultural Plan's top four priorities

- 1) Establish a professionally-staffed and funded Bridgeport office of cultural affairs, overseen by a representative citizen commission, charged with responsibility to represent the cultural sector and lead implementation of this plan. (*highest priority*) Goal 1, Objective 1.
- 2) Increase public and private funding for the cultural sector. The City of Bridgeport should respond to an urgent funding crisis by creating a line-item funded municipal grants program for Bridgeport cultural development (*very high priority*) Goal 1, Objective 2.
- 3) Develop policies, programs, and facilities to actively recruit artists and creative businesses, making Bridgeport a center for creative industries. (*high priority*) Goal 2, Objective 1.
- 4) Create a comprehensive, three-year capacity-building initiative for Bridgeport nonprofit cultural organizations. (*priority*) Goal 1, Objective 3.

¹ See Steering Committee members' list, page 7.

Bridgeport Connecticut Cultural Plan

Goal 1. Cultural Development Strengthen Bridgeport cultural sector's capacity with leadership, funding, and marketing, to advance the city's quality of life and prosperity.

Objectives, priorities, and recommended actions

- 1) Establish a professionally-staffed and funded Bridgeport office of cultural affairs, overseen by a representative citizen commission, charged with responsibility to represent the cultural sector and lead implementation of this plan. (*highest priority*) (See appendix for costs in comparable cities.)
 - a) Coordinate advocacy, marketing, and cultural development with the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance.
 - b) Manage communications between cultural organizations, artists, creative businesses, and city offices.
 - c) Manage the City's cultural grants program.
 - d) Seek state and federal grants and private-sector contributions to supplement municipal funding.
 - e) The office can be structured as a municipal office of cultural affairs, governed or advised by an arts commission (75% of large American cities organize arts commissions this way).
 - i) Amend the 2007 Arts Commission ordinance to broaden its scope as outlined in this plan.
 - ii) Alternatively, the City could enter into a multi-year, funded contract with a non-profit agency to manage Bridgeport's cultural development (more typical of smaller cities with significant private funding).
 - f) Organize collection of attendance and economic data to document the impact of the cultural sector on Bridgeport's economy.

- 2) Increase public and private funding for the cultural sector (*very high priority*)
 - a) The City of Bridgeport should join private-sector funders and the state of Connecticut to respond to an urgent funding crisis by creating a line-item-funded municipal grants program for Bridgeport cultural development (see action step 1.c. above).
 - i) Create operating or program grants for nonprofit cultural organizations.
 - ii) Create project grants for public-benefit or education projects by artists.
 - b) Encourage increased cultural funding by corporations and businesses that would benefit from a more vital cultural sector's contributions to quality of life and prosperity.
 - c) Explore the feasibility of a business/arts forum as done with arts and business councils in other cities.
 - d) Encourage increased private philanthropy by individuals and foundations.
 - e) Advocate for increased state and federal funding.
 - i) The Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism should respond to the urgent need for funding documented in the Bridgeport cultural assessment with special initiative funds and encouragement for nonprofits to compete for grants.
 - ii) Congressional offices should seek federal funding.

- f) Encourage non-traditional partnerships including: environment, transportation, housing, social services, etc.
- 3) Create a comprehensive, three-year capacity-building initiative for Bridgeport nonprofit cultural organizations. *(priority)*
 - a) Seek funding and partnerships with the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance, City of Bridgeport, Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism, Fairfield County Community Foundation, Fairfield County corporate sponsors, one or more federal agencies, and a national service organization such as National Arts Stabilization or the Nonprofit Finance Fund.
 - b) The initiative should include organizational assessments, training, one-on-one consulting, peer learning, and multi-year funding. See New Haven and Hartford for examples of successful stabilization programs.
 - 4) Build nonprofit capacity with ongoing training and assistance for improved effectiveness in areas such as: governance, accountability, grants-writing, fundraising, and marketing.
 - a) Strongly encourage nonprofit organizations to participate in existing opportunities for professional development offered by the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance, Fairfield County Community Foundation, colleges and university, City, and state agencies.
 - b) Encourage use of consulting services offered by the Peer Advisors managed by the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance.
 - 5) Coordinate marketing of Bridgeport cultural attractions to locals and regional residents and tourists.
 - a) Establish a Bridgeport identity that cites its many cultural attractions.
 - b) Coordinate cultural tourism with the Bridgeport and Coastal Fairfield County cultural attractions, the Convention and Visitor's Bureau, and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism.
 - c) Establish a public art ordinance and encourage private development for public art.
 - d) Preserve historic buildings and places.
 - 6) Advocate for increased awareness and support of Bridgeport's cultural sector, which is integral to Bridgeport's quality of life, economic development, and business decisions to locate or stay in the city.
 - a) Coordinate with the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance to increase state and federal funding for the arts.
 - b) Help make the case to civic leaders and businesses that the cultural sector is critical to the city's well being, yet is fragile and at risk.
 - 7) Develop the downtown cultural district by encouraging downtown cultural organizations, creative businesses, and cultural events.
 - a) Define and market a downtown cultural identity to residents and tourists (see objective 5 above).
 - b) Create good, pedestrian-friendly building and landscape design standards.
 - c) Actively encourage downtown festivals, performances, parades, and other celebratory events that bring residents and visitors downtown with streamlined City procedures, logistical assistance, and marketing.

Goal 2. Create Jobs Develop sustainable jobs in the creative economy with public policies, regulations, and facilities that actively encourage artists and creative businesses to live and work in Bridgeport.

- 1) Develop policies, programs, and facilities to actively recruit and retain artists and creative businesses, making Bridgeport a center for creative industries. (*high priority*)
 - a) Develop ordinances to encourage cultural overlay districts, simple zoning variance procedures, and/or creative enterprise zones to actively promote development of artist and creative business live/work spaces.
 - b) Review and amend zoning regulations to encourage creative businesses and artist residencies.
 - c) Help artists and other small creative businesses navigate municipal permits and regulations with city staff that actively encourage and assist these enterprises.
 - d) Offer artist and creative businesses similar tax incentives as done with larger developers. Defer business taxes for creative businesses that pioneer in under-utilized buildings and neighborhoods.
 - e) Actively help artists displaced by development to avoid loss of creative sector jobs.
- 2) Integrate cultural development into the City's Master Plan and economic development plans.
- 3) Develop artist housing and studios with adaptive re-use and artist incubators.
 - a) Assist artists and creative businesses to plan and secure financing to own the spaces they develop to avoid the otherwise inevitable displacement as they help improve property values by their presence.
 - b) Inventory artist spaces and create a directory to help match creative businesses with potential studios as is done in Cleveland, Chicago, and Boston (visit www.artistlink.org)
 - c) Tap national research, models, and artist space development tools created by LINC (Leveraging Investments in Community) visit www.lincnet.net.
- 4) Connect artists with continuing professional education to enhance their arts, business, and marketing skills.

Goal 3. Equity of Access Celebrate the city's diversity and assure cultural opportunities throughout Bridgeport's neighborhoods.

- 1) Celebrate Bridgeport's diverse cultures as a multi-ethnic community with a rich variety of cultural traditions.
 - a) Encourage artists, arts and heritage programs that increase awareness and understanding of the many national and ethnic origins of Bridgeport's neighborhoods.
 - b) Encourage NRZ committees to incorporate arts and heritage into their plans.
 - c) Require that nonprofit organizations seeking municipal support are representative of the city's diversity in their governing boards and programming.
- 2) Encourage cultural programming in community centers.
 - a) The City should continue to support neighborhood bands, music and art instruction, and cultural clubs in the community centers.
 - b) Extend cultural programming to neighborhoods not now served with cultural programs.

- c) Encourage community cultural groups with information, services, and funding.
- 3) Encourage cultural centers in neighborhoods so that residents are served by cultural institutions downtown and throughout the city.
- 4) Assure neighborhood access to cultural programs, education, and services.
 - a) Encourage cultural organizations to make all residents welcome and to help remove barriers to their participation in cultural programs.
- 5) Assure cultural organizations' programs are accessible to people with disabilities and compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Goal 4. Education Assure quality education that includes arts, history, and science.

- 1) Assure every public school student has access to a sequential program of arts and science education taught by certified professional teachers.
- 2) Help complement arts and science education with enrichment programs with cultural intuitions.
 - a) Cultural organizations should develop enrichment programs that further school's educational goals.
 - b) Encourage Bridgeport schools to seek Enrichment Grants from the Fairfield County Community Foundation.
- 3) Help match artists with in-school residencies.
 - a) Identify teaching artists qualified to work in schools.
- 4) Promote after school and out of school learning opportunities for all ages.

Goal 5. Environment Create a quality environment with good design and preservation of buildings, open spaces, and public art.

- 1) Create a municipal Conservation and Open Space Commission.
- 2) Preserve parks, open spaces, and historic sites.
 - a) Create overlay maps of historic sites to aid in preservation.
- 3) Establish a public art program that places and maintains art in public places.
 - a) Plan and approve a percent for art ordinance that allocates at least 1% of public investments in capital projects into public art.
 - b) Develop incentives so that private developers will create public art projects.
 - c) Preserve and maintain new and existing art in public places.
- 4) Establish standards for good design in buildings, landscapes, signs, and other land uses.
- 5) Promote environmentally sustainable development.

Approval

Approved and recommended by November 13, 2007 vote of the Bridgeport Cultural Assessment Steering Committee:

Michael Bielawa, Bridgeport Public Library
Susan Breen, artist
Razul Branch, student and arts promoter, Housatonic Community College
Dan Camboni, Nest artist Joe Celli, Black Rock Arts Center
Gregg Dancho, The Beardsley Zoo
Nancy Hadley, City of Bridgeport
Linda Malkin, Discovery Museum
Janice Martin, Bridgeport Regional Business Council
Kathy Maher, Barnum Museum
Harry C. Laurie, artist
Ryan Odinak, Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance
Nick Pasquerillo, video producer
Yolanda Petrocelli, artist
Guy Rocco, artist and producer
Keith Rogerson, Bridgeport City Council
Billie Jean Sullivan, City Lights Gallery
Nancy Sweeney, Bridgeport Public Library
Robbin Zella, Housatonic Art Museum

Technical advisor, Dr. Craig Dreeszen, Dreeszen & Associates

Methods

Leadership A steering committee of Bridgeport cultural and civic leaders has overseen the Bridgeport Cultural Assessment and Plan. The work is administered jointly by the Housatonic Art Museum and the Fairfield Arts Council, operating as the new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance. Dr. Craig Dreeszen conducted the assessment research. The Bridgeport Cultural Assessment built upon recent research and planning for Coastal Fairfield County as part of the One Coast One Future initiative.

Public meetings Planning has been inclusive, with 110 Bridgeport citizens participating in nine public assessment meetings and three Steering Committee meetings. Another 68 Bridgeport residents responded to a county-wide survey. The assessment meetings included two in November 2006 and May 2007, organized as part of the Coastal Fairfield, One Coast -- One Future Cultural Assessment. We convened the Bridgeport Steering Committee on September 26, 2007 and held six additional Bridgeport focus groups October 24-26, 2007 (60 people attended). The Bridgeport Steering Committee met again November 13 and December 11 to finish its recommendations. See the appendix for a summary of the October focus groups.

Survey research As part of a One Coast – One Future Coastal Fairfield County cultural assessment, we surveyed constituents of cultural organizations and business leaders. We heard from 380 individuals, with most from Fairfield (23%) and Bridgeport (18%). Cultural organizations were the primary target for this survey and 111 cultural leaders replied. This is a good response for the cultural sector for which we are planning. However, the sample is not representative of the general population and we cannot assume these opinions are held by most citizens. See the appendix for an executive summary of the survey report.

Plans and studies review We reviewed previous studies, cultural inventories, and plans. We examined the draft Bridgeport Master Plan. We extracted cultural economic data from reports by Americans for the Arts, National Center for Charitable Statistics, New England Foundation for the Arts, and United States Census.

Cultural inventory The consultant and Steering Committee worked with Housatonic College IT professionals and staff from New England Foundation for the Arts and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism to develop a cultural inventory database. Visit <http://www.coastalfairfieldcounty.org> to consult the directory.

Work Plan Revised 9/12/07

Sept 6, 2007 Funding confirmed

September 10 Organize and assign tasks. Executive committee confirms scope of work and identifies candidates and sets date for first Greater Bridgeport Steering Committee. Zella and Odinak invite community leaders to join a new Leadership Team for the Bridgeport Arts Community.

September 26 Convene first meeting of Greater Bridgeport Steering Committee to identify Bridgeport cultural issues, refine the work plan, and start to develop a local cultural strategy.

October - November Implement assessment and planning Conduct interviews, focus groups, and constituent planning meetings (Dreeszen makes a three-day site visit October 24-26). Dreeszen writes assessment report and starts to outline plan.

November 13 Greater Bridgeport Steering Committee meets to consider assessment findings and develop the Bridgeport cultural strategy. Communicate emerging plan to build support for the plan.

December 11 Greater Bridgeport Steering Committee meets to approve the cultural strategy including responsibilities for priority action steps.

January 2008 Executive Committee evaluates process and makes final report to funders.

Acknowledgements Planning was funded by the Greater Bridgeport Community Foundation and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism and organized by the Housatonic Art Museum, the Fairfield Arts Council, and the new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance. The Bridgeport cultural plan builds on the 2007 “One Coast -- One Future, Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Assessment” funded by the US Small Business Administration through the office of Congressman Christopher Shays, coordinated by the Bridgeport Regional Business Council and the Fairfield County Business Council.

Comparable Local Arts Agency Facts

Source: *Local Arts Agency Facts*, Fiscal year 2000 by Benjamin Davidson, Director of Research, Americans for the Arts. The report is based on 454 local arts agencies responding to a survey.

- 83% of get local public funding
- 51% of funding comes from local city or county government
- 40% get local option tax funding

Five-year budget history of private non-profit and public Local Arts Agencies (LAAs) based on 320 local arts agencies responding to the request in the 2000 Americans for the Arts survey.

Population	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Average all LAAs Annual budgets	1,033,833	1,125,251	1,267,254	1,378,681	1,469,417
100,000 to 499,000	602,925	648,164	678,620	722,306	768,950
Non-profit LAAs 100,000 to 499,000	477,742	526,453	572,014	643,765	675,574
Public commissions 100,000 to 499,000	944,770	980,528	969,738	936,782	1,023,938

A 2005 study by Wolf/Keens found that budgets declined after 2001 and started increasing again in 2205, but new comparable figures are not yet available.

- LAA funding decline started in FY02
- LAA budgets declined 2.3% in FY03
- Local government funding dropped significantly: down 4.7% from FY02 to FY03
- Wolf/Keens reports LAA budget increase starting FY05

Figure 1 Funding sources for public LAAs FY03

Public Local Arts Agency Funding FY2003

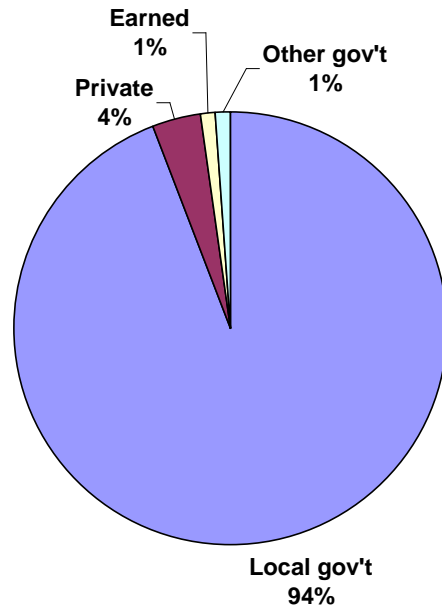


Figure 2 Sources of private LAA funding FY03

Private LAA Funding FY2003

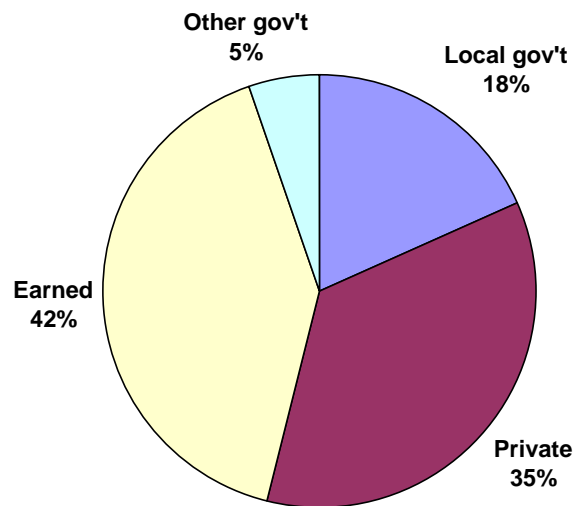


Figure 3 LAAs funded with Local Option Taxes

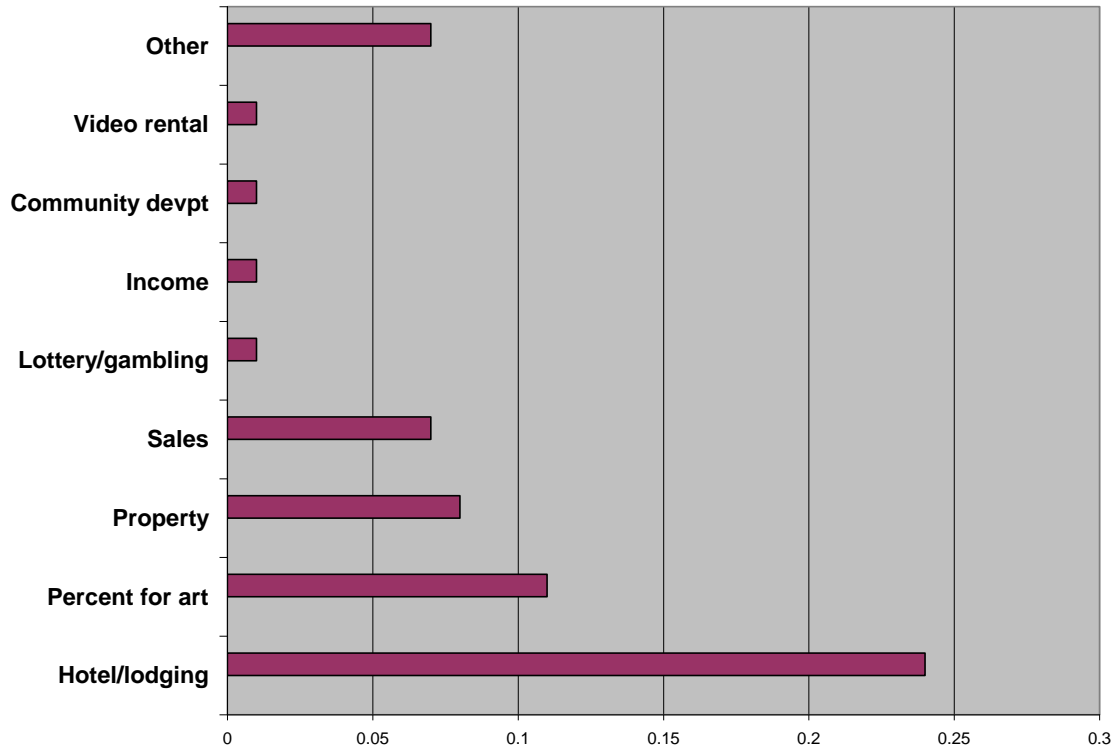


Figure 4 LAAs working on community issues

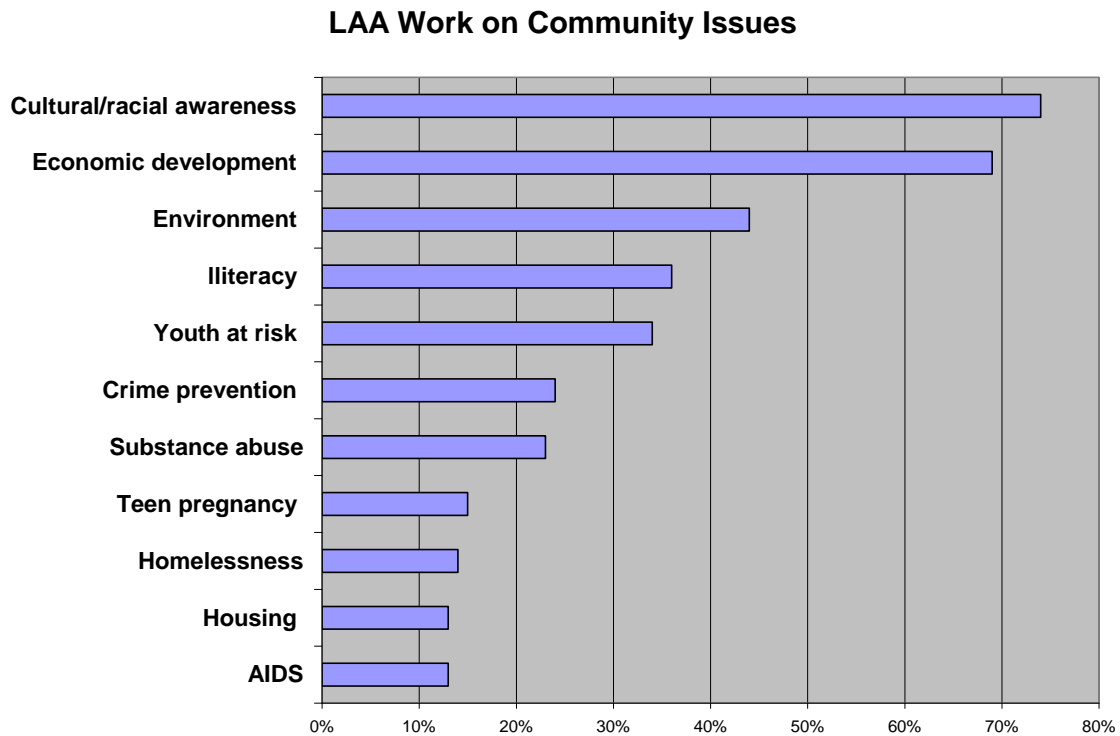
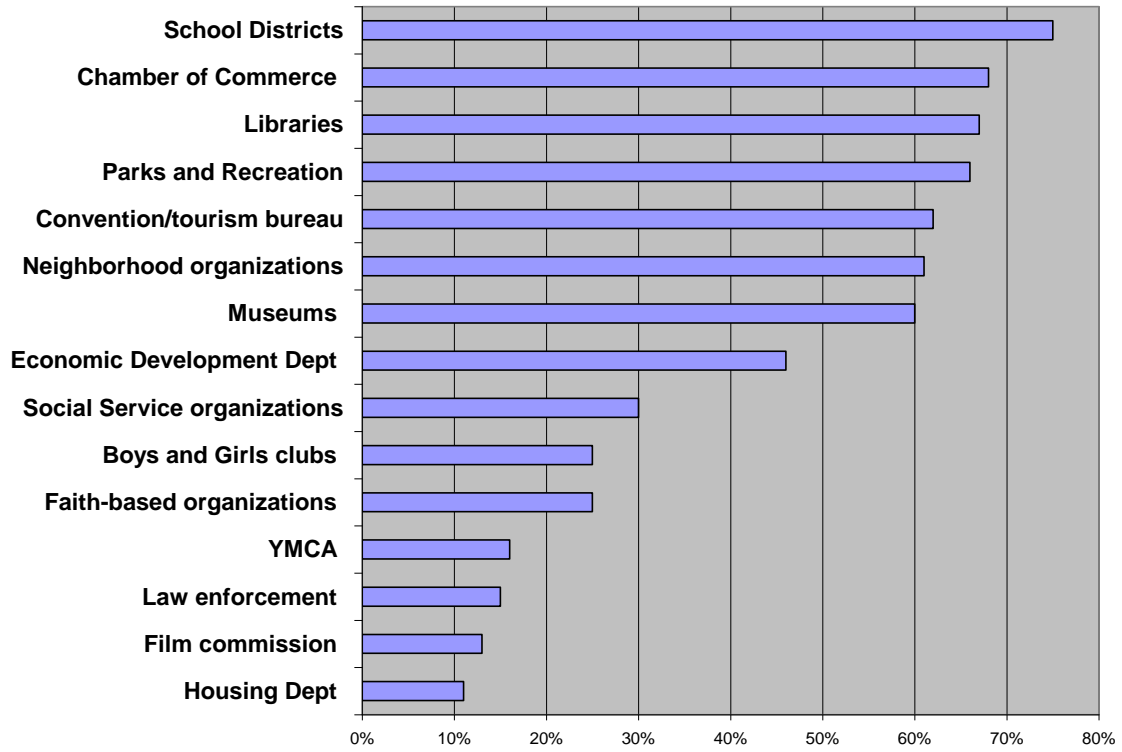


Figure 5 LAAs working in partnerships



Bridgeport Cultural Assessment Summary

Revised November 15, 2007

Organized by the Housatonic Art Museum and the Fairfield Arts Council Report
by Craig Dreeszen, Dreeszen & Associates

Cultural Assessment Objectives

- Confirm top priorities defined by local research and coordinated with the regional Cultural Assessment and the new Coastal Fairfield Cultural Alliance.
- Design a system for local and regional communication, coordination, and advocacy through a Bridgeport local arts agency and the Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance (or other system as determined in the planning).
- Develop a cultural development strategy to be integrated in the Bridgeport Master Plan and implemented by a new coalition of local and regional arts agencies and their allies.
- Document progress with regular status reports to the steering committee and a final written report with key findings and recommendations.

Key Assessment Findings

Cultural Assets

Bridgeport citizens in focus groups, interviews, and a survey described the city's significant cultural assets. Published reports provided additional information.

Creative economy The Bridgeport Master Plan acknowledges that arts and entertainment are a significant part of the local economy. In fact, arts and entertainment jobs are one of just four categories of employment growing in Bridgeport. Urbanomics reports, "between 2000 and 2003, the number of workers employed in the arts and entertainment sector rose from 680 to 835" and remained fairly constant through 2006²." This is in contrast to declining jobs in nearly every other sector of the Bridgeport workforce.

Cultural organizations Citizens enjoy quality arts, heritage, and interpretive science programs from a wide range of Bridgeport cultural institutions. Coastal Fairfield County's new cultural directory lists contact information for 53 organizations that offer cultural programs or services in Bridgeport³. These include institutions like Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo, Bridgeport Public

² Bridgeport 2020: A Vision for the Future, Draft July 2007, Section 9.0 Economic Development, p. 9-15.

³ <http://www.coastalfairfieldcounty.org/>

Library, Klein Auditorium, Greater Bridgeport Symphony, Barnum Museum, Housatonic Art Museum, Downtown Cabaret Theatre, Black Rock Arts Center, Music and Arts Center for Humanity, Playhouse on the Green, and Discovery Museum. Creative residents gather in many volunteer organizations such as the Puerto Rican Parade of Fairfield County, ArtForce, Dominican Social and Cultural Club, and Olympiad Greek Festival.

Cultural diversity The city has a growing population of people from many cultures and nations, making Bridgeport a most ethnically diverse city. City demographics are 45% White, 31% African American, 0.5% Native American, 3% Asian, and 15% from other races, and 6% from two or more races. Hispanic or Latino of any race 32% of the population. Over 36,000 people speak Spanish in their Bridgeport homes. The Puerto Rican pageant and parade is a public celebration of one of the city's many rich cultural heritages. Multicultural arts programming increases awareness and understanding, and is helping bridge differences. Some Bridgeport neighborhoods have arts and cultural programming in community centers and in one neighborhood arts center. The Coastal Fairfield assessment noted that "Multicultural programs are means to honor and include people of color and to help people of the dominant culture to better appreciate their neighbors. Many residents may be unaware of the rich cultural life of their ethnic neighbors, whose creativity may be expressed more often on porches and in churches than on stages."

Cultural facilities There are many venues and outdoor spaces at which cultural programming is presented among other mixed uses. These include the Klein Auditorium, Baldwin Plaza, McLevy Green, Seaside Park, and the Arena and Ballpark at Harbor Yard.

Education Residents have local access to higher education and continuing education through the University of Bridgeport and Housatonic Community College. Bridgeport Public Schools employ curriculum specialists and employ nearly 90 visual and performing arts teachers in every school. The Regional Center for the Arts provides arts instruction for its students and for other Bridgeport schools who bus students for supplemental classes. Music and Arts Center for Humanity (MACH) is Bridgeport's community school of the arts. Cultural organizations' outreach programs provide opportunities for students to learn visual and performing arts, and interpretive sciences.

Artists and creative workers There is a growing concentration of visual and performing artists, writers, and other creative professionals. An accurate count of Bridgeport artists is difficult, but the Housatonic Art Museum lists 1,300 Greater Bridgeport artists, the Read's building houses 60 artist residents, and City Lights has 80 artist members. Other creative businesses include film, radio, and television professionals as well as designers for industry, web, publishing, and graphics; Broadway staging; architects; publishers; advertising companies, and more.

Film industry A growing film industry has potential for jobs and investments. Housatonic College is setting up training programs for film crews.

Cultural tourism The Coastal Fairfield County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism are working to help develop Bridgeport and Coastal Fairfield County as destinations for visitors. The Visitors Bureau does market research and promotes events with advertising and an online events calendar.

History and heritage Bridgeport's history is still evident with 24 historic districts and an incredible 3,000 registered historic sites. Place names, like the Black Rock neighborhood, recall the deep water port and its historic maritime industry. Much of the city's beautiful architecture is preserved. The Barnum Museum reminds visitors of the city's famous citizen, P. T. Barnum.

Parks, gardens, and waterfront The city has beautifully preserved parks, gardens, and beaches. The city boasts two historic Olmstead gardens, the Beardsley Zoo and Botanic Gardens, and Seaside Park. Developers are working with the City to renew waterfront access.

Under-utilized buildings While the city has lost employment, the economic downturn has created a surplus of buildings with good potential for adaptive re-use for creative industries. Two theaters are mothballed for future re-use. The city's housing stock is more affordable than in surrounding communities. Artists have moved to Bridgeport to take advantage of the relative affordability of Bridgeport real estate.

New investments New restaurants, urban housing, and waterfront developments are good signs of returning vitality. The Reads Building is an example of building re-use and downtown cultural development. Urban Green Builders is an example of renewed interest investment in urban housing in Bridgeport.

Transportation Bridgeport's cultural attractions are accessible to tourists with bus, train, ferry, and highway access to major markets along the Atlantic seaboard.

Planning underway The ULI study recommended the city tap the potential of its cultural sector. This cultural assessment and the city's new Master Plan indicate proactive public policies that include the arts, culture, and interpretive sciences. The new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance and Mayor's Arts Commission are promising signs of cultural-sector leadership.

Civic engagement Artists, creative workers, and leaders of the cultural sector have been serving on public boards and commissions and actively participating in the political debates. Just as the creative sector is an important force in the city's economy, creative workers are becoming an important force in the political process. Artists in the focus groups were quite aware of their responsibilities as citizens and anxious to bring the creative process to bear on their communities' challenges.

Cultural challenges

This assessment stresses the potential of Bridgeport's assets, yet cultural development in the city also faces significant challenges.

Economy slow to recover The economy has been stagnant with significant losses of jobs in most sectors. This has resulted in unemployment, poverty, more commuting workers, empty buildings, and abandoned brown fields. Departing financial, insurance, and other corporations have decimated private-sector funding and reduced volunteer leadership and audiences for cultural organizations. Bridgeport's economic recovery has lagged behind the rest of Fairfield

County, making the regional coordination an appropriate strategy, as stressed in the One Coast – One Future initiative.

Funding crisis Public funding for cultural organizations in Bridgeport dropped dramatically from 2000 to 2006⁴. Funding from the state and federal governments and from the regional New England Foundation for the Arts dropped precipitously from a 20-year high in 2002 to a 20-year low in 2004. Funding has not recovered. Hartford and New Haven each receive more state cultural funding than does Bridgeport. The departure of manufacturing and financial corporations has also significantly reduced private funding. As public funding for essential social services has declined, private foundations and philanthropists have stepped in to make urgent social problems their priority. The combined loss of public and private funding and shift of private philanthropy has seriously threatened the city's nonprofit cultural organizations. Nearly all are struggling and some have failed. Most cultural organizations are under-funded, under-staffed, and lack capacity to raise funds and attract the audiences that would sustain their programs. Some focus group participants called for a Marshall Plan to save Bridgeport's nonprofit cultural organizations.

It is not too strong to say the state of Bridgeport's cultural institutions has reached a crisis. Most of the cultural organizations are approaching the point of diminishing support, beyond which they will fail. It costs far less to preserve an ongoing program than to recover failed organizations. For example, should the Beardsley Zoo or Barnum Museum cut staff and programs so far as to lose national accreditation, they lose access to federal funding. The cultural plan calls for a public-private capacity-building initiative intended to stabilize cultural organizations before more fail.

Marketing and audience development Cultural programs compete for audiences in the face of increasing costs, challenges of travel, home entertainment systems, the Internet, and television. Graying audiences decline as the generations who learned to appreciate arts and culture in school get older. A public safety perception exacerbates the marketing problem. News of drugs and violence encourage many families to move to suburban towns. Public perceptions of risks to safety discourage some audiences from attending cultural events in Bridgeport.

Artists vulnerable Some pioneering artists, who established studios or residences in the city, have been evicted, as their presence and improvements helped make buildings and neighborhoods more attractive to development. The loss of studios in The Nest is a recent example of the problem. Artists drawn by the promise of affordable housing or studios find few of the local services, support, or sales they need to sustain their businesses. Artists often do not have health insurance. Many artists have not yet found a sustainable market for their work.

Cultural facility needs Many cultural institutions struggle to maintain their historic buildings. Capital costs are high and funding sources are few. Connecticut does not have a state funding system for capital improvements as have been implemented in Massachusetts and other states.

Public schools stressed Schools are challenged by inadequate funding, high teacher turnover, family poverty, high drop out rates, and student transience. Arts educators are further challenged by inadequate supplies and books. High stakes testing requires teachers to focus on tests that do not value arts learning. School budgets and schedules have reduced funding and time for field trips. Teachers are preoccupied with social problems and report that classrooms are often

⁴ New England Cultural Database, 2007

difficult to manage. Over 95% of Bridgeport public school students are eligible for free or reduced cost meals.⁵

Transportation Traffic congestion sometimes discourages residents of neighboring towns from traveling into the city for cultural programming. Limited transportation prevents some neighborhood residents from participation in downtown cultural programs.

No local arts council The cultural sector does not yet have leadership, coordination, or services through a local arts agency. No agency consistently speaks or advocates for the sector. The county-wide cultural assessment acknowledged this need. The Urban Land Institute (ULI) report on economic development strategies for Bridgeport⁶ called for a municipal arts and entertainment commission as one of three recommendations for immediate initiatives. The draft Bridgeport Master Plan recommends that "...a local arts council should be created to coordinate local efforts and tap into regional approaches to coordination..."⁷ Artists who have gathered in a series of meetings have also called for the creation of a local arts council. The City Council has approved an ordinance to create a Mayor's Commission on the Arts, which could resolve this problem.

Cultural Opportunities

Most focus group participants saw more opportunities than problems. Many envisioned a city where a vital creative sector helped make a vital city attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses and where creative businesses were creating jobs. They envisioned equal opportunities in education and cultural participation. This assessment finds eight high-potential opportunities for cultural development in Bridgeport.

1. **Creative economy** -- One of the fastest growing sectors of the Bridgeport economy has more potential for attracting creative businesses.
2. **Artists** – Artists and other creative workers are the foundation of the creative economy. Bridgeport is well positioned to attract and keep a vibrant creative economy based on individual artists and creative businesses.
3. **Local and regional cultural leadership and coordination** -- A new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance provides the Bridgeport cultural sector with the opportunity to work regionally. As recommended in the 2005 Urban Land Institute (ULI) study and draft Bridgeport Master Plan, a local Bridgeport Arts Council can best take advantage of this.
4. **Capacity building initiative** The time is ripe for a capacity-building initiative to stabilize Bridgeport cultural organizations with coordinated assessment, training, consulting, mentoring, and funding. This has worked well in New Haven and Hartford.

⁵ Bridgeport School District, Strategic School Profile, 2004-2005

⁶ Bridgeport, Connecticut Citywide Economic Development Strategies, January 16-21, 2005, An Advisory Services Panel Report by the Urban Land Institute

⁷ Bridgeport 2020: A Vision for the Future, Draft July 2007

5. **Coordinated identity and marketing** -- City and business leaders have made downtown identity and marketing a top priority. Cultural attractions are a significant part of the city's identity.
6. **Advocacy** -- State, regional and federal funding has dropped disproportionately in Bridgeport. Coordinated advocacy can make a difference.
7. **Downtown cultural district** – Bridgeport's close concentration of cultural institutions is unique in a region where cultural attractions are widely dispersed.
8. **Neighborhood community and cultural centers** – The City's draft Master Plan calls for neighborhood development. At least two community centers employ cultural programming and instruction in service of community development. The Black Rock Arts Center does the same.
9. **Bridgeport Master Plan** – The City is renewing its Master Plan as recommended by the ULI study. Both the ULI report and the draft Master Plan include cultural resources as a municipal asset and priority. The City will integrate key policy recommendations from the cultural plan emerging from this assessment into the City's Master Plan.

Assessment Methods

Leadership A steering committee of Bridgeport cultural and civic leaders oversees the assessment. The work is administered jointly by the Housatonic Art Museum and the Fairfield Arts Council, operating as the new Coastal Fairfield County Cultural Alliance. Dr. Craig Dreeszen conducted the research and wrote this report. The Bridgeport Cultural Assessment looks closely at Bridgeport as we build on recent research and ongoing planning for Coastal Fairfield County.

Public meetings Planning has been inclusive, with 110 Bridgeport citizens participating in nine public assessment meetings and three Steering Committee meetings. Another 68 Bridgeport residents responded to a county-wide survey. The assessment meetings included two in November 2006 and May 2007, organized as part of the Coastal Fairfield, One Coast -- One Future Cultural Assessment. We convened the Bridgeport Steering Committee on September 26 and held six additional Bridgeport focus groups October 24-26, 2007 (60 people attended). The Bridgeport Steering Committee is scheduled to meet again November 13 and December 11 to finish its recommendations. See the appendix for a summary of the October focus groups.

Survey research As part of a One Coast – One Future Coastal Fairfield County cultural assessment, we surveyed constituents of cultural organizations and business leaders. We heard from 380 individuals, with most from Fairfield (23%) and Bridgeport (18%). Cultural organizations were the primary target for this survey and 111 cultural leaders replied. This is a good response for the cultural sector for which we are planning. However, the sample is not representative of the general population and we cannot assume these opinions are held by most citizens. See the appendix for an executive summary of the survey report.

Plans and studies review We reviewed previous studies, cultural inventories, and plans. We examined the draft Bridgeport Master Plan. We extracted cultural economic data from reports by Americans for the Arts, National Center for Charitable Statistics, New England Foundation for the Arts, and United States Census.

Cultural inventory The consultant and Steering Committee worked with Housatonic College IT professionals and staff from New England Foundation for the Arts and the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism to develop a cultural inventory database. Visit <http://www.coastalfairfieldcounty.org> to consult the directory.