

**MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL DISTRICTS INITIATIVE  
SITE ADVISOR ASSESSMENT**

**Applicant:** Concord, MA  
**Site Advisor:** Meri Jenkins  
**Date of Site Visit:** June, 2012  
**Date of Report:** August 8, 2012

**Recommendation for State Designation of *Concord Center Cultural District*: YES**

DISTRICT	YES	NO
1. Boundaries of the area proposed for designation are justifiable		X
2. Range of cultural facilities/amenities are in the district	X	
3. Cultural organizations outside the district are programming activities and events	X	
4. The district is accessible and walkable		X
5. The district has a sense of place	X	
6. The district's vision is appropriate	X	
7. The goals are realistic and achievable	X	
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>With 14 museums, 3 performing spaces, 5 art galleries, 5 Historic Districts -- 8 buildings listed on the National Historic Register of which 6 are National Historic Landmarks, a further 41 buildings included in two contiguous National Historic Districts, over 50 art studios in the vicinity at the Emerson Umbrella, several rehearsal spaces, a very active public library, private and public schools, private residencies of architectural and historical interest and more than a dozen creative economy businesses the <b>Concord Center Cultural District</b> encompasses ample cultural and historical assets and amenities to form a solid foundation for a successful and vibrant arts district.</p> <p>Other notable attributes that contribute to the district's 'sense of place' include The Colonial Inn, a hotel and restaurant; public green space that doubles as outdoor cultural space; various nooks and crannies in the center to sit and eat; an attractive streetscape with an authentic but natural New England village sensibility; and a diverse and delightful variety of restaurants and shops, many of them selling creative products, to entice the consumer.</p> <p>The town's appeal is multi-faceted. Concord has an august history that is at the heart of America's foundation as a country. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century pre-eminent thinkers and writers made their homes in Concord. Today, visitors can delve into the Colonial era; visit the homes of Hawthorne or Louisa May Alcott; make a pilgrimage to Thoreau's cabin, and enjoy the work of contemporary artists in a variety of excellent cultural organizations.</p> <p>The vision of the <b>Concord Center Cultural District</b> to 'stimulate increased participation in arts and cultural activities; provide economic benefits and increased revenue for art and cultural organizations and local businesses; encourage communication, cooperation and collaboration among the various cultural organizations and create unexpected partnerships and synergies; enrich community life and recirculate residents' income locally; attract more visitors to Concord as a destination, increasing benefits for hospitality and retail organizations; foster local cultural programming, education and youth programming aligns with the goals of the MCC's Cultural Districts Initiative.</p> <p>It also reinforces the Town of Concord's active efforts to support a strong retail and commercial base.</p> <p><b>Considerations/Suggestions:</b></p> <p><i>Edit the boundaries of the district.</i></p> <p>➤ The center of the town is an obvious point of departure for visitors, especially as the Concord</p>		

<p>Visitors Center is situated in the heart of the district on Main Street, with free public parking behind the building.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ The proposed edges of the district involve walking up Monument Street to the North Bridge and the Manse and then retracing the steps to walk down Lexington Street to the Concord Museum (beyond the Museum is the Louisa May Alcott House, and the Minuteman National Park, which straddles the towns of Lexington and Concord). While there are important assets and amenities in both areas, the boundaries that most naturally occur will be the simplest for the visitor to negotiate.</li> <li>➤ As proposed, from the Concord Museum the visitor must retrace their steps along Lexington Street, down Heywood Street, and along Walden Street. The walk may not be long, but Lexington Street provides a challenge. On one side the sidewalk is in need of repair, and on the other, there is no sidewalk, poison ivy is prevalent, and the cross walk at the junction of Heywood and Lexington is barely visible to the motorist. This issue needs to be remediated for the Museum to be included in the district at this time. It is noted that the Museum has made a commitment to be a cultural district partner (as have other outlying organizations) and the synergistic relationship between the Museum and the district is encouraged.</li> <li>➤ The Old North Bridge and the Manse also fall outside the naturally occurring district (as does Authors Ridge) but are encouraged to remain partners in the cultural district.</li> <li>➤ The Cultural District Initiative includes the proviso that partners that fall outside of the district can program in and be promoted by the district, and in this case, using this factor strategically could be a means of including organizations and assets that are not close by, such as the Alcott House, and further out, Walden Pond.</li> <li>➤ In addition, what role might the Minuteman National Park organization play in the development and implementation of the district? Do they offer arts-related programming (visual, performing, literary) as part of their services? Perhaps it would be of mutual benefit for the Park to become involved in the process despite not being officially located within the district boundaries (i.e. increased marketing, potential organizational partnerships).</li> </ul> <p><i>Visually define the district.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Create ways – unique to Concord – to let residents, students, business owners/patrons, and visitors know that they are in the <b>Concord Center Cultural District</b>. Aside from the cultural district signage program, creating artistic gateways to the district, and using imaginative signage would support the Chamber’s efforts to create a brand/identity/image for the district that balances Concord’s past with its present.</li> </ul> <p><i>Articulate specific, numerical goals to be measured as part of the district evaluation plans.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Though the District Partnership Advisory Committee has outlined sensible goals and objectives, members have shied away from setting specific figures for these goals. It is recommended, however, that the committee articulate concrete, numerical goals (# new creative businesses to be recruited, # new programs to be developed, \$\$ new investment anticipated in district, etc.) in order to track the district’s progress, allowing stakeholders to celebrate successes when targets are hit and to re-evaluate strategies when targets are not being met. Evaluations using hard facts will also help ‘tell the story’ of Concord’s cultural district development to potential funders/sponsors, artists, and businesses.</li> </ul>		
<b>MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1. Municipality is engaged	x	
2. Partnership representative of district	x	
3. Management structure sound	x	
4. Clear policy, strategy and action plan		x
5. Relationships with other external partners to support implementation	x	
6. Financial resources are in place	x	

**Comments:**

One of the strengths of the proposed cultural district, which will help ensure continued success as this project evolves, is the combined expertise and commitment of its management team. The Town of Concord has a long-standing and cordial working relationship with the Concord Chamber of Commerce, who will manage the district. Led by Stephanie Stillman, Executive Director of the Concord Chamber, the District Partnership is comprised of a representation of stakeholders in the district – executive directors of several cultural and historic organizations, artists, business owners, and town representatives.

When debating the cultural district resolution, Selectman Stanly Black said “We’ve been flooded with letters from cultural institutions in town”. Selectwoman Carmin Reiss agreed with Black and said she hasn’t heard any concerns or objections to the cultural district designation, and this perspective was confirmed by Chamber representatives, who said that “local businesses were 100% behind the district”.

According to stakeholders, an application to the MCC’s Adams Arts Program was not funded a few years ago, and the partnership did not last, but this new effort has reenergized people. Stakeholders commented that local government will provide the infrastructure to support the district, and the Chamber will manage the week-to-week operations, promote the district, and develop the partnership.

The proposed governance structure outlines quarterly meetings, as well as an annual meeting.

Community Preservation Funds have played an active role in the preservation of the town’s historic assets and open space, and this is to be applauded. It is notable that the Chamber has set aside funds to market the district, and there are plans to launch a “Friends of the Concord Center Cultural District” to raise funds on an ongoing basis.

**Considerations/Suggestions:**

*Research, identify, and secure additional sources of funding for cultural district programming and marketing.*

➤ Some possible funding options may include:

- Approaching the local cultural council to focus some of its giving toward cultural programs within the **Concord Center Cultural District** and vicinity.
- National Endowment for the Arts’ – “Our Town,” a funding program offering grants ‘for creative place making projects that contribute toward the livability of communities and help transform them into lively, beautiful, and sustainable places with the arts at their core.’ [www.nea.gov/grants/apply/OurTown/index.html](http://www.nea.gov/grants/apply/OurTown/index.html)
- Sponsorships/grants from local businesses and corporate foundations. Consider the potential in offering business memberships (and promotion) in support of the cultural district.
- Adams Art Program/MCC – funds are currently committed to existing projects, but may be an option in the next few years.
- Open a discussion with the Merrimack Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, and the Greater Boston Convention and Visitor’s Bureau about ways to promote the district through their websites.
- Create linkage with other cultural districts in the vicinity to cross promote the district.
- Earned revenue streams– explore ways to produce items for sale. Some ideas include using images from some of the partner organizations’ collections to produce t-shirts, postcards, bags, hats, pins; commissioning watercolor paintings of historic buildings for reproduction and sale; reproducing historic photographs of Concord to sell; or using the cultural district signage design as a product line in local stores (% to stores/% to district) that might be attractive to Concord residents and visitors alike.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Community or private foundations – the notion of establishing a “Friends of Concord Cultural District” is a sensible way to match and increase the Chamber’s marketing dollars, particularly as this has been a successful fundraising strategy in previous campaigns.</li> <li>National Park Service.</li> </ul> <p><i>Explore ways to engage and include more diverse participants in the District Partnership.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Develop a strategic communications and operational plan to continue to deepen and broaden the partnership so that a diverse pool of participants is engaged in the district, and issues of exclusion are mitigated.</li> <li>➤ Develop a committee structure. This would help to spread the work across the partnership, utilize the intellectual capital of the partners, and ensure that the work of the district is able to progress in a timely way.</li> <li>➤ Consider structuring the committees based on the goals of the district and review their usefulness at the end of 12 - 24 months.</li> <li>➤ Meet more often in the first year.</li> </ul>		
<b>ASSETS AND AMENITIES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1. Amenities support/enhance the vision and goals of the district	x	
2. Range of assets in non-profit, commercial where cultural participation occurs – amateur, professional, formal, informal	x	
3. Identification of properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places	x	
4. Role of arts included in land use and space strategies	x	
5. Policy on public art in development	Unclear	
6. Role of arts in the built and natural environment	x	
7. Artists in discussion on new capital projects	Unclear	
8. Artists used in environmental projects	x	
9. Volunteering in arts and culture is encouraged	x	
10. The district incorporates features that improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities	Partial	
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>There are numerous amenities that enhance and support Concord’s cultural district:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ample free and metered on-street <u>parking</u> is available. The Town is in the process of completing a parking management study, as well as a review of parking regulations. Draft recommendations will be ready for review later this summer.</li> <li>➤ Transportation to/from Boston and other parts of Massachusetts is available by car and rail. Concord is 20 miles (32 km) northwest of Boston along MA Route 2. On weekdays, 20 MBTA Commuter Rail trains a day leave Boston’s North Station on the Fitchburg/ South Acton Line for the 40-minute trip to Concord; on Saturday there are 12 trains, and on Sunday, 8. The Minuteman Bikeway extends from Boston and Cambridge to Lexington, Bedford and Concord.</li> <li>➤ Public restrooms are available at Town Hall (during open business hours), the Concord Visitors Center, and for patrons of the area’s restaurants.</li> <li>➤ According to stakeholders, the walkability of the town is seen as a community benefit, and the center of town is traversable. However, walking access is hampered by the condition of sidewalks in the vicinity of the district. As mentioned above, remediating this issue to ensure that all types of visitors – young, elderly, disabled -- can comfortably transverse the district should be a high priority.</li> <li>➤ Ensuring that visitors are aware of accommodation options is an important economic goal.</li> <li>➤ Of note, the Concord Chamber of Commerce also runs the visitor center, located in the center of downtown, close to free parking. With appropriate marketing and signage, the</li> </ul>		

visitor center has a key role to play in promoting the cultural district as it evolves by providing a launching pad for all visitors to Concord.

**Considerations/Suggestions:**

*Establish (and advertise) a starting point for visitors to the cultural district.*

- The Concord Visitor Center seems a natural choice to function as the starting point for new and/or returning visitors to the cultural district. It would help to address questions such as, where would a visitor start on their visit to Concord for the first time? When they get out of the car, or off the train, are there signs directing them to the Visitor Center and the **Concord Center Cultural District**? What maps and promotional materials do they see/get when they arrive?
- Like many communities of historic importance, signage is discreet. Understanding how visitors navigate the district and find assets beyond the district’s boundary is important; understanding any frustration on their part is crucial, and making changes accordingly will help ensure that visitors will linger longer and visit more of the attractions and amenities. The way finding study currently underway should help develop a course of action.

*Bring diverse interests together.*

- Several stakeholders mentioned the Town’s interest in environmental issues, and in recent years, programs that have been developed to highlight and enhance this interest. Linking the environment and arts and culture could be an area of program expansion.
- Consider adding even more permanent outdoor seating in the district: There are some opportunities for visitors to rest and relax along the district corridor, but there could be more. The community may wish to commission local artists to design permanent seating for the district that is distinctive.
- Explore the possibility of adding more public art to the district and consider the development of policies to govern the development and maintenance of these public art features: Given the number of artists in the area, it would be delightful to see more public art on display in the district. It is not clear what policies exist to guide and encourage further development of public art, and these are helpful in creating a long-term program. Make sure to forge policies that consider the optimal location for public art pieces in the district, and provide for their ongoing maintenance. A number of resources offer guidance on the development of public art programs, including: New England Foundation for the Arts’ Public Art Network ([http://www.nefa.org/grants\\_services/public\\_art](http://www.nefa.org/grants_services/public_art)), Americans for the Arts’ Public Art Network ([http://www.artsusa.org/networks/public\\_art\\_network/default.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/networks/public_art_network/default.asp)), the online resource Add Value Add Art: A Public Art Resource Guide for Developers (<http://www.ura.org/developers/URA-AddValueAddArt.pdf>) and the classic how to guide to public art, *Going Public*, published by the Arts Extension Service at UMass Amherst (<http://www.artsextensionservice.org/index.php/publications/publications/list-of-publications>).
- Make use of free and low-cost sources in conducting a cultural asset inventory, particularly of local artists: There are a number of free and low-cost resources that may be useful in conducting research about the impact of the region’s cultural assets, including Culture Count ([www.culturecount.org](http://www.culturecount.org)) and Americans for the Arts’ Arts and Economic Prosperity Study ([http://www.artsusa.org/information\\_services/research/services/economic\\_impact/default.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/information_services/research/services/economic_impact/default.asp)). In addition, area colleges can provide interns to help engage in new research studies and to help implement a searchable database. Finally, property tax mailings and voter registrations can often be used to collect valuable information about professions and income (in the aggregate) for the purposes of counting creative businesses.
- Engaging local residents as ambassadors of the district for special events is a great way to increase their knowledge and participation.

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**YES**

**NO**

1. The goal to increase revenue for local enterprises is clearly incorporated in the district plan	x	
2. Strategies are being implemented to assist the development of creative and/or other businesses	x	
3. Business owners are engaged in programming for the district	x	
4. The District is likely to result in job creation	x	
5. Incentives are being used in support of the district	x	
6. Research underway or planned	x	
7. Investment in arts development – programs and facilities	x	
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>There is a history of business owners (restaurant and music venues) providing “gallery” like opportunities and supporting a wide range of programs. The district is a real mix of public and private programming in both public and private spaces. There are several incentives and strategies being used to attract creative enterprise to the <b>Concord Center Cultural District</b> and foster cultural economic development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There are a number of creative entrepreneurs located in the downtown area. Do they each have a business plan? Are they accessing business support or training? What are their capacity needs? There was no real discussion of specific efforts to support creative economy businesses in either the application or during the tour.</li> <li>➤ Stakeholders stressed that businesses are very closely tied to visitorship, and though attempts have been made to diversify information so that visitors are better informed and can easily navigate the town, there is still a need to improve upon current efforts. Stakeholders also mentioned that residents did not know as much as they might about local assets.</li> <li>➤ The Chamber plays a crucial role in relaying information to area businesses. As the primary conduit for publicity and marketing, developing strategies to deepen and broaden their reach is likely to bring economic benefit.</li> </ul> <p><b>Considerations/Suggestions:</b></p> <p><i>Reach out to artists and creative entrepreneurs and businesses in a more formal, targeted approach to recruit to <b>Concord’s Center Cultural District</b>.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Utilize stakeholder’s contact lists, arts journals, appropriate trade publications, and media outlets to advertise the opportunities and financial incentives for relocation to Concord’s cultural district.</li> <li>➤ Create or increase linkage between businesses in the district, restaurants and cultural activity to help create or boost current economic activity.</li> <li>➤ Conduct more familiarization tours for tourism operators.</li> <li>➤ Given the range of activity available in town on a daily basis, developing a broadsheet for the day might be a way of presenting visitors with more options, complemented by brochures from the display racks. Furthermore, sales of tickets at the visitor center would “close the deal.”</li> </ul>		
<b>PROGRAMMING</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
1. Programming is appropriate given the district goals		
2. There is a track record of success with past programs	x	
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>Existing programming in the district is strong. The partners, both individually and as a group, have a proven track record of delivering high-quality events that showcase the unique nature of the district. There exists a high volume and range of formal and informal cultural programs that take place in the district as part of the regular programming of facilities and organizations.</p> <p>The Town’s brand draws many thousands of people to Concord from throughout New England and beyond. Most come because of the Town’s unique historical assets. The challenge of encouraging visitors to stay longer or return is an economic issue; mobilizing greater participation in cultural activities by residents, and people living in surrounding communities is another. As mentioned above, an obvious overarching need is to create linkage between the various</p>		

<p>organizations and businesses, and between daytime and evening activities. Cultural tourists spend more money than other travelers, are more likely to extend a trip because of learning about an activity or event, and have more money to spend. (Source: Travel Industry of America). This is the visitor that is attracted to towns like Concord.</p> <p>The application and supporting materials have long lists of what has been done and some really interesting ideas for new programs. Assessing, collecting and analyzing data about current offerings will help identify and fill any programming holes. Theme-based programming (i.e. historical walking tours, open studios, gallery nights, etc.) already exist, but what more could be done specifically for the cultural district? The district offers a great opportunity to engage artists, residents, students, and business owners in the planning, promotion, and participation of cultural district programs and events in ways that complement the Town's historical and cultural assets.</p> <p>Stakeholders mentioned the burgeoning literary focus, which this advisor considers a natural for the community, and is to be encouraged.</p>		
<p><b>MARKETING</b></p>	<p><b>YES</b></p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>
<p>1. The marketing and branding plan is feasible and well-articulated</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>2. The partnership includes expertise in marketing</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>3. There are a variety of promotional strategies</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>4. The partners are likely to reach their target population</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>5. Efforts have been made to create a welcoming environment</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p>6. If relevant, program materials are offered in more than one language</p>	<p>unclear</p>	
<p>7. Individuals from a variety of backgrounds and age groups are welcomed into and valued in the district</p>	<p>x</p>	
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>The district partnership has a sophisticated group of volunteers and staff working on the marketing of the cultural district site. There is attention to a variety of marketing channels, including online and print media, and an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of these channels. The Town is equipped to handle tour bus operators, and is thinking of ways to improve the traffic flow to accommodate this type of vehicular traffic.</p> <p>Members of the Partnership recognize that marketing is a key element to the success of the <b>Concord Center Cultural District</b> and are currently working to more fully articulate the marketing plan for the district. Yet, despite possessing strong competitive advantage, stakeholders did not seem to think that their marketing and promotion strategies were effective.</p> <p><b>Considerations/Suggestions:</b></p> <p><i>Create a one-stop-shopping website for the cultural district.</i></p> <p>8. The Chamber's website will include cultural district information. Ensure that the site includes background information on the initiative, a map of the district, a list of hot spots, a calendar of events for district programs and events, and general information (i.e. visitor center, where to park, public restrooms, places to eat, directions/transportation, etc.).</p> <p>9. It would be beneficial, for cross-promotional purposes, if the cultural district web site was linked to the homepages of all organizations, agencies, restaurants, and businesses located in the cultural district, including the official City of Concord's web site.</p> <p>10. The web site should be geared toward (and designed for) a variety of users – artists, businesses, students, visitors, residents, and donors/funders, and can include additional features such as volunteer opportunities, financial incentives for artists and creative businesses, virtual tours, videos, calls to artists, sponsorship opportunities, blogs, membership opportunities, and links to all cultural district stakeholders' websites.</p> <p>11. The calendar of events icon on the cultural district website could be set up to redirect users to other relevant local websites. It would also be helpful to provide event producers with a vehicle to plan events years in advance by allowing them to plug in dates on a calendar,</p>		

<p>which all other organizations may view, in order to help prevent the conflict of having two major events on the same date.</p> <p><i>Develop a strategic public relations campaign to boost the Town's brand.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Work with the editorial boards of the local media to continue to boost the diversity of activity in Concord through a strategic public relations campaign.</li> <li>➤ Think about how existing materials/activities (like walking tours, maps, etc.) can be used or amended to direct people beyond the boundaries of the district and vice-a-versa. For instance, a map with the district at the center and walking/biking tours radiating outwards.</li> <li>➤ Similarly, think about how materials available at external assets can drive people into the center of Concord. Stakeholders mentioned that people interested in Walden Pond shouldn't need to come into town to get information about Walden Pond, which is a good point, but materials should be available at Walden Pond that would encourage people to travel into town and vice-a-versa. Consider creative ways to do this beyond a brochure.</li> <li>➤ Consider offering marketing materials in more than one language: According to U.S. Census data, there does not appear to be a significant percentage of non-English speakers in the vicinity of Concord. However more than 1 million out-of-country travelers come to Massachusetts on a yearly basis. Putting out the welcome mat for them involves a concerted effort.</li> <li>➤ Ensure that the partnership and stakeholders are fully trained in social media. Investing in training everyone now in the various social media options may reap very real benefits in the future.</li> <li>➤ Ensure that information is provided to Boston area hotels. Include transportation information, particularly how long it takes to get from Boston, or area communities, to Concord.</li> <li>➤ Promote the Liberty Ride, and consider increasing the stops in Concord.</li> <li>➤ Utilize artboston.org to promote district activities – a free service.</li> <li>➤ Investigate and analyze how other successful history-based communities are using innovative ways to get to market, and adapt their ideas for Concord.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>EVALUATION</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There is a plan to collect visitor and occupancy data</li> <li>2. Any additional data the partners plan to collect is relevant to the district goals</li> <li>3. The partners have some idea of how they might use the results</li> </ol>	<p><b>YES</b></p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>
<p><b>Comments:</b></p> <p>As a requirement of state designation, the District Partnership plans to collect data on visitorship and occupancy rates in the arts district. In addition, the partnership will conduct surveys, monitor web traffic to measure the impact of free and paid media advertisement, and administer a business survey to measure annual changes in revenue.</p> <p><b>Considerations/Suggestions:</b></p> <p><i>Identify baselines for measuring the cultural district's impact and the progress in achieving its goals.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recognizing that state designation from the MCC is for a five-year time period and is renewable, evaluation will be an ongoing process. The baselines to be used by the partnership for project evaluation (such as, inventory of existing cultural programming, business surveys, etc.) should correspond to the stated goals.</li> <li>➤ Satisfaction surveys are also useful to assess 'quality of experience' for participants/visitors.</li> </ul>		

