

RiverCulture Steering Committee
MINUTES
Wednesday, October 14, 7pm

Present: Eileen Dowd (chair), Tammy Ketcham, Lucinda Kidder, Rachel Teumim
Absent: Lilith Wolinsky, Kristi Bodin
Staff: Suzanne LoManto (Director), Walter Ramsey

7:02pm Eileen Dowd opens the meeting

7:04pm *MOTION by E. Dowd to accept the meeting minutes of April 30, 2020. Seconded by R.Teumim. VOTE: RT(Y), TK (Y), LK (A), ED(Y). MOTION PASSES.*

7:06pm Montague Mural Policy/RiverCulture Mural Program. (Revised 9/20)

The Director gives an overview of the process and purpose of the Montague Mural Policy. The Director describes the previous draft which required all murals- public and private- to receive a permit from the Planning Department. This draft was presented to the Select Board and the Planning Board. Both Boards found fault with various aspects of the policy, especially regulations on private property because the Town doesn't have a way to enforce restrictions. Director describes the *new* draft which does not require a permit for murals on private property, making instead a series of recommendations. Director also describes the RiverCulture Mural Program, which is designed to regulate murals by offering financial and technical assistance for compliance. RiverCulture Mural Projects would run through the Steering Committee for authorization.

Eileen Dowd expresses reservations, and would like the policy to contain a well-structured guideline for community input. Lucinda Kidder expresses concern about the lack of regulation regarding content. Director explains that content is not regulated as a First Amendment right, but projects reviewed by the RiverCulture Steering Committee can be rejected if they do not enhance the community. Walter Ramsey elaborates on the issue of content, as well as the position about the Town NOT acting as a regulatory body. Ramsey suggests that the RiverCulture Mural Program is a good start and perhaps we can come up with regulatory policy in the future. The Director explains that the RiverCulture Mural Program would help create better murals throughout Montague by offering financial and technical assistance. Lucinda Kidder worries about political messaging however, the Director expects that the program will "help people do what is right for the community." Director of RiverCulture and Town Planner ask the Steering Committee if they will vote to support the policy, which will need to go back to the Select Board to be adopted.

Chair makes a MOTION to support the RiverCulture Mural Policy. Seconded by Tammy Ketcham.

Lucinda Kidder requests further discussion. Eileen expresses concerns about the nature of murals vs. signs, vs. political/ religious messaging. Rachel comments that people can currently paint whatever they want; the RiverCulture Mural Policy is a way to encourage better murals. Lucinda Kidder asks about regulations in Greenfield and also worries that content "can send the wrong message." Town Planner explains that a town can not regulate the content of a sign (or mural) it is Federal law. The Town can only restrict size and location. The only way to "get to the issue of content" is through a program which can make sure that projects align with the "vision a town has for itself." Tammy comments that

someone in a certain "mindset" will paint an offensive mural on their own, and the mural program is a way to slow down the process and have some regulatory authority. Director talks about parts of the program Review Criteria, which would allow the Steering Committee to address content.

8:40pm Eileen makes a MOTION to WITHDRAW. Seconded by Lucinda. *Walter requests directives of the Steering Committee. Individual questions should be sent to the Director- not the group.

7:15pm: "Resurgent Places" Grant projects

On Behalf of the Turners Falls Cultural District, Suzanne LoManto received a \$6400 grant by MassDevelopment to integrate art at Spinner Park and a mural on the "Old Cumberland Farm" building. The mural will go up in panels so it can be taken down and relocated. (The building is coming down.) Money will be paid to Nina Rossi and Alex McGuian for their art as well as supplies for the project. The mural will be completed in the next couple of weeks. There will be some money left over.

8:20pm: Preliminary Conversation: Cultural District Signage Program

The Director reports that she noticed that the buildings with less professional signs or vinyl signs were buildings without brackets. The building owned by the Franklin Regional Housing Authority did not have brackets over their three retail storefronts. After conversation, FCRHA agreed to put up brackets with some guidance. The Director worked with Hale Custom Sign to source a vertical, well-made bracket. The program would pay up to \$250 per sign, window decal, and graphic design and not cover the cost of brackets. RiverCulture would pay for the pilot program in downtown Turners Falls. Lucinda Kidder asks if the goal is to create uniformity. (yes) Eileen has seen the brackets and likes that they are perpendicular to the building and approves of the choice in brackets. The Steering Committee is in support of the program. The Planner draws parallel between the mural program and the sign program as an "incentive." However the sign program will be administered through the Planning Department, not the Steering Committee. The Director expects about 2 or 3 new signs will go-up a year.

7:55pm: RiverCulture Finance: Republic Services is under contract to donate \$3500 a year and the Farmacy is under contract to donate \$5,000, plus money from the Turners Falls Cultural District if they continue with their \$5000 grants. (Not yet decided by the MCC) RiverCulture has \$12,680 and the Cultural District has \$5,784. The Director has been supporting outdoor programs like the Farmers Market. In general, business sponsors would rather support particular events, rather than the RiverCulture general fund.

8pm Director Updated:

Turners Falls Cultural District: Holiday Shopping, Spinner Park Construction

The Cultural District has not been active but starting to rally around a holiday shopping.

A gift certificate (\$20 for \$25) is one idea. Tammy asks about a centralized place to list all of the businesses. (RiverCulture web site) An advertising campaign will be strong, no matter what we decide. The Director describes the project as "an appeal" Tammy asks if the businesses downtown have the skills to sell on line? (Yes/ No. Also an issue of desire.) Tammy encourages on-line sales and gift certificates.

Spinner Park has been delayed due to an electrical issue. The Town went back to the design process to accommodate a different electrical plan. The reopening of Spinner Park (May, June 2021?) might be the first big post-COVID event downtown.

Battlefield Grant Audio Tour. The project emanates from the partnerships formed while writing the Battlefield Grant, a five year project. The Director had one meeting with the group which was very

positive. The group decided not to tell the story of the battle, but instead focus on more positive aspects of Native life and Culture. The Director would be in charge of the technology, not the content which will be written by the Indigenous members of the group. The concept is for people to use a QR code to access a new website where audio files (stories) are stored. The listener will be directed around the riverfront. Eventually there could be a number of tours on the riverfront, riverside and Millers Falls. The website platform will likely be a Word Press Site designed for podcasting.

8:15pm Millers Falls: Tammy describes the renovation of the Millers Falls stairway-which goes from the downtown to the upper park. The project was identified during an input session of the “Millers on the Move Strategic Plan” last year. A walking path was completed last year, as well. A new business will arrive November 6 on the corner of Bridge/ Main Streets. The MFCIA is discussing how to renovate a mural on Newton Street.

Topics not anticipated in the last 48 hours:

Rachel Teumim would like to see RiverCulture work more connected to the Montague Cultural Council. The Director is very supportive of this idea and has given money (2K?) to the MCC to support the good work that they do vetting grass-roots programs. Director suggest co-programming post COVID.

Chair makes a MOTION to Adjourn. Seconded by Lucinda . VOTE: TK (Y), RT(Y), ED(Y), Meeting is Adjourned. 8:25pm.

*A December meeting is suggested to discuss the mural policy.