



**MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL DISTRICTS INITIATIVE  
SITE ADVISOR ASSESSMENT**

**Applicant:** Town of Easton, MA  
**Site Advisor:** Christine Proffitt  
**Date of Site Visit:** November 17, 2016  
**Date of Report:** December 8, 2016

DISTRICT	YES	NO
1. Boundaries of the area proposed for designation are justifiable	√	
2. Range of cultural facilities/amenities are in the district	√	
3. Cultural organizations outside the district are programming activities and events	√	
4. The district is accessible and walkable	√	
5. The district has a sense of place	√	
6. The district's vision is appropriate	√	
7. The goals are realistic and achievable	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

North Easton's *Shovel Town Cultural District* is located entirely within one of the Town's four National Register Historic Districts. Home to a significant cluster of historic and majestic buildings designed by famed architect Henry H. Richardson, the proposed Cultural District is architecturally stunning – *and tidy!*

With a strong public/private partnership, an active co-op of artists, two museums, a year-round farmers' market, an energetic calendar of cultural programs, events, and festivals, and an emerging restaurant and retail presence, Easton's Cultural District already possesses a solid cultural infrastructure to support a thriving Cultural District.

The Town of Easton tells an interesting story about how the founding family of Ames Shovel Works, the major supplier of shovels for the California Gold Rush, American Civil War, and the Union Pacific Railroad, not only helped to shape the Town's economy, but also its landscape and architecture (drawn from the application and Town of Easton's website).

The Cultural District's compelling 'sense of place' is embedded in its exceptional architecture and rich, industrial history. Also contributing to the District's personality is its name, *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District*, and its new logo. The name and logo pay homage to the Town's distinctive past while simultaneously being playful and quirky. Sponsoring a logo contest provided a terrific way to build awareness and excitement about the District.

With the exquisitely restored Ames Shovel Works property serving as the Town's visual centerpiece, and picturesque 36-acre Governor Oliver Ames estate, the District strikes an appealing balance between turrets, archways, and stone with lush, green space and water. This project also added 113 units of market-rate and affordable housing (owned, not rented) and a built-in audience for Cultural District offerings.

Even for first-time visitors to the District, it would be hard to miss some connection between the Town and its prolific symbol of its historical roots – the shovel. Look closely enough and visitors will notice that the minute and hour hands of the old street clock along Main Street take the form of shovels. This is an iconic symbol unique to Easton that should continue to be infused throughout the District.

The District is of comfortable scale and extremely pleasant, clean, accessible, and walkable; one can see much more sky in Easton than in a large city. The Town has recently adopted the Complete Streets policies which will further boost accessibility and convenience for pedestrians, bicyclists, and commuters.

Easton has received a number of prestigious awards and accolades over the years, including:

- Easton named twice as one of the top 100 “*Best Small Towns in America*” by Money Magazine
- Ames Free Library twice received the “*Best Small Library in America*,” Finalist Award (placed 2<sup>nd</sup> each time) by the Library Journal, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Ames Shovel Works presented with the exclusive *Driehaus Preservation Award* by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which recognizes the country’s best preservation projects that highlight cutting-edge preservation approaches or technologies

The Town’s comprehensive master plan, *Envision Easton*, was finalized in 2014 and is the product of a two-year planning process that involved a tremendous amount of community input. According to Cultural District Chair Carolyn Cole, “it does not live on a shelf.” It is the guiding force for District Partners that presents a detailed road map for arts, culture and education.

While Easton supports a robust creative sector with an active Art Co-op and a handful of hip creative retail shops, including Auntie ZaZa Fiberworks and Paint, Rust & Pixie Dust, there are no visible signs of contemporary public art in the District. Incorporating public art in highly visible locations throughout the District would add to the existing historic artifacts found primarily in the Shovel Works campus (i.e. old iron bell, large iron gear) and inspire an interesting metaphorical conversation between the past and present.

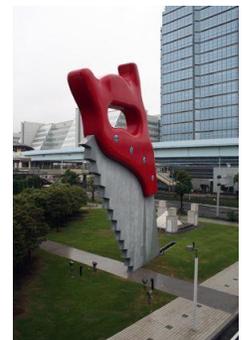
In addition, improving wayfinding, establishing gateways to the District, installing directories/kiosks/maps, continuing to make streetscape/façade improvements, implementing an architectural uplighting program to highlight the District’s architectural gems (already in place?), and adding other types of graphic elements – banners, streetcaps, sidewalk icons – that highlight and unite the District, will inform people where they are, add vitality and artistic flair, and play a key role in helping to visually define *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District*.

These strategies would need to be implemented in such a way as to enhance the Cultural District and not detract from its National Register Historic District designation.

#### **Recommendations:**

##### ➤ ***Visually define the Cultural District.***

- Create a strong visual identity for *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District* and its cultural attractions, amenities, events, and activities, that is consistent, repetitive, and easily identifiable by residents/visitors, to increase awareness of – and by extension, participation in and support for – the Cultural District . Some strategies include:
  - Installing temporary and/or permanent public art in the District
    - As the Town’s architecture and La Farge stained-glass windows are of national and international significance, it would be highly appropriate and exciting for District Partners to commission an artist of major prominence to create a public work of art for Easton’s Cultural District. A project of this caliber could serve as a major tourist attraction to the District (possible NEA funding).
    - To the right is work by artist Claes Oldenburg, famous for his large-scale reinterpretations of everyday objects; at 87, he may no longer be active, but imagine if this were a shovel?
    - Trash cans, manholes, benches, planters, sidewalks, bike racks, blank walls, green spaces, may all be viewed as opportunities for public “pedestrian art.”
  - Creating artistic and welcoming gateways to the District from multiple entrypoints
  - Adding architectural uplighting of significant properties for dramatic flair; highly appropriate for Easton with its stunning architectural backdrop
  - Utilizing other forms of inventive lighting to “light up” the District (through animated lights, color) at night; these are temporary fixtures and would not likely interfere with historic district regulations
  - Mounting banners, visual markers, or other identifiers in and around the District to let people know that they are actually *in* the District; historic plaques are already in place



- Using imaginative signage (i.e., wayfinding signs) to create links between attractions and amenities
  - Installing a directory or kiosk with a map of the Cultural District highlighting area attractions and hotspots; could also include a brief history of the Town and highlight the significance of its architecture, La Farge windows, etc.
- Following are links to a handful of creative strategies implemented in other cultural districts in this state and across the country:
    - <http://www.easthamptoncityarts.com/publicart> (numerous examples from Easthampton)
    - <https://www.facebook.com/pittsfieldartscape/> (Pittsfield’s painted utility boxes)
    - <http://www.northamptonartscouncil.org/p/public-art.html> (Northampton’s public art gateway to the cultural district, *Water Music* by David Teeple)
    - <http://www.worcestermass.org/city-initiatives/wayfinding> (Worcester’s wayfinding program /creative kiosks)
    - <http://blogdowntown.com/2012/02/6607-a-is-for-arts-district-handdesigned-signs> (hand-designed signs/LA)
  - Involve and commission artists wherever possible, through juried competitions or requests for proposals, to support efforts to create a very distinct brand/identity/image for the Cultural District.

MANAGEMENT	YES	NO
. Municipality is engaged	√	
. Partnership representative of district	√	
. Management structure sound	√	
. Clear policy, strategy and action plan	Emerging	
. Relationships with other external partners to support implementation	√	
. Financial resources are in place	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

One of the greatest strengths of this Cultural District Initiative is the combined commitment, passion, and creativity of its Champion and Chair, Carolyn Cole, and the solid public/private partnership that has been established. According to Elizabeth Alach, Owner/Artist of Auntie ZaZa Fiber Works located in the District, “I love us coming together through the arts to build community, and to create history through celebrating each other and sharing our talents.”

Nearly 30 stakeholders – representing the Town’s political and municipal leadership, creative, historical, educational, and business sectors, as well as a mix of residents born-and-raised in Easton and newer transplants – participated in the MCC site visit and engaged in lively discussion surrounding the *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District*. Also in attendance were several District sponsors, including two local banks. Partners have been successful at raising funds to support much of the programming that has taken place over the past several years in the District; Ms. Cole estimates that \$60,000 has been raised to date.

Evidenced by the impressive number and enthusiasm of community investors, support for the District is very strong. This is also a group of people who seemed to know, respect, and truly like each other, and repeatedly voiced their gratitude for Ms. Cole’s vision and stalwart leadership.

For the district to thrive, the stakeholders must organize as a true working partnership so that ideas, opportunities and issues can be discussed broadly and resolved quickly. This way of working will develop shared responsibility for the district and foster greater understanding about latent possibilities.

The management and governance structure has worked quite effectively to date, in large part because of the very active role the Chair has played in managing day-to-day District activities. Ms. Cole will continue to serve as Chair of the Advisory Committee comprised of Team Leaders, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. The Town’s Director of Planning & Economic Development (or designee) will continue to provide guidance. Oversight will be the responsibility of the Historical Commission to ensure accountability, transparency, and good communication between the Town and Advisory Committee. The District Partnership will meet approximately 4x/year and Project Teams (to be established) will meet as often as necessary. The Town will continue to provide the financial management of Cultural District activities.

The Town is actively engaged. Town Administrator David Colton stated, “We try to find ways to carve out staff time to dedicate to various committees. There’s someone who is dedicated to working with the historical commission and housing trust...we try to identify staff people who can support volunteers. A lot of what gets done in the Town is by the volunteer efforts of local citizens.” Director of Planning & Economic Development Stephanie Danielson concurred, “There’s a lot of support at the governance level here for these efforts. It’s a question of what can we do to help you, or give you what you need, so that you can continue to do the volunteer work to get this done.”

Next steps include fulfilling the Advisory Committee and identifying appropriate Project Teams to increase capacity and get more work done. Longer-term goals should include the hiring a Cultural District Manager, or permanently dedicating staff, to focus on the advancement of the Cultural District (even on a very part-time basis to begin with). A question that keeps circling back, though, is what role will the Town’s local cultural council play in the continuing implementation of the District? Will they assume a leadership role? A partnership role? At minimum, they could direct funding in support of Cultural District programs and activities.

Easton has benefitted tremendously by the enthusiastic and capable volunteer leadership of Ms. Cole and the momentum that she has fostered. Having dedicated staff time for the long term will help avert volunteer burnout and ensure sustainability of the Cultural District.

**Recommendations:**

- **Form Advisory Committee and Project Teams and recruit members based on areas of expertise needed to achieve District goals (as proposed in application).**
  - Advisory Committee members to be drawn from extensive District Partnership. Committee members should reflect the diversity of the community.
  - Project Teams to focus on specific District-related goals and priorities and be assembled based on areas of expertise. Likely Project Teams include:
    - Art Co-op (already active)
    - Marketing/Branding – charged with developing and executing marketing plan
    - Public Art
    - Fundraising – deserves greater focus; untapped resources at state level – MCC’s Festivals Program & Cultural Facilities Fund (w/ MassDevelopment); Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts?
    - Programming
  - Other Project Teams, task forces, focus groups, or ad hoc committees may be assigned as needed (for ex., Wayfinding, Gateways, or for time-specific events or festivals).
- **Strive to establish a Cultural District Manager to help ensure long-term sustainability of the Cultural District.**
  - “Regardless of management structure, dedicated staff time is vital to realizing the goals and reaping the benefits of a designated cultural district” (R. Stubbs, State Cultural Districts: Policies, Metrics, and Evaluation, 2014, sponsored by Americans for the Arts).
  - Other cultural district communities have utilized cultural district managers/coordinators, staff from nonprofit arts organizations, and economic development officers as the primary point-person to provide important stability for cultural district efforts.

ASSETS AND AMENITIES	YES	NO
1. Amenities support/enhance the vision and goals of the district	√	
2. Range of assets in non-profit, commercial where cultural participation occurs – amateur, professional, formal, informal	√	
3. Identification of properties listed on or eligible for the National Register of Historic Places	√	
4. Role of arts included in land use and space strategies	√	
5. Policy on public art in development		√
6. Role of arts in the built and natural environment	√	
7. Artists in discussion on new capital projects		√
8. Artists used in environmental projects		√

9. Volunteering in arts and culture is encouraged	√	
10. The district incorporates features that improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities	√	
<p><b>Comments/Observations:</b></p> <p>District Partners and stakeholders recognize and have a strong appreciation for the beauty and significance of Easton’s many remarkable cultural, natural and historical assets. With a population of just over 20,000, Easton boasts one of the most impressive collections of H. H. Richardson-designed buildings in the country, two of John La Farge’s finest stained-glass windows in the world (at Unity Church), an active historical society, a vibrant children’s museum with an outdoor wild space, and a library campus that is bursting out of its seams with programming.</p> <p>The District also lays claim to a strong cluster of artists who can be found at the centrally-located Art Co-op. According to Ms. Cole, there may be 400-500 artists living/working in Easton. With such a large number of creatives and a waitlist of 70 people at the Co-op, evidence indicates that there exists a greater demand for artist studio and exhibition space. Conducting an artist survey to determine the types of space needed for artists of all disciplines to live, work, exhibit and/or perform would serve to inform the development of needed space and nurture this community’s strong creative sector.</p> <p>Art Co-op members have been operating with a formal structure to date and plan to legally incorporate; it is always advised to consider the need to incorporate and whether or not it makes more sense to merge with an existing organization (any possibilities with Brockton Arts?) or continue to operate independently using another organization with nonprofit status as the fiscal agent.</p> <p>Despite the high numbers of artists creating in Easton, little can be found in the built environment outside of the Art Co-op to remind us of their presence. Public art is a key strategy that contributes to a cultural district’s sense of place. It helps to beautify and visually define a district and has the potential to engage the entire community in its creation, execution, and appreciation. Public art can be big or small, permanent or temporary, and can be as simple as decorating public trash cans, painting shovels on sidewalks, or fabricating bike stands that resemble shovels, to commissioning large-scale murals, site-specific sculptural installations, or multiple life-size fiberglass objects (like shovels), individually designed by artists and displayed in various high-visibility locations. Establish a Public Art Project Team to develop policy and a strategic plan to thoughtfully integrate public art into the Cultural District. The Project Team might begin by implementing temporary public art projects initially.</p> <p>The area known as <i>The Rockery</i>, designed by renowned landscape architect F. L. Olmsted, who also landscaped the grounds of Oakes Ames Memorial Hall and the Ames Free Library, deserves additional focus. Most communities in New England can lay claim to historic buildings and structures of great importance, but <i>The Rockery</i> is of particular intrigue. After seeing photos when this war memorial was first built, there was a reaction to suggest the Town return it to its original state, when it was not yet camouflaged by mature shrubbery and other plantings. However, after learning of Olmsted’s intent to let the greenery grow as a symbolic ‘drapery of peace’ over war, there was a great appreciation for this designer’s vision.</p> <p>Is there a way to highlight these original photographs of <i>The Rockery</i>, along with the extremely interesting back story about the father of modern landscape’s vision either directly onsite or nearby? More broadly, is there a way to spotlight all of the architectural gems located in the Cultural District and their stories to alert passersby of their significance? The Historical Society, through its many school programs, tours, events, and resources, does a superb job of sharing the history of Easton. How might the work they do be parlayed into some form of physical, educational element (something more interactive than a plaque?) at these sites so that everyone who walks by can stop and take a moment to learn something new. Oftentimes, people who are born and raised in the same town know less than newcomers who have taken the time to learn about their new community.</p> <p>Not discussed during the recent MCC site visit but important to note is the proposed re-establishment of MBTA’s South Coast Rail service extending the commuter rail line to new terminals in Fall River and New Bedford. This calls for the addition of ten new commuter rail stations, including ones in North Easton and Easton Village. Expanded transportation is an added amenity anticipated within the next couple/few years that will likely have quantifiable impact the Cultural District and larger community.</p>		

**Recommendations:**

***Develop a public art plan for the Cultural District.***

- Some communities tackle public art projects as they come up, while others, like Lowell, Worcester, and Salem, have developed comprehensive public art master plans. It is suggested that Easton create a Public Art Project Team, comprised of a group of qualified experts in areas including art, design, landscape/architecture, and project management, to develop a policy and plan (to include identification of appropriate sites) that will increase the *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District's* public art programming and presence.
- The MCC offers a valuable online *Public Art Plan toolkit* with local examples of public art programs and public art plans, including information about how these programs are administered and funded.
  - [https://www.mass-culture.org/public\\_art.aspx](https://www.mass-culture.org/public_art.aspx)
  -

➤ ***Develop, or assist in the development of, more studio and gallery space in the District.***

- Conduct an artist survey to determine market demand and characteristics of needed space. (Seek the advice of MCC staff on this topic).
- The MCC has assembled a list of *Artist Space Resources*, providing useful information for municipalities, developers, individuals/artists, and organizations interested in creating, finding, locating, funding, and sustaining affordable space for artists: <http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/services/artistspace.asp>.
- Create an inventory of prospects for cultural redevelopment. Where do opportunities exist in the District for studio, exhibition, or more retail space for artists? Could Oakes Ames Memorial Hall create/offer artist studio/exhibition space as a physical extension of opening doors to the Art Co-op for gatherings?

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	YES	NO
. The goal to increase revenue for local enterprises is clearly incorporated in the district plan	√	
. Strategies are being implemented to assist the development of creative and/or other businesses	√	
. Business owners are engaged in programming for the district	√	
. The District is likely to result in job creation	√	
. Incentives are being used in support of the district	√	
. Research underway or planned	√	
. Investment in arts development – programs and facilities	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

There has been a timely convergence of factors which has promoted a new renaissance in the town of Easton, including:

- CPA funds have enabled this community to make some significant strategic decisions about the preservation of many of this community's historical and natural assets which have played a vital role in the town's recent economic growth (Shovel Works, library campus, Governor Olive Ames Estate, Oakes Ames Memorial Hall).
- Active and focused municipal leadership, Board of Selectmen, Economic Development Council, and Cultural District Partnership.
- Establishment of the *Shovel Town Cultural District* has generated high levels of community excitement and involvement, and has spurred a tremendous amount of new cultural programs and events.
- Creation of a comprehensive master plan for the Town, *Envision Easton* (2014), is providing a detailed road map for Easton's future.
- Zoning has been updated in the District to better reflect the historical usage patterns of downtown allowing property owners to more easily make physical improvements while ensuring its integrity as a National Register Historic District.
- *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District Art Co-op* and gallery has come online, supporting hundreds of artists by providing networking, exhibition, and direct income opportunities (artwork sales), as well as offering cultural consumers regular times to enjoy and buy the work of local artists.
- Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, viewed as a cornerstone of the Cultural District, has ramped up its programming and

is actively working to increase accessibility and make needed physical repairs and improvements.

Perhaps what may be the most critical piece that has fostered new commercial activity along Main Street was the Town's foresight in requiring Beacon Properties to build a wastewater treatment plant that not only serves the Shovel Works property but the surrounding area as well. With no sewer, high groundwater, and high septic system failure rates in North Easton, this major infrastructure improvement has reduced a major obstacle to new business growth nearby, and the Town is reaping the benefits.

The retail footprint is small and noticeable. The completion of the renovation and occupation of shopfronts by businesses is critical to the vibrancy of the district as it will significantly boost the district experience. A timeline for occupation was not available during the site visit.

However, a number of new businesses have moved into Main Street, including a bustling restaurant, Farmer's Daughter, Auntie ZaZa-Fiberworks, and Paint, Rust & Pixie Dust. These businesses will be supplemented by a bakery and a brewery in the coming months. Voiced repeatedly during the *Envision Easton* planning process and echoed by cultural district stakeholders who participated in the recent MCC site visit, there is a need/desire for more restaurants in the downtown. The Town and District Partners have an opportunity to be deliberate about the types of businesses that will open in the Cultural District and are encouraged to actively recruit businesses that are complementary to the District.

**Recommendations:**

- **Actively target and recruit restaurants, creative businesses, and other types of commercial and retail enterprises which are complementary to the Cultural District.**
  - What other kinds of businesses would District residents/stakeholders like to see? If you don't know, ask. Any specific kinds of restaurants? High end cuisine or family-friendly? An art supply store? Antique stores? A fabric store?
  - Town officials, the Economic Development Council, and other District representatives should be intentional about targeting and luring businesses that fill a need/want, encourage longer dining and retail experiences to ensure a joined up approach to the economics of downtown.
  - Aside from the current activities, and the development of space, additional ways to provide or expand marketplace opportunities for local artists is an area recommended for discussion and descisions early in the disitrc't's work, and in conversation with the local creative community.

PROGRAMMING	YES	NO
1. Programming is appropriate given the district goals	√	
2. There is a track record of success with past programs	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

Partners of the *Shovel Town Cultural District* already present a wide range and vibrant calendar of programs and festivals throughout the year, from juried art shows to music concerts, cooking classes to theatre performances, and tag sales to poetry salons.

The Cultural District Partnership has sponsored a number of new major annual art events - *Artisans Faire and Holiday Tea* at Qeset House (4<sup>th</sup> annual), *Artisans on Display* at Easton Community Access Television Stations; and the extremely well-attended *Legacy Art/Music/Food/Fun Festival*. Hosted in partnership with the Trustees of Reservations, new stewards of the Governor Oliver Ames Estate, the *Legacy Festival* has been a major success attracting over 1,000 people. Cultural District events have received a solid amount of media coverage, repeatedly reinforcing the District's brand and increasing awareness of its endeavors (a large number of press clippings and articles were included in the application).

In addition, the Ames Free Library is in a league of its own offering over 1,000 programs per year, and having served

120,000 people last year alone. Those statistics are truly remarkable, particularly for a small library located in such a small town. The recent expansion of the library campus to include the adjacent historic Quesset House and Italianate garden with a reflecting pool, has enabled the library to extend its offerings and bring programming outdoors. The library is a very active partner and important contributor to cultural programming in the District.

The Historical Commission is commended for its programming. In conjunction with its annual preservation awards programs, the Commission sponsored a juried competition of photography focusing on the natural and architectural beauty of Easton. This is a great example of how there is always an opportunity to make connections with art, history, nature, and culture, and how this mindset is becoming engrained within this community.

It continues to be a priority for District Partners to present *affordable* programs and festivals to the public; most, in fact, are free of charge. According to Ms. Cole, "The best comments I've gotten were from mothers. After the first *Legacy Festival*, we heard feedback that we were providing a level of cultural exposure and experience that they've never been able to afford before."

Perhaps the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall offers the greatest potential to increase programming and attract new audiences from beyond Easton. Trustees of the Hall will embark on a master planning process to decide and direct the Hall's future. The Hall's recent partnership with the Stoughton Theatre may be foretelling. Could the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall become a permanent home to another theatre company? Or a dance studio? Or a larger performing arts center with multiple tenants? There are many nonprofit organizations throughout New England that are craving a stable home with affordable rent; the chance of becoming a company in-residence at such a prestigious site would be very appealing for many organizations, and would provide the Hall with annual, reliable income and consistent programming for the region.

Continue to explore partnerships and encourage other organizations, groups, and businesses, from both within and outside the District, to sponsor/host programs under the auspices of *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District*. Prospects include the local schools' many talented music students, Old Colony YMCA, Children's Museum, Historical Society, Stonehill College, and Beacon Properties, to name a handful. Would Beacon Properties underwrite or host a community BBQ, as an example, on their property? Or would the new brewery host an annual BeerFest with music?

Something that District Partners mentioned during the MCC site visit was that plein air painting occurred organically around the Governor Oliver Ames Estate. To boost regularity of this activity, could Partners designate an official '*Plein Air Painting Day*' (maybe 1x/month like first Saturdays, or perhaps weekly on Sundays during the summer and fall) to encourage local and regional artists – and audiences – to come to *Easton's Cultural District* to paint – and watch – on a consistent basis? This would cost very little, be fairly easy to organize, and hopefully garner greater foot traffic for area businesses.

District Partners are exploring potential collaborative programming ideas with nearby Stonehill College. In addition to potential programming, there are a number of other ways for the College and Cultural District to cooperate. Could a group of students, as part of their capstone or service project (many colleges require this), conduct the artist survey, or design and manage the calendar of cultural events (even if there is biennial changeover, it would be more consistent than it is now). Perhaps students could photograph the district annually to document how the district has physically evolved over time. Oftentimes, such project requests can be built into the students' curriculum so they may receive credits).

#### **Considerations/Recommendations:**

##### ➤ ***Identify and inventory in-door and out-door for public programs***

- To fully understand the programs that are happening now, and the potential growth of or development of new programs, consider all available space and what it is used for i.e. coffee house in a local restaurant; concerts or gardening program in the Quesset House garden and so on.

##### ➤ ***Expand Cultural District programming to include temporary and permanent public art projects.***

- Since 2008, *Art in the Park, Worcester* has featured the juried work of dozens of regional environmental installation artists in the City's historic Elm Park. Begun under the auspices of the local cultural council, this MCC-Gold Star Award recipient has grown into its own organization and transforms the park into an outdoor gallery for two months every other summer. Due to its central and visible location, tens of thousands of people of all ages and backgrounds become part of this experience. Viewers are encouraged to tour the entire park and can cast their vote for their favorite piece. This could be another collaborative programming opportunity with the Trustees of Reservations for the Governor Oliver Ames Estate.

➤ **Oakes Ames Memorial Hall – consider the possibility of housing a theatre or dance company in-residence or becoming a larger performing arts center with year-round tenants.**

- As Trustees embark on a master planning process to script a pathway for the Hall's future, explore the opportunity to serve as host facility for an in-residence theatre or dance company, or even become a larger performing arts center with multiple full-time tenants. This would not prevent the Hall from continuing to serve other community members and organizations throughout the year for special events if the master calendar was well managed.
- A speculative survey could be conducted with prospective performing arts organizations/groups in the region to gauge interest if Trustees decide that the idea is worthwhile, and to see if enough audience demand exists (particularly with neighboring Stoughton's State Theatre coming online in the future).
  - *note:* The Oaks Ames Memorial Hall is eligible to apply for funding from the state's competitive *Cultural Facilities Fund* (co-administered by the MCC and MassDevelopment) for the creation of the Hall's Master Plan (typically up to \$30,000) and for capital grants (historically, up to \$300,000) "for acquisition, design, repair, rehabilitation renovation, expansion, or construction of nonprofit cultural facilities in Massachusetts." All grants from the Fund must be matched with cash contributions from the private or public sector. Organizations can have only one active grant at a time. For more detail, go to [http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/facilities/facilities\\_about.htm](http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/facilities/facilities_about.htm).

➤ **Continue to develop relationships with groups, in and out of the Cultural District, to expand programming.**

- Invite and encourage organizations, businesses and groups, both within and outside of the District, to increase and present their programs and events *in* the Cultural District. Brockton Arts, Inc. seems like a natural fit and serves the region with an active array of programming, particularly in the areas of poetry and film. How about a *Poetry Slam Showdown* at the Oakes Ames Memorial Library?
- It could be as simple as relocating already-existing events to the District. The Governor Oliver Ames Estate and the library's gardens offer ideal settings for groups presenting any type of outdoor event. The Oakes Ames Memorial Hall is a wonderful backdrop for any annual meeting, performance, or special occasion.
- Benefits to groups would be inclusion in an umbrella marketing campaign that *collectively* promotes all Cultural District activities (forthcoming) and greater exposure.
- This is an effective way to enhance programming in the Cultural District without the Advisory Committee having to implement it.

MARKETING	YES	NO
. The marketing and branding plan is feasible and well-articulated		√
. The partnership includes expertise in marketing	√	
. There are a variety of promotional strategies	√	
. The partners are likely to reach their target population	√	
. Efforts have been made to create a welcoming environment	√	
. If relevant, program materials are offered in more than one language	-	
. Individuals from a variety of backgrounds and age groups are welcomed into and valued in the district	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

Over the past several years, the Chair and District Partners have done a very good job branding and promoting *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District* to attract and grow awareness and audiences. The name of the District is widely promoted through an active public relations campaign, as well as in the prefix for the Artist Co-op and the suffix for the Oakes Ames Memorial Hall.

The District already has a Facebook page, is well represented on the Town of Easton's website, and has received a high degree of response from local media for its various activities (a large # of news clippings/articles were included in Easton's application). Of note, the local community access TV station is an extremely active player in the promotion of the Cultural District and its many programs and events and has developed a number of informative and entertaining videos which can be seen throughout the Town of Easton's homepage and within the websites of many Cultural District

## Partners.

The challenge is to create more visibility for the town's cultural life to residents in Easton, to increase visitation from surrounding communities, and the Boston area.

Forming a Marketing/Branding Project Team, comprised of experts in the fields of marketing, communications, web design, branding, and tourism, is highly recommended. This expertise would provide the support necessary to develop and implement a comprehensive and strategic marketing plan. Creating a *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District* website and cultural calendar will be among the Project Team's first action items. In addition, the Project Team will be charged with developing materials that promote all of the District's cultural attractions and hotspots (i.e. maps; sidewalk directories/kiosks; District walking tours), identifying and targeting wider audiences, and using existing and new vehicles and technologies that broaden audience awareness and bring more traffic to the District.

The District's name is historical, yet playful, and the logo has visual appeal. The tag line, however, "*Uncover History... and Discover the Arts,*" while sufficient, is generic and could apply to any other cultural district in Massachusetts. The District's tag line should be as playful and unique as its imaginative name and logo.

District Partners should work closely with the Southeastern Massachusetts Convention & Visitors Bureau, Southeastern County's Regional Tourism Council (RTC) to market Easton's Cultural District and, along with Plymouth and New Bedford, promote Southeastern Massachusetts as a region with a growing concentration of state-designated cultural districts. *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District's* description and message will be incorporated into the MCC and Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism's websites as a major benefit of state designation, visible to millions of users.

## Recommendations:

### ➤ **Create a comprehensive website for Easton Shovel Works Cultural District.**

- Partners plan to create a website (using much of what is already included in the District's Facebook page) that will serve as a clearinghouse of information for all things related to the District that, at minimum, should include:
  - history of the District
  - a map of the District indicating cultural destinations and other points-of-interest
  - a calendar of events for District programs and festivals (critical to regularly maintain to ensure the quality and relevancy of the listings)
  - general information (i.e., directions, where to park (free/cost?), restrooms, business hours for the Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center at the Art Co-op, places to eat, transportation options, etc.)
  - a cultural directory (of artists, creative businesses, other resources, w/ links to their websites) and/or marketplace
  - list of partnering organizations/businesses w/ links to their websites
- For cross-promotional purposes, the Cultural District website should be linked with the Town's homepage and to cultural and presenting organizations, the Chamber, restaurants, and all businesses located within, and/or partnering with the District, so visitors have easy access to *consistent* information about the Cultural District from various points-of-online-entry to the Town of Easton.
- The website could be geared toward (and designed for) a variety of users – artists, businesses, realtors, visitors, residents, and funders – and can include additional features such as volunteer opportunities, available artist space (when applicable), incentives for creative businesses, virtual tours (via community access TV station?), calls to artists, and sponsorship opportunities. This will require a high level of visual and navigation sophistication.
- To check out some websites of other cultural districts (from MA and other regions) for reference and comparison, follow the links below:
  - <http://www.cityofpittsfield.org/>
  - <https://www.natickcenter.org/>
  - <http://fenwayculture.org/>
  - <http://www.goprovidence.com/things-to-do/arts-culture/>
  - <http://www.belairartsandentertainment.org/faqs/>

- <http://www.thedallasartsdistrict.org/>

➤ ***Develop a cultural calendar (or upgrade an existing one) that includes all programs, events, and activities happening in the Cultural District, or more broadly, the Town of Easton.***

- A comprehensive cultural (or community) calendar of events is a critical component of the Cultural District's outreach which will enable viewers to see what is happening in the District and broader community on any given day and to plan their visit accordingly. Several existing online calendars make an admirable attempt at promoting community events, but all fall short. For example:
  - The District's Facebook 'Events' section only promotes District-sponsored events and does not offer a broader view of Cultural District happenings; approximately one event/month is promoted.
  - The "Community Events" link under the "Leisure & Attractions" tab on the facepage of the Town's website features only two events that are 3 years old. This link should be removed (or at least directed to another functional calendar until it can be better managed
  - The Chamber of Commerce's "Community Calendar" has several listings for the month of December (current month), but does not list a single event in January?
  - The Library's "Community Calendar" is the most extensive among these calendars, but after three months, there are only three events listed (for event planning purposes, it helps to see when other events are taking place at least 6 months to a year out). In addition, are three different calendar links, "Special Events," "Full Calendar," and "Community Calendar," causing some confusion.
- Underconstructed, outdated, or incomplete calendars will hinder, and even harm, rather than support District Partners' goals to increase audience participation in District programming and avoid event overlap. The Marketing/Branding Project Team should promptly address this major challenge and decide where the community calendar would best be housed and who/what organization should maintain and update it regularly.
- Of note, the City of Worcester uses a networked system powered by an external host called the 'social web' for its calendar of events, which enables all registered users (free to sign up), including the City, Worcester Cultural Coalition members, CVB, Chamber of Commerce, and area colleges, to promote all of their events on multiple other calendars and major search engines by submitting their event information only once. In essence, partners are connected to the same calendar, though they appear differently on each organization's own websites. Having a 'social web' powered calendar on all District Partner websites also updates events automatically (no need to delete passed events) and allows calendar viewers (people looking for things to do) to filter events based on their own personal areas of interest. For more information about the Central MA social web calendar, go to <http://www.socialweb.net/Clients/>.

➤ ***Engage the Regional Tourism Council with ways to further promote Easton Shovel Town Cultural District and the region as a premier cultural destination.***

- Southeastern Massachusetts Convention & Visitors Bureau, Southeastern County's Regional Tourism Council (Bristol County/Tri-Town); 800-288-6263; <http://visitsemass.com/tri-town>

➤ ***Consider creating a new tag line for the Cultural District.***

- The Cultural District name and logo equally appropriate and engaging. The tag line, however, "*Uncover History...and Discover the Arts,*" while adequate, is rather generic. Partners might consider a short brainstorming session to rework the tag line to foster an even stronger brand for the District.

➤ **Utilize available resources for marketing and branding the Cultural District.**

- There are a number of available resources and online toolkits that District Partners might find particularly helpful as it relates to marketing, branding, and tourism, including:
  - The National Arts Marketing Project of the Americans for the Arts, [www.artsusa.org/information\\_services/artsmarketing.asp](http://www.artsusa.org/information_services/artsmarketing.asp)
  - MCC's Tourism 101 page, which shares success stories from throughout the state and provides tips on how to tap into tourism: <http://www.massculturalcouncil.org/services/tourism.asp>
  - Americans for the Arts' National Cultural Districts Exchange Toolkit, a one-stop shopping site for cultural districts: <http://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/toolkits/national-cultural-districts-exchange-toolkit>
  - New Mexico Arts & Cultural District Marketing Standards & Toolkit: [https://gonm.biz/uploads/documents/ACD\\_Marketing\\_Standards\\_6-5-12.pdf](https://gonm.biz/uploads/documents/ACD_Marketing_Standards_6-5-12.pdf)

EVALUATION	YES	NO
1. There is a plan to collect visitor and occupancy data	√	
2. Any additional data the partners plan to collect is relevant to the district goals	-	
3. The partners have some idea of how they might use the results	√	

**Comments/Observations:**

As a stipulation of state designation, District Partners must collect data on *visitorship* and *occupancy rates*. Methods for evaluating *visitorship* include monitoring ticket sales and parking at various events. Changes in *occupancy rates* will be monitored via business certificates and changes in tax revenue.

Cultural District Partners already have helpful baseline data on *visitorship* from some of the larger cultural organizations including the library, the Children's Museum, Oakes Ames Memorial Hall, and the Historical Society and Museum. Tracking attendance/participation from smaller or different-type organizations, like the Stedfast School of Museum & Art and Old Colony YMCA might also be useful.

Data collected on *visitorship* could be used to identify when activity is slowest or busiest among organizations to ascertain if program/event schedules need to be adjusted. As an example, if attendance at the majority of organizations is very low in January, then that might be an optimal time to move an existing program or present a new one to draw visitors to the District during that time of year.

Ongoing evaluation will allow stakeholders to celebrate successes when targets are hit and to reevaluate strategies and resource allocation when targets are not being met. Evaluations that document specific, measurable, (and hopefully compelling) outcomes, such as "two new monthly programs were implemented in 2017 drawing 3,000 participants," "two new public art projects were installed in 2017 involving over 100 community-participants in their creation," or "attendance at cultural programs/festivals within the District has increased by 20% since 2013," will help 'tell and sell the story' of the *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District* development to funders/sponsors, artists, residents, businesses, and the media.

**Recommendations:**

- **Use additional benchmarks in order to more accurately measure progress and evaluate the District's effectiveness in achieving its goals over time.**
- Additional benchmarks which Partners might consider using to evaluate progress include:

- \$\$ funds raised for District-related development and activities (Town already keeps track)
- # of new partnerships
- # of artists living and/or working in the Cultural District
- square footage of added artist studios and/or performance space
- # of new programs/festivals taking place in District
- # of new creative businesses located in District
- # of creative sector jobs produced (including FTE, PTE, and one-time commissions)
- # of public art projects
- \$\$ artwork sold in District
- before/after photos – a very powerful evaluation method which Easton already employs

The benchmarks used, and methods for collecting data and measuring success (via surveys, tracking attendance, examining tax rolls, photographs, etc.), should remain consistent in order to obtain an accurate evaluation of the District's impact and progress over time.

➤ ***Include qualitative research methods to help evaluate programming and marketing.***

- In addition to quantitative research methods, qualitative research methods, such as satisfaction surveys and anecdotal conversations, are useful in assessing the 'quality of experience' or 'quality of engagement' for participants/visitors. Information garnered from District events will help guide future planning, programming, and marketing for *Easton Shovel Town Cultural District*.