



PITTSFIELD CULTURAL PLAN

at the intersection of art and community

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Pittsfield, in partnership with Berkshires Tomorrow, the nonprofit arm of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), is pleased to present the city's first-ever Cultural Plan. Funded by an *Our Town* grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the Cultural Plan calls attention to the central role the arts and culture play in Pittsfield's identity. It also offers recommendations for how the city and its partners can use the arts to restore a sense of civic pride and support residents, businesses, social service organizations, and religious institutions.

Work on the Cultural Plan began in September 2023, when the four grantees (The City of Pittsfield Office of Cultural Development, Berkshires Tomorrow, Downtown Pittsfield, Inc., Berkshire Black Economic Council) first met to discuss the potential approach to the planning process.. The group quickly expanded to include arts and community leaders, artist liaisons, small business owners, and the public – residents and visitors. Their generous contributions of time, energy, and ideas have resulted in a plan that is broad in its reach but specific in its goals and objectives.

Following a year-plus process of discussions, surveys, and research, the plan has three key aims:

- Restore civic pride by fostering a diverse arts and culture landscape in which all feel welcome and included.
- Nurture residents' individual and collective ability to express themselves creatively.
- Recognize and support artists and arts organizations as resources that enhance the community socially, emotionally, and economically.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city also recognizes that a Cultural Plan, like any work of art, starts as an idea in the mind of a creator but only realizes its impact once shared with an audience. We therefore welcome the public's feedback and look forward to continued conversation after the plan's release. What we do individually and collectively to bring the story in these pages to life is in our hands. Most importantly, we want YOU to become part of the story by joining us in celebrating the diversity of talent our city offers and by sharing loudly and proudly what makes our city great.

**A plan is not the end of the story;
it is the beginning.**

CONCLUSIONS

The Cultural Plan concludes with recommendations for specific actions the city and its partners can take to enhance Pittsfield's status as the arts and cultural hub of Berkshire County for the benefit of all.

The recommendations are based on the lived experiences of arts leaders, artists, residents, and visitors, as well as those of stakeholders that use the arts for related purposes (i.e., social service, religious, businesses).

Restore civic pride and foster a creative landscape in which all feel welcome

GOAL 1: Increase the Accessibility, Affordability, and Welcoming Nature of Arts and Culture for All

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Create a central page on the Love Pittsfield website where residents and visitors can learn about reduced-price and day-of tickets to events and find volunteer opportunities (e.g., ushering at local venues).
- Better promote the availability of EBT's Card to Culture and free cultural passes at the library by partnering with the Department of Transition Assistance and nonprofits, social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and the public school system (e.g., Superintendent e-blast, Power School, Parent Squared).
- Build awareness among medical providers of Art Pharmacy so they can "prescribe" arts to clients.
- Pilot Pay-What-You-Can events and performances, preferably on weekends, to make it easier for low-income working adults, families with children, and youth to attend and better promote the discounted tickets to performances for young professionals (e.g., BTGY allows adults aged 18-30 to purchase one ticket to any Berkshire Theatre Group produced show for \$30 and BSC40 allows adults aged 18-40 to purchase two tickets to a Barrington Stage Company show for \$40/each).
- Look for ways to "activate" the portion of North Street closer to A-Mart, Carr Hardware, and Berkshire Medical Center with "creative placemaking" programming during First Fridays at Five to encourage positive public uses in an area with more dispersed street-level businesses.

CONCLUSIONS

- Encourage more outdoor dining on North Street during events and at other times in the summer.
- Create more family-friendly events in spaces that feel safe and hold them during the day rather than evening.
- Support sober events in spaces that are less triggering for people in recovery (e.g., WANDER Berkshires) and incorporate more arts and music into events aimed at people in recovery, such as Revel in Recovery and Stamp Out Stigma.
- Include “passport” stamps and foods of diverse cultures at community events to encourage people to explore beyond their familiar activities.
- Ensure the success of The Berkshire Carousel’s reactivation by supporting the volunteer group now leading its pilot this summer.
- Encourage the continuation of an annual show at The Berkshire Museum featuring Pittsfield and other local artists.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization partners: 2nd Street Second Chances, Berkshire Habitat for Humanity, Berkshire Medical Center, Berkshire Black Arts Council, Blackshires, BOAPC, Brien Center, Church of the Beloved, Crane Center, Department of Transition Assistance, Hearthway, Latinas413, Living in Recovery, Pittsfield Community TV, Pittsfield Cultural Council, Pittsfield Public Schools, Youth Advisory Board

GOAL 2: Support Multi-Modal Ways for People to Reach Cultural Experiences Through Walking, Biking, Public Transit, and Car

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Continue to promote the map of public art in downtown Pittsfield, now available on the Love Pittsfield website, to encourage people to take self-directed walking and bike tours to murals and/or art venues around the city.
- Organize with the Pittsfield Community Design Center a guided arts-oriented bike tour in collaboration with venues on dates when notable events are taking place (e.g., Berkshire Pride, First Fridays at Five, July 4th Parade).
- Encourage participation in volunteer, neighborhood-run, free, and low-cost walkable arts events such as ArtWeek Berkshires.

CONCLUSIONS

- Expand the BRTA program that allows service-by-request to Bousquet and Hancock Shaker Village to include more cultural sites such as Arrowhead, 18 Degrees, and Berkshire Community College. Include a reciprocal service-by-request pick-up option within a three-hour timeframe.
- Provide a dedicated bus to travel between Pittsfield cultural venues one weekend a month and promote it to youth and families with children (e.g., Hancock Shaker Village, Arrowhead, Bousquet, downtown).
- Pilot with Rainbow Cab or an on-demand service a reduced there-and-back “Share a Cab to Culture” rate if two parties share a ride both ways to a Pittsfield arts venue.
- Pilot a 10%-off discounted food or drink ticket to a local bar or restaurant if parties of three or more can show they carpooled to a show.
- Create better wayfinding to help those who drive more easily find parking.

GOAL 3: Create Cultural Branding through Collaborative Wayfinding (i.e., Signage) and Marketing that Helps People Better Locate and Enjoy Arts and Cultural Organizations

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Continue the planned rollout of wayfinding in downtown Pittsfield in summer 2025 that will include branded signs, maps, and a kiosk.
- Assess the impact of the wayfinding rollout with a public survey campaign in July, August, and September.
- Continue working with civic, arts, business, BIPOC, and youth organizations to brainstorm ideas for targeted cultural marketing, including a more robust and video-rich social media campaign aimed at hard-to-reach audiences.
- Pursue additional funding for wayfinding through the Mass Downtown Initiative and Community One-Stop.
- Create a design competition involving local artists to re-imagine Pittsfield imagery that could be used for posters or social media in a Phase II marketing/branding campaign.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization Partners: 1Berkshire, BBEC, Blackshires, EforAll, Latinas413, PERC, TDI

CONCLUSIONS

GOAL 4: Cultural bridge-building. Increase organizational and community training related to cultural accessibility and DEIA-B to ensure arts and culture organizations are welcoming and inclusive internally and externally.

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Work together to identify DEIA-B trainers outside of Berkshire County to help expand the pool of consultant candidates to lead the work.
- Use Pittsfield Public School's equity audit and findings to help guide discussions and training.

Nurture and support individual and collective creative expression

GOAL 1: Expand Arts Integration Within Public Schools and Social Service Organizations to Benefit Youth – Our Future Creators

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Ensure the Pittsfield public school superintendent, middle- and high-school principals, and middle- and high-school teachers are making full use of the arts-related career guidance and resources curated by MCLA Brainworks Career Readiness Guide. Evaluate efficacy through annual student and teacher surveys to ensure they are reaching students in meaningful ways.
- Encourage Pittsfield public schools and arts organizations to fully participate in MCLA Brainworks C4 Initiative, which aims to facilitate a cross-sector, collective impact initiative that maps arts learning to larger regional goals. See a list of current participating organizations here: <https://www.brainworks.mcla.edu/arts-culture-organization>.
- Pilot a brief (1- to 2-week) mentorship program that pairs professional local artists with high school students through a competitive application to attract students serious about careers in the arts. Explore with Berkshire Taconic Foundation dedicating funds to pay a stipend to mentors.
- Replicate in a dedicated location, such as Barrington Stage's Mr. Finn's Cabaret or Dottie's, the monthly youth open mic series now offered at Calliope Cafe in the Stationery Factory in Dalton.

CONCLUSIONS

- Continue the relationship between Berkshire Film Collaborative and Pittsfield High School to teach students in-demand film and videography skills. Explore having students create short social media videos for arts organizations.
- Recruit a high school student to serve as a member of the Pittsfield Cultural Council to better represent youth voices.
- Identify teen/youth cultural “ambassadors” to create social media aimed at building young people’s awareness of the Love Pittsfield website and arts-cultural offerings.
- Better promote and expand youth-focused or youth-only event nights at cultural venues and other performance spaces (e.g., WordXWord).
- Create an arts mentorship program between arts-focused students at BCC, MCLA, and Williams College and Pittsfield and Taconic High School students.
- Restore funding for the Coordinator for Arts Integration & Community Partnerships role within the Pittsfield Public School System to foster more robust relationships between public schools and arts organizations.
- Provide a way for low-income students to borrow musical instruments for free and try them out before their families have to pay and commit to an instrument, before their children are ready.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization Partners: 1Berkshire, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, Berkshire Community College, Berkshire YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, MassHire, MCLA, Pittsfield Public School’s Superintendent’s Office

GOAL 2: Provide Opportunities for Neighborhood-Based Creative Expression

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Stage shows in neighborhood-based public spaces to reach audiences in places requiring little to no transportation, such as Pittsfield Skate Park, Wahconah Park, and Durant Park.
- Designate an Artist Liaison / Arts Ambassador for each Pittsfield ward who would help program a centrally located neighborhood park within walking distance of most residences.
- Encourage the creation of new volunteer-led events that foster neighborhood spirit, such as PorchFest.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization Partners: Christian Center, City of Pittsfield Parks Department, Framework, Ward Councillors

CONCLUSIONS

Recognize and support artists and arts organizations as resources that enhance the community socially, emotionally, and economically

GOAL 1: Help Berkshire Artists and Arts Organizations Increase the Range of Ways They Earn Income to Ensure Their Sustainability

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Recruit more artists and physicians to participate in Art Pharmacy to prescribe the arts to students in need and provide arts activities on-site at social service organizations and recovery programs.
- Find creative ways for artists to be brought in as contractors to assist with civic engagement projects to lend a unique perspective to problem-solving.
- Help more artists promote themselves on MCC's Creative Ground to expand awareness of their work. Once Creative Ground is well-populated, have the city list these artists and groups on the Love Pittsfield website using a customized API feed.
- Encourage BIPOC artists to list themselves with BBEC, Blackshires, and Latinas413.
- Ensure artists are aware of local and regional e-newsletters that post paid opportunities such as BCAN e-news, 1Berkshire's The Jobs Thing, ArtsHub of Western Mass, and HireCulture.
- Have the Berkshire Athenaeum lead periodic workshops to teach artists and arts organizations how to use the Candid grants funding database.
- Brainstorm with arts organizations about opportunities to market and promote their spaces for alternative uses that generate new sources of income.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization Partners: 1Berkshire, BBEC, Blackshires, EforAll, Latinas413, Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, Small Business Development Center

CONCLUSIONS

GOAL 2: Support Artists to Find and Secure Affordable Live, Work, and Performance Spaces

Strategies to Achieve Goal:

- Create a landing page on the Love Pittsfield website for artists where they can post jobs, housing shares, and space rentals.
- Identify vacant and under-utilized spaces that could be repurposed for pop-up performances and window arts.
- Help artists find homeowners interested in organizing “house concerts.”
- Build relationships with faith-based organizations currently offering arts and performance opportunities that have the potential to be expanded.
- Continue to identify state and philanthropic funding that would support permanent and seasonal affordable artist housing.
- Host an affordable artist housing day-long conference and invite regional developers and multi-state representatives who have completed artist housing to participate.

SAMPLE Non-Arts Organization Partners: 1Berkshire, BBEC, Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, Blackshires, Faith-Based Organizations, Hearthway, Milltown Capital, Nonprofit Center of the Berkshires, Private Homeowners.





SPECIAL THANKS TO



For a full comprehensive Cultural Plan including resource links and appendices, go to **LovePittsfield.com** or call the City of Pittsfield's Office of Cultural Development 413-499-9348.