

Report of Arts Committee
June 4, 2015

Background

Freeport is home to a robust and diverse creative arts community. For over twenty years, this community has been exploring the idea of developing a home where artists can perform, exhibit, learn and collaborate. In the 1990s the Casco Bay YMCA was planned with Freeport Arts considered, but ultimately excluded from the project. Freeport community art was also a significant consideration when the Freeport Performing Arts center was developed at the High School, but time has shown that the concentration on the high school's educational needs makes the space unsuitable for regular use by the creative arts community. The Arts, particularly the performing arts was initially a fundamental use that was central to the planning for Community Center but as the social service focus of the Community Center became clearer, the creative arts was once again omitted from the plans for the final project.

The Current Effort

In April of 2014, the Freeport Community Players began to explore the possibility of acquiring space to perform shows for small (100-125 seat) performances and the Freeport Economic Development Corporation adopted the concept of an arts and cultural center in its Vision 2025 action plan. Together these two organization decided to sponsor a joint effort to explore the concept and if sufficient interest existed to develop a plan for developing an arts center in town.

Under the auspices of FCP and the FEDC, a gathering of potential users from the arts community convened in August 2014 for a discussion about what the arts and artists need to thrive in Freeport.

In January, 2015, a coalition organized under the auspices of Freeport Community Players and Freeport Economic Development Corporation was created to explore the interest and support for an arts center in Freeport.

Based on the responses received, a smaller working group (The Committee) met to discuss the idea of an arts center and to decide a process for going forward. This Committee decided to interview local residents active in the arts and in community affairs to assess the interest in the concept of an arts and cultural center and to begin the process of defining the project. An effort was made to include representatives of the organizations in town that already involved elements of the arts community. The Committee also decided to visit and interview the existing arts centers in the State of Maine to gather information about their programs and offerings and to explore the process each used to develop their entity.

The Interviews

Between January and March, 2015 this small committee interviewed over 30 residents. During the interviews participants were asked about a variety of issues, including:

- Whether they considered themselves members of the creative community in Freeport.
- Whether they thought the creation of an Arts and Cultural Center was a good idea for Freeport.
- What services or space such a center should provide.
- Where such a center should be located.
- Their interest or willingness to be involved in the development process.

The results of the interviews was published in a summary that suggested the majority of those interviewed supported the development of an arts center with caveats that included concerns about fund raising, competition with exiting arts space (i.e., FPAC) and with existing arts venues and institutions. A copy is attached. These people thought the benefits of a center would be increased opportunity for artists to exhibit and perform, to collaborate with other artists, to expand the Freeport identity to showcase the strengths of the creative community, and to engage members of the public in the creative process. Overall the diversification of opportunity to experience the arts, through performance and exhibits, collaboration, arts education and training would increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life for Freeport residents from all ages and social strata.

When asked about the services and space a wider divergence of opinion was revealed. Among the specific uses identified for a center was a small performance space (blackbox) for intimate productions, practice and workshop space for visual and music arts, classroom (lesson) space, audiovisual space, gallery exhibits, social space including food and drink options, offices for arts NFP, parking, and communication services for the public about arts offerings and opportunities.

The ideas about location were also varied but most people thought the Arts Center should be located in the downtown area but not necessarily on Main Street.

The most positive result from the interviews was the expression of support those interviewed conveyed and the wealth of suggestions they gave for people to contact going forward. These people also gave guidance on the tasks ahead advising strongly about the need for a well defined plan, that includes consideration of the relationship with Freeport Schools, FPAC, funding needs and sources, management, and operational sustainability.

Cogent comments regarding the need for strong leadership and demonstration of community benefit were also received.

The Site Visits

The Committee also collated the results of its site visits to cultural centers in Lewiston, Eastport, Stonington, Denmark, Boothbay, and Gorham and reviewed a detailed and useful report from the Farmington Center. A summary of these visits is attached.

Principle takeaways from these visits include:

- All of the Arts centers were housed in old buildings that were contributed to the developing organization. Renovation of these old buildings has been an ongoing source of effort and fundraising. Historic Preservation clearly played a role in the arts center development.
- All of the centers offer a stage and small performance space for music and theater. Several centers host community events with seating and kitchen and bar space that serve weddings, funerals, parties dances community fundraisers and receptions that help pay operating costs and keeps the community engaged and connected to the facility.
- Advice received from facility managers was know your community and give them what they want, develop a good plan based on the community needs, hire strong management, live within your means.
- Revenue for the centers came from a variety of sources, including private donations annual appeal and capital campaigns, bank loans, grants, event revenue, revenue from bar and kitchen.

The Public Meeting

After the conclusion of the community interviews and completion of the site visits the organizing committee decided it was important to gain a town wide perspective on the desirability of an Arts Center. On April 28 the Freeport Community Players and Economic Development Council jointly sponsored a public forum to assess the community interest in the center. The public meeting was held at The Freeport Community Center from 6-8 with refreshments provided by Azure Café, Bow Street Market, and Coffee by Design. The public meeting was facilitated by Carol Wishcamper. Over sixty people attended the meeting which was designed to further assess the support for an arts center and its specifications informed by perspectives gained through Committee interviews and site visits.

The meeting was divided into four topic tables for discussion:

1. The concept of developing an informational hub to disseminate information about arts events and increase resident access and experience with local artists.
2. The concept of developing space for black box theatre and gallery space
3. The concept of creating a community arts complex focused on the involvement of the community in the creative arts process and collaboration between artists of different genres.
4. All the above/combination of these ideas.

The attendees self-selected by joining tables based on their interests. The largest group, number 4, was divided into two sections. Committee members attended sessions to answer questions, but every effort was made to use the table discussion groups to develop a clear understanding of the views of public participants.

Detailed notes were maintained from each working group and kept as a record of the proceedings. At the end of the small group discussions the large group reconvened to hear the report of each small table group.

At the end of the meeting the organizers promised to review the comments and opinions, to issue a report of the proceedings and to set out the steps for developing the recommendations adopted as a result of the input from the meeting,

Interested members of the public were invited to join the organizing committee and to join an email list to stay apprised of the committee's considerations and decisions.

Next Steps

On May 14, 2015, the organizing Committee with its new members met at Town Hall to review the results of the public meeting and to decide on an agenda for going forward.

Based on review of the meeting notes and their participation in the meeting the Committee unanimously concluded that the interest expressed in the public meeting justified taking the concept to the next stage.

Committee members stated that they had observed consensus around the following points:

- 1) There is an obvious and immediate need and benefit from developing an information hub to disseminate information about ongoing arts events and opportunities in Freeport. A

subcommittee was established to develop the specific elements of such a communications hub and to report their recommendations to the next meeting

- 2) There is an immediate benefit to creating an interim organizational structure for what has been to date an ad hoc committee. A subcommittee was appointed to consider organizational issues and report their recommendations to the next meeting.
- 3) There is a critical need to conduct in depth analysis of arts center programs and facilities in conjunction with artists, the schools, existing arts organizations and venue providers A subcommittee was formed to plan for the specific contents of the arts center concept, including a means to identify the users of the facility and to specify space needs.
- 4) Funding each aspect of the plan was seen as critical. A finance subcommittee was created to explore options for raising funds to operate the planning process, developing recommendations of the committees and to develop an arts center.
- 5) Site opportunities. The committee believed it would make sense to keep informed about sites suitable for some or all elements of and arts center during the planning process.

The Committee also met with the FEDC board in May, and reported the results of the public meeting and the steps it had decided to take to advance the concept. The FEDC discussed the Committee's report and agreed to continue its involvement in the project and to authorize its director, Keith McBride, to continue his support. Keith will be principally responsible for identifying facility opening and for helping with organizing the effort from a formal and operational perspective. The FEDC recommended that initial short term funding needs be addressed by appeals to FEDC and the Players with contributions sought from local businesses.

Communications from the committee will be maintained on the FEDC website which will provide a repository of information and plans developed by the Committee and its working subcommittees.

The Committees next meeting is scheduled for Thursday June 5 at 7 pm at the Freeport Library.

I. The Arts Community

Most of the individuals we interviewed identified themselves as being part of the Freeport arts community. Of those who said they were not, most considered themselves patrons or supporters of the arts, but not an artist themselves. The artists we interviewed spanned many different mediums and also had a wide spectrum of income expectations from their art.

1. Are you a member of the Freeport Arts community?

Approx 2/3 said yes.

2. If so how would you describe your participation or involvement?

- Musician 7
- Writer 2
- Visual Arts 10
- Educator 3
- Performance Art/Drama 1
- Supporter/Patron 8
- Representing an arts organization 4

3. Is your engagement commercial?

- "I make my living from my art."
- "My primary income, but not my family's only income source."
- "Some income, but it's not reliable and I'm not dependant on it."
- "No, I would describe myself as amateur/hobbyist."
- "No. I support the arts, but I do not consider myself an artist."

II. The A&CC Concept

The majority of individuals we interviewed were supportive of an arts & cultural center for Freeport. There are, however, differing ideas on what that center would include, and where it should be located.

1. Do you think developing a Creative Arts and Cultural center in Freeport is a good idea?

- Yes, absolutely
- Yes, every community should have one.
- Yes, the question isn't whether or not to have it, it's what shape should it take.
- Yes, there is a real need for additional space.
- Yes, it would be great for Freeport's image.
- Yes, it would give Freeporters an opportunity to participate and be exposed to art.
- Yes, but concerned about funding and management/control.
- Why isn't the FPAC serving this role?
- No. We should support existing arts venues and institutions instead.

2. Could a Creative Arts and Cultural center in Freeport benefit you as an artist and if so how?

- More opportunity to show/display art, year-round
- More opportunities to collaborate with other artists
- Probably/Depends on what it offers
- Shared resources (i.e.: workshop space, equipment)
- More opportunity to sell art/increase revenue
- No impact
- Could attract artists to Freeport, creating an arts hub/exposure to new artists
- Could provide places for mentors/teachers to work with students (workshop/classroom space)
- Performance space for music/theatre
- No benefit. In fact, it would hurt other organizations/venues.

3. Do you think an Arts and Cultural center would be a positive development for Freeport?

- Yes, it diversifies Freeport (not just shopping).
- Yes, improves quality of life for residents.
- Yes, if it's done well. A failing Center would look bad.
- No. It does not serve any existing need.
- Yes, if its financially feasible and self-sustaining.
- Yes, if it benefits all Freeport society and not just the well-to-do.
- Yes, it will provide educational opportunities.
- No. It would "water down" the quality of art in town with amateur work.
- No. The public would not support it.

4. What services, opportunities or space should a Freeport Arts and Cultural Center provide?

- Small theatre/performance space (100 seats or less)
- Practice/workshop space
- Classrooms/educational/lesson space
- Social space (i.e.: lounge, coffeeshop)
- Space for film festival
- Depends on what will generate revenue streams
- Visual arts gallery
- Ample parking
- Offices for local arts non-profits
- Instead of a physical structure, we should consider a publication to inform residents and provide a rallying point for quality art in the area.

5. Where should a Freeport Arts and Cultural Center be located?

- Close to schools (walking distance?)
- First, we need an arts organization, then figure out how to meet the needs.
- No opinion/I don't know
- Balance proximity of amenities (restaurants/hotels) with cost.
- As close to downtown/village/foot traffic as possible.
- Depends on whether you are catering to locals, tourists, artists or students.
- Edge of town, not in the downtown/village
- Downtown, but not necessarily Main Street.
- Anywhere, as long as the space allows for outdoor and indoor exhibits

- Maximize visibility. Main Street if possible.
- Route 1 South, because its more cost-effective and there is more growth.

III. Energy/Support

There is tremendous support for the process. Many interviewees were not able to contribute, and would not commit to any particular role. The interviewees also raised a wide array of concerns for this project moving forward –most notably, financial feasibility/sustainability and management of such a facility.

1. How would you describe your interest in development of an Arts and Cultural Center for Freeport? Would you be willing to participate in the process of planning/ developing an Arts and Cultural Center for Freeport?
 - Willing to share my experience, but can't otherwise participate/contribute
 - Interested in helping find out if it's financially feasible
 - "Enthusiastic bystander"
 - Interested in helping design the space, but not fundraising/letter writing
 - Possibly volunteer on a limited basis
 - None. Too busy to contribute.
 - Very interested in participating in the process.
 - Not sure there's anything I can do to contribute, but contact me if so.
 - Willing to contact philanthropists and inquire about fundraising.
 - Public support (attend public meetings, letters to the editor, etc.)
 - Interested in helping market the opportunities the center would bring.

2. Are there any questions you have or issues you would like to raise regarding the idea of developing a Freeport Arts and Cultural Center?
 - Figure out the long-term funding first, then cater to what that supports.
 - Is "Arts" too narrow a focus?
 - What is the goal? Education? Supporting Artists? Supporting Arts Organizations?
 - Is this project financially feasible/sustainable?
 - Tension between quality and inclusiveness; maintaining a professional tone
 - Concerns about need and sustainability
 - the FPAC was meant to serve this purpose; can we work to get the benefits from public support of FPAC as was intended?
 - Who will manage the space? How?
 - Will it be affiliated with the schools? Should it be?
 - Needs to show a community-wide benefit.
 - Needs a strong leader/champion/director.
 - Is Freeport big enough to support an arts and cultural center?
 - Needs to have a clearly defined plan that will be pursued. The concept is not yet defined.

Arts Center Research Summary
April 24, 2015

The following Arts Centers were selected:

- Franco-American Center, Lewiston, ME
- Eastport Arts Center, Eastport, ME
- Opera House Arts, Stonington, ME
- Denmark Arts Center, Denmark, ME
- Boothbay Opera House, Boothbay Harbor, ME
- Gorham Community Arts Center, Gorham, ME

With each center, our research and interviews focused on the following: the history (creation/development), management, facilities/capacity, and funding/fundraising strategies. From each, we hope to determine some “best practices,” and also to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats each center faced, and which might also be present in Freeport.

We have included the names of the interviewees we contacted at each of the centers. We found them all to be helpful and informative, and thank them for their time and participation.

I. Franco-American Center, Lewiston, ME

Interviewee: Richard Martin, Program Director

History: The large church building was donated by the Diocese for \$1 to a community group committed to saving the old building. Since 2000 they have raised between \$6 and 7 million dollars for renovations. This continues.

Management Structure:

Facility/Events: The Franco Center has two stages. The upstairs stage has seating for many hundreds of people. Heritage Hall is down stairs, which has a kitchen and a bar as well as a stage and seating for approximately 200 at tables. The downstairs facility is a good place for comedy, rock and roll, performances, dances, parties, etc as well as receptions.

This allows a wide range of options for events that fill the facility. The bar provides an important means of attracting rentals and supporting the core mission of the facility. Richard said he could not imagine operating the facility without a bar now that they have one. They also provide a catering service for wedding receptions, etc.

They do have in-house events and support the local arts community. However, they could not possibly survive on that income stream alone.

Funding/Fundraising: Their total operating budget was not disclosed. The building is a major asset; however it is also a significant cost center. Heating the facility has been a concern, but they have saved some money by converting to natural gas.

Programming and rental account for approximately 20-40% of the revenue. The balance of income is from fundraising, capital campaigns, Annual appeal, grant writing, etc. The rental of the space for events including weddings and receptions is a very important part of the income stream.

Take-aways: Overall impression is that the facility creates a devoted base of supporters. The facility is expensive to operate. Having an intimate space and a large space provides them with a perfect place for weddings and receptions as well as large performance and intimate performance spaces.

II. Eastport Arts Center, Eastport, ME

Interviewee: Devon Kelley-Yurdin, Publicity Director

History: The EAC began in 1985 as the Eastport Gallery, then over the years, incorporated the community theater into the center, along with a film society and a concert series.

Management Structure: EAC is the umbrella for seven constituent groups, some of which are 501(c)(3), and some aren't. Some constituent groups have boards, others don't. These groups include StageEast, Passamaquoddy Bay Symphony Orchestra, Quoddy Voices, Eastport String, Eastport Gallery, Northern Lights Film Society, and ArtsBloom. Each group does its own programming and have a good deal of autonomy, but they share a home that none could otherwise afford. EAC has a large and active board of directors, which makes up in some part for its lack of an organized volunteer corps.

It currently has three part-time staff: the director, development director, and publicity/education/outreach director.

Last year, EAC hired Portland consultant Gary Stern, who Devon thought was fantastic. He helped them with their business plan—its conception and implementation, which involved the hiring of the development director. She believes any arts center needs solid professional staff. She also highly recommended Gary Stern.

Facility/Events: Summer is very busy, and they offer classes, workshops, concerts, films and other events. Each group pays its "fair share" according to calculations that I could not really comprehend, but a lot of it was based upon the number of hours each group used the building. EAC continues to grow, and is refocusing on educational programming and better publicity.

Funding/Fundraising: EAC has gotten a lot of support from grants, including the Adams Family Trust. The organization cannot rely on grants, however, especially for salaries, so it hired its development director last year.

Take-aways: Devon emphasized how important it was for the community to "really know what is going on if you want their support," and they do a lot of press releases, have community meetings, etc., in addition to publicizing their programs.

III. Opera House Arts, Stonington, ME

Interviewee: Linda Nelson, Co-founder and Executive Director

History: Operah House Arts was a project led by four women – all but one non-residents at the time the idea was hatched – who saw an opportunity to use their theater and business knowledge to restore a community asset. From the outset the vision was for community improvement through the arts. Their motto is “Create Art. Incite Community.”

They focused their attention on an historic building which in its heyday was a center of community life, and set to restoring that building to its original condition and purpose. They started with the restoration of the building, then developed programming in keeping with the history of the building (theater and movies) and in service to the community improvement mission.

Management Structure: This was an entrepreneurial effort – led, owned and operated by a small group. However, they made a commitment to involve the community in the project in meaningful ways. An unusually large community advisory board was formed to consider current and future programming, property management, financing, and expansion. The community advisory board helps the non-profit Board and staff make good choices backed by community support. OHA also enlisted the help of community volunteers in building renovations and continues to rely on volunteers.

Facility: 250-seat theatre.

Funding/Fundraising: Initially, private financing (commercial loans) was utilized to acquire the property, but individual supporters (through fundraising campaigns and events) raise enough to support programs operations. Successful and popular (community-wide) programming helps with fundraising.

Take-aways: Having a detailed business plan and swot analysis helped with understanding their financial position and competition. Community involvement is also key.

IV. Denmark Arts Center, Denmark, ME

Interviewee: Jamie Hook, Artistic Director

History: DAC is in an old Odd Fellows building, owned by town was to be burned as a live fire exercise. Sold the bldg to carpenter – 1994 – who create non-profit...bldg and nonprofit limped along until 2010. Budget never more than \$10K. Mostly motivated by love of physicality of building. A benefactor brought new energy to center.

Management Structure: DAC is a non-profit organization with a “working” Board of Directors, with job descriptions. DAC employs an Artistic Director, and some additional part-time staff.

Facility: A small, vocal group resists the director’s shifting focus to professional artists, wanting it to remain an amateur community arts center. There is on-going tension: “is it a community center or arts center”? There is currently some amateur use of the space.

Funding/Fundraising: Current annual budget: \$100,000 approx. Henry Banks arranged for town to sell the building to Denmark Arts Center, not-profit, for \$1. Fundraising campaigns sustain the building. The DAC board is trying to buy a farmhouse across the road to add the possibility of smaller events and winter activities. The new facility could host residences, a café, and small studio/rehearsal spaces.

The center currently closes for the winter.

They are also exploring funding opportunities to host a residency program. However, there is push-back from the town residents, who are concerned about outsiders coming to Denmark.

The center's revenue is 60% contributed/donated. The Artistic Director's spends significant time grant writing and raising money rather than researching and contracting interesting performance groups. The center welcomes donations at events, and 95% of attendees pay the suggested donation. The center charges \$50 for week-long kids' workshops, but also allows local residents to apply for scholarships for their children.

They also receive \$2500 from the town, and some additional small support from the school district.

Take-aways: The idiosyncrasies of people that populate and run the space has to be honored – not in job description but the personality is important. Be unique in what you offer.

V. Boothbay Opera House, Boothbay Harbor, ME

Interviewee: Cathy Sherrill, Executive Director

History: The Boothbay Opera House is an historic performance hall and event venue located in downtown Boothbay Harbor. Originally built by the Knights of Pythias, the Opera House was used by them and the Masons as a lodge since 1894. After years of neglect, the building was purchased in 2003 by a 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts group.

Management Structure: The non-profit has a Board of Directors, which employs a staff of two full-time and one half-time employees who make the venue ready for community use.

Facility/Events: The first floor of the building has a performance hall which has been used for a wide variety of entertainment acts and community events that place it solidly in the experience and memory of all Boothbay residents. The second floor of the building contains an impressive bar and dining room where the Knights of Pythias once met and a smaller more intimate dining room in the former Mason Lodge.

The Opera House hosts over 100 performance events a year, primarily concerts, which provide a huge boost to the local economy by filling seats in local restaurants and beds in area lodging establishments. The Opera House hosts other events including weddings, funerals and reunions.

Funding/Fundraising: A private, non-profit arts group raised in excess of \$1,000,000 to purchase the property, retire debt, restore and maintain the building, and to operate the performance hall. During this period, benefit concerts by Jackson Brown and Mark Knofler were central to raising funds and awareness to support the private initiative; a generous private matching donation was also key to the effort.

The annual budget for the Opera House is approximately \$350,000. To date there has been no municipal funding and no grants to support either capital improvements or to subsidize operating expenses. Annual expenses are offset by revenues from operation, membership dues (\$40,000) and the annual appeal which raises \$60,000-\$70,000. Developing membership and conducting the annual appeal are largely the responsibility of the Board of Directors.

Take-aways: The mission of the Boothbay Opera House is “Arts Building Community,” and community support is a critical component of the success of the venture. This support is based on the community memory of historic use and current efforts to insure the site is accessible to meet community needs and operated to enhance rather than compete with local business and community interests.

VI. Community Arts Center, Gorham, ME

Interviewee: Amy Valentine, Board of Directors President and Activities Coordinator

History: The Gorham Arts Alliance has been providing adult and child arts education for a number of years. Their need for space led to the opportunity presented by the former Odd Fellows building on School Street. The owner, a local realtor, pitched the idea of using the space as an arts center to the GAA. The board sought traditional financing to purchase the building and was rejected. They eventually connected with a local business-person and developer who offered to serve as the financier for the project.

Management Structure: The facility is owned and operated by the GAA. One of the board members volunteers to oversee operations and activities on a part-time basis. Teachers and others offering activities in the space are responsible for managing their own events/classes, and are not paid by the GAA, but by the students/participants. The only exceptions to this are the GAA’s preschool, before/after-school programs, summer camp.

Facility: The building has approximately 5,000 square feet of usable (finished) space, over two floors (approx 2480 feet per floor). The upper floor is dominated by a large, open auditorium space with a small elevated stage and curtain. It is idea for small stage productions. There is also a small box office, office space and some storage. However, the upstairs is not currently usable because it lacks the fire protection (sprinklers) systems required by the town. A plan to install the sprinkler system is in the works.

Downstairs, the area has been made into an educational center. There are some lesson rooms (used mostly for music lessons) a kitchen, a pre-school room and a large arts workshop room containing easels, supplies, pottery wheels and other open work stations. It is used mostly by students.

The GAA has considered using part of the space as a retail artists co-op store, but decided against that. They are able to convert some of the downstairs space into a “gallery” by adding lighting and temporary walls, and have used this set-up for exhibitions. They also host birthday parties, a local knitting group, and have received requests from writers seeking access to the office upstairs as a workspace.

Funding/Fundraising: Their primary source of revenue is education-based arts programming. The pre-school, and before/after-school care programs offer a structured, arts-intensive education. During the day, they expand this program to include arts enrichment for home-schooled children. They also collect usage fees from teachers/instructors who use the space for private lessons.

The GAA has a strong budget history, and used this as a demonstration of their revenue-potential to obtain financing for the purchase and refurbishing of the arts center space. They continue to pay their private financier out of the revenue earned by the use of the space. However, the maintenance and required upgrades in the space are more expensive than expected. They will seek grants and/or private

philanthropy to complete the fire protection project on the second floor. No public funding, donations or grants were used to acquire the building.

Take-aways: The organization operated without space, finding their niche in Gorham: providing educational opportunities to adults and children. The addition of a physical space created new opportunities, but also new, unexpected costs. However, it has contributed enormously to the visibility of the arts in Gorham.