



The Town of Lexington Cultural District Assessment

Purpose

This report is for the Town of Lexington, the many staff and volunteers who will create and maintain a lively and viable cultural asset for the Town, its residents, and its visitors. The report documents the current conditions, the committee's plans, and the observations and recommendations of Mass Cultural Council staff and the Cultural District Program site advisor.

Specifically, Mass Cultural Council Cultural Districts "shall attract artists and cultural enterprises to a community, encourage business and job development, establish tourist destinations, preserve and reuse historic buildings, enhance property values and foster local cultural development. "

Successful cultural districts are built on understanding, connecting, and leveraging an ecosystem of physical, organizational, and programmatic assets. The Mass Cultural Council program identifies three foundational characteristics:

1. a navigable, welcoming, and defined physical plan with a mix of cultural (very broadly defined) physical assets,
2. a collaborative organizational model grounded in the local area and including a multi-sector of types of partners, and
3. open and authentic programming that highlights the District's character and engages residents, workers, and visitors.

The Mass Cultural Council framework guides this assessment. The observations reflect a review of the application, meetings, a site visit, additional bench research, and experience with other cultural districts. The first section, Strengths, assesses the proposed plan and current conditions. Strengths are points of excellence. The following section, Recommendations-Opportunities & Challenges, includes recommendations on tactics and priorities. The district's management may decide to identify strategies and clarify its work plan to address these

recommendations. A third section creates a checklist of action steps, and a final section includes additional resources.

Intro/Overview

The Town of Lexington Description

The Town of Lexington is a suburban community located fifteen miles northwest of Boston. The Town is easily accessible from multiple directions via Routes 93 or 95, Route 2, or Route 4. It is noted for its colonial history and as a place where "history and the present are intertwined."

Cultural Assets

The Town has a mix of cultural and historical assets. It has four historic districts, multiple historic sites, and well-maintained and programmed historic facilities. Lexington shares the Minute Man National Park with Concord and Lincoln and is a significant tourist attraction for visitors interested in the battles of the American Revolution. The Town has a diverse cultural community of artists anchored by art galleries, a cultural center, performance spaces, museums, and festivals. Art schools and festivals are organized by the diverse communities within the town.

Vision

The vision for the cultural district is to improve upon the existing assets and foster collaboration among all the cultural organizations.

Goals

The goals of the district per the Select Board Resolution are to:

1. Attract artists and cultural enterprises
2. Encourage business and job development
3. Establish tourist destinations
4. Preserve and reuse historic buildings
5. Enhance property values
6. Foster local cultural development

Boundaries

Mass Ave from Hastings Park to Pleasant Street. The stretch of Mass Ave includes Lexington's main street with significant historical and cultural sites, restaurants, shops, and public spaces. It is a little over three miles.

The Action Plan for the first six months

To promote the district within Lexington:

- Using the Town's website and email newsletter
- Planning a public ribbon-cutting ceremony to open the district
- Publishing press releases announcing the opening of the district in local news outlets as well as conducting outreach to partners to share widely in their networks.

Strengths of the Proposed District

Place and physical assets

The Town of Lexington has strong, well-maintained, and nationally recognized physical assets and amenities that are a significant draw for local, national, and international tourists. The unique historic assets are located in four historic overlay districts and include many National Historic Landmarks that have a foundational place in the country's colonial history. Battle Green and the surrounding area are the sites of the first Revolutionary War battle and a tourist attraction with an international appeal. The proximate Buckman Tavern, the Hancock-Clarke House, and the many historic homes that abut the Battle Green create a picturesque feel for visitors and define the Town's character. Old Burying Ground and Simonds Cemetery are close and form an easily accessible cluster.

Additional historical and cultural assets are within walking distance or a short trolley ride from the Battle Green. Scottish Rite and Masonic Museum & Library is a unique cultural center with distinctive exhibits and an auditorium. The Cary Library, a beautiful and well-used facility, hosts and facilitates programming by many members of the Lexington community. The Depot was an old train station and is now one of four buildings programmed by the Lexington Historical Society.

Cary Hall is the site of civic and cultural programming throughout the year. The building includes an auditorium and recital stage, was recently renovated, and is entirely handicap accessible and air-conditioned.

Farther down Mass Ave, the district includes the Munroe Center for the Arts, Munroe Tavern, and the Stone Building. The Munroe Center for the Arts is an art center filled with local artists, exhibitions, and classrooms. The Munroe Tavern shares a site with the Historical Society Archives and Research Center and the Munroe Tavern Gardens (Garden of Colonial Flowers, the Wildflower Native Plant Garden, and the Rose Garden at Munroe Tavern.)

In May 2022, a Final Report of the Stone Building Feasibility/Reuse Committee recommended that the building return "to its original purpose as a Lyceum, a place for learning and engagement, updated for modern users, as the overarching concept for the building's reuse. We envision a welcoming place where organizations and individuals connect and are inspired to

create positive change in the local community and beyond." This redevelopment will create another unique Town venue for a diverse, cultural programming agenda.

The Lexington Centre shops, restaurants, and well-designed town center create a walkable and inviting commercial district. With its wide sidewalks, the Centre was recently redesigned, and elements of the original design construct, "a public living room," were incorporated into the new design's seating and public spaces.

Together with Memorial Park, these are spaces for formal and informal gatherings, fairs, markets, and other events.

The Town also has many public parks, walking trails, and the Minute Man Bike Trail. The parks have passive and active recreation spaces, including performing areas and infrastructure to support programming. A public meeting place and a venue for concerts and other activities complement Antony Park's French formal garden. Accessing the Visitor Center and the Town center from the bike trail is easy.

The Town's strong tourism focus strengthens these assets and makes them more accessible. The Tourism Committee is vital to the Town's management and was instrumental in forming the cultural district. A well-developed tourism infrastructure includes public bathrooms, Wi-Fi, and a well-positioned and staffed visitor center.

Operational Structure & Planning Framework

The management structure for the cultural district is a partnership model consisting of local organizations anchored by the Town's Economic Development Office. The partnering organizations will identify individuals to represent them at quarterly meetings coordinated by the "coordinator." The application specifies a broad group of cultural, civic, historical, and commercial representatives and identifies the responsibilities of the coordinator, treasurer, and potential task forces.

The Town is committed to "efforts to create, promote and sustain the LCD' once the cultural district is in place. Specifically, they will appoint town officials to represent the Town within the managing partnership and encourage participation by properties or businesses within the district. The Town will deploy resources to market the district. The Town's website and email distribution will promote the district, and existing marketing efforts will be directed at marketing the district.

The committee's plan for the first six months focuses on web development, press and marketing, and a public announcement.

Programmatic Assets

The Town's solid programming history includes various activities to attract historical audiences and engage residents. The historical assets are nationally recognized, and the Town estimates

that over 120,000 people visit annually. The Town has invested over \$70 million in the preservation of facilities. In tandem with these investments, they have developed and encouraged significant programmatic amenities to accommodate these visitors. These amenities include tour guides, historical programming that includes reenactments, parades and exhibitions, a local trolley, and musical performances. There is also a staffed visitor information center and retail store.

There are galleries, performances, open studios, artist studios, rehearsal spaces, and multiple open spaces primarily used by residents. The Town's involvement, a strong culture of volunteerism and engagement, and a wealth of local talent support these programs. The Town actively supports the facilities and management necessary for these cultural resources. Spectacle Management, a full-service facility and production company, produces family programming at Cary Hall. Volunteers, like the Chamber of Commerce, the Lion's Club, and the Monroe Cultural Center, host family-focused cultural festivals, readings, and classes. The Cary Library connects the diverse communities of Lexington (Black, Korean, Japanese, and Indian) by providing space for presentations, discussions, and classes.

Marketing and creative efforts to connect communities and programs are a strength of the Lexington community. The Historical Society's program, *Stitching Stories: Textiles in Conversation*, and the partnership with CVS are great examples of connecting history with current artistic work with the goal of connecting cultural and historical audiences. The windows project and the sculpture outside the Monroe Art Center are additional examples of bringing art out to the street to increase the visibility of cultural assets to the general public.

Recommendations-Opportunities & Challenges

The committee has submitted a clearly articulated application outlining the available assets, programming, and marketing strategies. This report's recommendations focus on informing and directing action and strategy to build a coordinated short-term plan for achieving these goals. They provide a foundation to support the long-term goal: a rich cultural resource for town residents, businesses, and visitors.

1-Expand, detail, and prioritize the goals approved in the Select Board resolution

The district's goals identified by the Select Board are an excellent start. Still, to be the basis for a solid and effective strategy, the Community Managing Partnership (CMP) should convene a meeting to delve more deeply into making the goals helpful in setting the strategy and creating actionable plans. A more deeply developed set of goals based on a shared set of community priorities will be vital to the CMP developing an action plan that extends past the next six months.

At the meeting, the CMP should review each goal. Each goal starts with a verb that implies action. The next step is to assign a responsible entity. While remaining accountable to the

Select Board, the CMP must identify organizational partners who can take the lead and help carry out the agenda. With leadership established, the group should agree on a clear definition of success that includes why it is crucial. With this in hand, the CMP will be prepared to set a timeframe, establish metrics for success, and outline action steps.

During our community conversation at the Cary Library, almost all speakers identified increasing collaboration as the desired outcome of a cultural district. The common thread was the "hope the district will help to move organizations from silos to collaboration." More collaboration can be very beneficial to the successful functioning of a cultural district. The CMP should consider adding a goal that addresses improved collaboration.

The final step should be looking at the goals as a group and considering how they connect, where synergies exist, and whether it is essential to prioritize goals for the next twelve months. CMP should develop and make public a written plan to guide the CMP for the next twelve months. This expanded plan would add to and expand the Action Plan presented in the application.

2-Build collaboration by broadening and strengthening the informal networks through formal communication and intentional strategies for engagement

The meetings and discussions focused on the benefits of the diverse communities currently contributing to Lexington's vibrancy. This focus directly aligns with the Mass Cultural Council's core principle that: "culture embraces everyone" and actively works to break down barriers to participation. It is an important goal to address early in establishing the district. It can set essential precedents for how programming is developed and what are the best methods of outreach to ensure inclusive programming.

To strengthen the role of diverse communities in the district, the CMP should begin by understanding Lexington's current population. In 2021, the Town's population of 34,071 was 61% white, and the second largest demographic was 32% Asian. Another lens on Town diversity states that 29% of the population was born outside the US. Another indicator of diversity that looks at neighborhood segregation (the mixture of different races and ethnicities living close to one another) gives Lexington a "diversity score" of 88 out of 100, indicating that how people live in Lexington is much more diverse than other communities.

This data provides a point-in-time perspective that can guide the development of a survey. A survey can help the CMP better understand the different communities. Direct questions can add depth of understanding to who is included in the subgroups and what they need. Surveying the community and building a comprehensive database of what organizations exist, what programming is happening, and who participates will be an excellent foundation for the CMP's work.

Understanding the current demographics combined with the findings from the survey, the CMP should broaden its membership and ensure that its communications strategies reach a diverse constituency. The marketing and communication plans can be more inclusive by deliberately including the broadest, most comprehensive programming information. Information about participation can inform ideas for new programs.

Marketing of existing programs should highlight the place of Lexington's diverse communities and encourage new programs that tell new stories.

The informal networks and connections that exist can be the foundation for diverse, inclusive, and welcoming programming. The CMP can institutionalize and formalize these new relationships with changes in its membership, marketing, communication, and programming strategies. The CMP should be intentional about being inclusive and developing ways to ensure it reaches the widest audiences possible.

3- Enhance the "Sense of Place" to make the district stand out by extending the re-branding effort to the streetscape, wayfinding, and gateways

Lexington is a beautiful place and plays a significant role in the Commonwealth's tourism ecology. The Town Center and the area up and down Mass Ave have a fabulous streetscape with a welcoming feel for pedestrians. The surrounding area, with historic, stately homes and green spaces, is beautiful. The Town recently completed a re-branding effort, and this work should be revisited to consider how to translate the messaging into physical elements. Specifically, they should address branding opportunities for seasonal planting, gateways, wayfinding, and lighting efforts. The Town should consider how working with artists could elevate and distinguish these efforts. It should also take steps to formalize these relationships by developing a town-wide public art program.

The Town already has a landscaping program, seasonal decorations, and lighting that can be a foundation for more enhancements. Applying the marketing colors and logos to the streetscape landscaping and decorations design is a way to mark the geographic area visually. Distinctive colors, consistent with the brand, and flower types used in hanging baskets and street planters, can further identify the district to visitors. The street planters can also be branded with the logo, and seasonal lighting can include iterations of the logo.

A consistent, town-wide wayfinding system should be put in place. A plan should be developed that identifies critical locations, is legible to pedestrians and vehicles, entices engagement, and reinforces the Town's brand. For vehicle users, it should locate significant sites and parking. For pedestrians, it should provide a context map with attraction site locations and information on basic tourist amenities (the Visitor Center, bathrooms, and parking.) A digital, interactive sign visible from the road at the Visitor's Center would reinforce the Center as a "hub." It could be a dynamic way to attract attention to drivers and provide a comprehensive map, updated information on trolleys, events, and even public art opportunities. If developed, the kiosk could also host a parking app to facilitate visitor payment for parking for extended stays.

Consider identifying gateways to the district to brand the area and signal a welcoming place. Most people visiting are coming by car, so the scale and location of gateways should acknowledge this. The goal would be elements at the gateways that signal drivers that they are entering a special place. They could be as simple as large branded ground planters or elaborate branded signage. There should be additional signage on where to park for both short-term and long-term parking.

The Minuteman Bike Trail is another entry point to the district and a significant opportunity for attracting visitors. The signage at the bike trail intersection with Mariam Street at the Visitor's Center is an excellent example of connecting the bikeway and its riders to the Town and historic assets, like the Battle Green. There are opportunities for more programming and wayfinding to connect the trail to the Town and build regional partnerships with local communities.

The CMP should build out programming that focuses on activating these connections. Programs like the "Go Outdoors" should be reconceived to include the Town Center and other public areas to create exhibitions that bring visitors along the trail and into the Town. The CMP should also coordinate with its neighbors, Arlington and Bedford, to expand the program along a more extended trail segment and consider developing joint marketing. Also, consider encouraging the Town to support bike rentals or other bike amenities, secure bike parking, food truck, or other temporary vending at this location to make it a "destination."

Enhancing the wayfinding at this location is also an opportunity. The Visitor's Center is an excellent resource for bike riders who have decided to stop. The current fit-out of the exterior spaces includes tables, chairs, and public restrooms. Signage encouraging bikers to stop and take advantage of these facilities would also be helpful.

Local artists could play a role in the Town's placemaking efforts. They could be brought into conversations and development of branding elements or develop distinctive landscaping elements, gateways, and wayfinding. Many communities have used local artists to create branding elements that are the foundation for wayfinding systems. Seasonal landscaping and lighting programs are also opportunities to engage local artists and enhance the visual impact of Town investment in decorative lighting.

The CMP should consider working with the Town's Local Cultural Council on the development of a public art program. The first step would be establishing a public art plan that includes goals and priorities, identifies sites and opportunities, confirms section guidelines and contracting, and establishes maintenance. In combination, these efforts could build a sense of place that establishes a visual identity that complements the Town's historical identity.

4-Expand cultural audiences by leveraging the Town's historic assets and brand by focusing on brand extensions, new programming tracks, and cultural assets

The Town of Lexington has unique historical assets, including four historic districts and a history of solid historical programming with a proven ability to attract audiences. In addition, they have a powerful, recognizable brand. For the Lexington Cultural District to be thriving, the Town's brand needs to extend to the Town's cultural programming and assets. The CMP needs to extend and refine its marketing and branding to include all of the district's cultural resources. One way to do this would be to add a cultural tagline to the new branding, "Make History in Lexington." A specific marketing campaign that unites historical and cultural resources would be essential to the Town's marketing strategy.

The CMP should solicit and encourage programming that adds a cultural lens to the historical narrative where possible. This programming can be done through strategic grantmaking and collaboration with the Local Cultural Council. Programming can add new artistic interpretations

to historic sites, present contemporary art in conjunction with historical exhibitions, or engage artists to engage broadly in historic storytelling through public art installations. During the site visit, some themes were mentioned or are in the planning stage.

The Town initiated the Stone Building Feasibility/ Reuse Committee to follow up on a prior preservation report and "explore constructive reuse options. The SBFR Committee's recommendations for a 21st Century Lyceum, a place for historical interpretation, educational programming, and community gatherings, have many merits. It could provide a new set of programmatic options for the district and connect many of the threads in a way that builds out Lexington's reputation as a cultural hub.

Like many suburban Boston communities, Route 128 fostered substantial growth. For Lexington, this growth also included developing a unique set of mid-century housing communities. Lexington is home to several historically significant modernist communities built by notable architects. These neighborhoods include Six Moon Hill, Peacock Farm, Five Fields, and Turning Mill/Middle Ridge. Creating programming focusing on the Town's mid-century development could be an interesting addition to Lexington's story.

Wilson's Farm, located on the edge of the planned district, is a significant regional draw and hub of activity. The unique history of the business and its place as a leader in sustainable, local farming techniques could make it an exciting programming partner as the district considers new programming themes.

5- Start discussions on how to integrate the Town's parks and natural resources into planning for the cultural district

Lexington has numerous parks, cemeteries, and green spaces easily accessible to the district. For a visitor, the appeal of spending a day in the area can be enhanced by knowing there are parks for picnics or nature walks. Promotional efforts and programming should focus on these opportunities. Investment in these connections is an opportunity to provide programming for tourists and locals.

The CMP should conduct an inventory of various natural resources as a foundation for enhanced marketing and promotion. The district map should call out these resources, map bike routes, and highlight the walking trails and cultural assets, like performance areas found in the parks. The calendar that is developed should include all cultural programming in the parks and public green spaces.

The CMP should expand cultural programming in parks and along walking paths. Temporary outdoor artwork is a good programming strategy for outdoor public art and is easy to implement. Siting public art in parks, along bike trails, and on the street can create a fun way to signal that art and culture are integral to the Town.

Special Thanks

Congratulations, to the Town of Lexington, on your efforts to pursue a state-designated Cultural district to honor and preserve your creative and cultural communities. Special thanks to local and state representatives, Lexington's Economic Development Director, the Lexington Select Board, the Tourism Committee, the Lexington Council for the Arts, the Managing Partners, and community and organizational partners for successfully spearheading and supporting these efforts.

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A suggested checklist

1-Expand, detail, and prioritize the goals approved in the Select Board resolution

- Review each goal and identify the primary partner.
- Add a goal specifically about collaborating.
- Assess relationships among goals and priorities.
- Expand and extend the timeframe for the action plan.

2-Build collaboration by broadening and strengthening the informal networks through formal communication and intentional strategies for engagement

- Understand the current demographics of the Town
- Survey the community and build a database of organizations and programming.
- Broaden membership, programming, and marketing based on survey results.
- Institutionalize networks to ensure diverse participation.

3- Enhance the "Sense of Place" to make the district stand out by extending the re-branding effort to the streetscape, wayfinding, and gateways

- Translate the branding/messaging into physical elements such as landscaping, wayfinding, and gateways.
- Use branding and wayfinding to strengthen to reinforce the Visitor Center as a "hub" connecting other assets throughout the Town.
- Extend existing programming to different parts of the Town and develop new programs that are sited throughout the Town and strengthen the connections.
- Utilize local artists in these placemaking efforts and build a Town-wide public art program.

4-Expand cultural audiences by leveraging the Town's historic assets and brand by focusing on brand extensions, new programming tracks, and cultural assets

- Add a cultural-centric tagline to the Town's marketing.
- Encourage the addition of cultural programming to historic assets.
- Use the Stone Building to connect the historical and cultural narratives that distinguish Lexington and as the focal point for cultural programming.
- Create programming that focuses on the Town's mid-century architectural narrative.
- Develop a partnership with Wilson's Farm.

5- Start discussions on how to integrate the Town's parks and natural resources into planning for the cultural district

- Promote the Town's parks and recreational areas as part of the visitor experience.
- Conduct an inventory of the Town's natural resources as the first step in expanding programming and promotion.
- Use temporary art installations as a first step in expanding cultural programs in the parks.

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Additional Resources

State Resources

Access Policy/ Mass Cultural Council

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/access-policy>

Resources

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/resources/>

Statutory Language

<https://massculturalcouncil.org/communities/cultural-districts/statutory-language/>

Federal/National

Cultural Districts Basics /Americans for the Arts

This page is no longer maintained but contains good materials and research.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/reports-and-data/toolkits/national-cultural-districts-exchange/cultural-districts-basics>

Creative Placemaking/National Endowment for the Arts

A good inventory of creative placemaking projects.

<https://www.arts.gov/impact/creative-placemaking/exploring-our-town>

Data tips/ Americans for the Arts

<https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2022/02/25/painting-by-numbers-how-cities-can-use-data-to-support-the-arts>

Other

The **Global Cultural Districts Network** (GCDN) is an international federation committed to improving the quality of urban life through the contribution of the arts, culture, and creative industries.

The membership network fosters cooperation and knowledge-sharing among those responsible for creative and cultural districts and engages leaders in culture and in urban development through convenings, research and collaborations in order to inform global, local, and sectoral agendas.

<https://gcdn.net/>

Two specific reports that I recommend are:

1. Branding Cultural Districts and Destinations

<https://gcdn.net/product/in-search-of-the-social-impact-of-cultural-districts/>

2. IN SEARCH OF: The Social Impact of Cultural Districts – Emerging Principles for Social Impact Evaluation

<https://gcdn.net/product/branding-cultural-districts-and-destinations/>