

Town of Concord, MA
West Concord Cultural District Committee
Public Meeting Agenda

Topic: WCCDC Monthly Meeting
Fowler Library, 1322 Main St. Concord

Time: January 7, 2026, 12:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Pursuant to notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, the West Concord Cultural District Committee convened in person at the Concord Public Library - Fowler Brank, January 7, 2026, 12:05pm Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Call to Order

In attendance: Sue LaChance, Jen Hurley-Wales, Chris Randall, Sue Beck, Anne Mauk (via zoom), Sue Gladstone, Mimi Graney (via zoom), guests: Barbara Morse - West Concord Advisory Council, Margot Kimball - Art for All, Tooley Rogers - Concord Cultural Foundation, Stewart Ikeda - consultant to The Umbrella.

Not in attendance: Marueen Goldin

Approve Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion made by Sue Beck and seconded by Chris Randall it was unanimously voted to approve the [minutes of December 2, 2025](#).

Collaboration with West Concord Advisory Committee

Barbara Morse explained the WC Village Center Master Plan of 2010. Their next mtg - 1/14 @7PM. WCAC is a subcommittee of the planning board. They reviewed all of the recommendations from the 2010 Master Plan (copies available online). Checked off what has been accomplished, what was suggested that can't be done, what needs to be accomplished still. In doing that - recognized that the charge for their committee is out of date. Village parameters are pretty well set - though they will probably expand to include Baker Ave development, MCI Concord, 1440 Commonwealth Ave. No one is required to come to their committee for approval - everyone goes to the planning board. Gas station developers for E&S site stopped coming

to them since they have no power. Is there a way for WCAC and our committee to collaborate more? Given new requirements from MCC for cultural districts - it might be wise to consider.

Sue B questions how/why we would work together - our purview is very defined, very different, Barbara: Wondering if the MCC requirements of the cultural district committee might make collaborating with her committee a necessity for us to keep our status.

Tooley raised the issue of the number of studies that have been done - Envision Concord, a Historic Commission study being done now. Concord Cultural Foundation is finishing up another report. And there are 63 committees! Tooley suggests we would benefit by working more closely together.

The committee discussed the response to MCC that Mimi wrote (see more details below) - which we all appreciate and support.

Comments on Draft Annual Report 2025

Sue L asked if there were any additional comments from the committee. Thanks expressed to Sue L for her great work on the report. A discussion about which pictures to include. Mimi encourages as many pictures as possible. SueL will modify one of the photo submissions, then submit the narrative and photos Jan. 8. Submitted [Annual Report 2025](#)

Junction Park Sculpture

Sue B reports that the Town decided they don't want us to work with the New England Sculptors Association (NESA) because we end up paying them a commission. Encourages our committee to do a call for art ourselves. We discussed Mimi's draft [call for sculpture](#). Sue B explained that the Green Thumbs wants to dedicate the sculpture to those who made Junction Park possible. The artist can help incorporate dedication or Green Thumbs can add a plaque. Sue B asks for the committee's input on the wording regarding the subject matter of this sculpture. The Green Thumbs felt that the emphasis should be about the importance of being in nature -

and its impact on bringing us a sense of peace. The sculpture is meant to be a welcome into the park - to enjoy a peaceful moment. Town insisted that this piece is temporary - one year. Sue B wants to assemble a review committee that will judge the submissions.

Chris asked if we need to specify anything about the sculpture's desired content. Margot said, as an artist, she likes guidelines for what the committee is looking for - saves all involved time.

Chris asked about wording: "intended to be climbed on". Committee recommended: artwork should not invite climbing or sitting on the sculpture or any physical interaction.

Chris: Do we need to say in the call that the artist has to sign a contract with the town? Sometimes the contract takes artists by surprise. Mimi agreed to include language in the call about a contract for the chosen artist. Do we add something about renewal in the call? Mimi prefers to put that in the artist contract, not in the call. Leave the call as open as possible. Chris questioned the "one year" installment, taking it down in September. Do we want to remove the piece in the most beautiful time of the year? Can we take down in November instead? Mimi suggests that we not get into the timeline in the call - put into the contract and give some wiggle room. Timeline can be estimated.

There will be a page on the town website for this call and the application process.

There is much concern about how to phrase inclusiveness without stating it the way it currently is stated, which feels problematic to many, as if we would not normally value applications from BIPOC or LGBTQ+ applicants. Mimi and Sue B will discuss how to improve that language.

June 6, 2026 Porchfest Planning

Jen asks - if any of you who are not already involved with Porchfest and would like to be on the committee, let me know, we are starting to gear up.

Mimi was asked if there is an update on the Porchfest permit? There was concern that Pride Day is going to happen on the same day in Concord Center and WC and might put strain on the police detail required for both. Town reviews event permits every other Thursday. We will hear back soon. Would be great to have Pride and Porchfest collaborate on the crosswalk unveiling in West Concord on that day.

Poetry event in April

Jen reports that the Winter poems are up! She would like to do a poetry reading event in April - poetry month - possibly at Fowler or maybe someplace else? We did a reading event in our first year. It was very well received.

Sue G offered to help in the planning. What about Barefoot Books as a location? Margot is going to check with Kristin Canty about Woods Hill as a location.

Margot mentioned that CeCe King and Maura Clarke are working on a poetry project with Robbins House? And might like to collaborate with the Poetry Phone project.

Chris wonders if the Festival of Authors would be interested in featuring the Poetry Phone poets on their schedule.

Report on Holiday Stroll December 13th and thinking about Spring Into West Concord Day May 16

Sue L reports that \$1400 raised from the Stroll! Thanks for the participation from everyone on the committee.

Jen asked about inclusion of Chanukah in our holiday stroll. Sue L said that it was raised, but was perhaps too late, and that with a more advanced invitation we can do so next year.

Discuss response letter to MCC - vote on adding our Committee's signature .

We received confirmation for MCC funding for this year of \$15K. All expenses need to be encumbered by the end of June and spent by Dec 31 2026. MCC is not moving forward with new guidelines at the moment - still evaluating. The committee thanked Mimi [for the letter she wrote](#). Chris moved that the committee deputizes Sue L to sign Mimi's draft on our committee's behalf. Jen second. Unanimously approved.

Update on potential Phase 2 of Art Loop

Postpone report until February

Update on Kiosk Banner

Chris will update us at the next meeting. In the meantime he will follow up with Mimi about purchasing needs. Chris will take the design to Concord Printing.

2026 Goals and Succession Planning

Sue L suggests that we start thinking now about new people to recruit proactively.

Date and location for next meeting

February 3, 2026 at 7pm on zoom.

Other Business- Guitar Museum

Sue L will submit a support letter for the Guitar Museum on behalf of our committee. Jen Schunemann has invited us to come see the architectural design for the museum. Stewart Ikeda offered to share the plan with us at our February meeting.

Margot shared the March 7 Brighter Together lantern parade and party poster. There will be workshops to make lanterns. More info next meeting.

Public Comment - None

Sue L adjourns meeting at 1:32.

Next Meeting: February 3, 2026 (time and location - TBD)

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Attachments - Bookmarked Links

[Approved December minutes](#)

[Annual Report 2025](#)

[Call for Sculptures](#)

[Mimi Graney Feedback to MCC](#)

Approved December Minutes

**Town of Concord, MA
West Concord Cultural District Committee
Public Meeting Agenda**

Via Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81968169164?pwd=KSH9YGwRyNNA8fsD6PiVYduw1Pa1qB.1>

Meeting ID: 819 6816 9164

Passcode: 513323

Topic: WCCDC Monthly Meeting

Time: December 2, 2025, 7:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Pursuant to notice duly filed with the Town Clerk, the West Concord Cultural District Committee convened via Zoom, December 2, 2025, 7:02 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Call to Order

In attendance: Sue LeChance, Jen Hurley-Wales, Chris Randall, Sue Beck, Anne Mauk, Mimi Graine, guests: Kate Yoder, Margot Kimball, Janet Anderson (West Concord Green Thumbs), Cosette Dunn (West Concord Green Thumbs), Alan Bogosian resident of West Concord.

Not in attendance: Sue Gladstone and Marueen Goldin

Approve Meeting Minutes

Upon a motion made by Sue B and seconded by Jen HW it was unanimously voted to approve the minutes of November 4, 2025.

"Pianos on the Town"- Kate Yoder

Kate gave a project presentation (attached) and led a discussion about how Concord Conservatory wants to celebrate its 20th anniversary. An idea done in many cities including Minneapolis - Pianos on Parade - pianos are painted and placed outdoors around the community for everyone to play and enjoy. It's an opportunity for many organizations to collaborate, cultural districts, Arts for All, etc. Pianos paired with arts groups, locations and Concord organizations. Will tie-in celebration of the Concord 250, elevate local talent, build community connection, and provide a nice publicity opportunity for the town. See deck attachment for project timeline. Sponsorship would potentially come from local Banks and the 250 funds and maybe local organizations. There would be a call for local artists to paint the pianos. A map would be created to show locations and programming schedule. The launch will take place in June and run for 2 weeks. Locations will be somewhere in West Concord, Depot area and Concord Mildam area. Would be a nice tie-in with WC Porchfest and the OARS project. Artists will be paid. The time cycle for MA Council grants has already passed.

Kate asked if WCCDC would be interested in collaborating on this project. The committee offered to help facilitate connections with artists. Margot can also give a list of artists. Artscape is another source. Anne offered the names of the Artloop artists. Anne can share the on-line system she created for the artist competition. Mimi reminded Kate that if the pianos are going to be placed on town property, there is a permit permission process.

A lot of excitement about the fun things that can be done with this project. Chris Randall mentioned the man that plays weekly for programs at the Council on Aging - Jack (?).

Junction Park Sculpture- Sue Beck, Janet Anderson and Coco Dunn

They have received approval from the Select Board on the sculpture project for Junction Park. Sue B still prefers the concept of working with the NE Sculpture Association - we come up with what we want: the theme, location demands, material, and then follow their lead. They help with the call and put out the info.

Mimi cautions that we will need some organization to be the lead/owner of the project to hold insurance, do the installation and be responsible for the maintenance, etc. Mimi suggests that we could bypass NE Sculpture and she could guide us on how to do what they do...No matter how we go about the sculpture acquisition we need someone to own the installation and maintenance and that is not usually the artist. Mimi asked The Umbrella if they would play this role but they have not responded yet. Chris R offered that his cousin runs the Boston Sculpture Association. He has expertise and incredible connections to artists. There is also the YV Sculpture Museum in Acton, and the Old Frog Pond Farm Sculpture Park in Harvard.

Coco D and Janet A from Green Thumbs like the idea of a sculpture to commemorate how Junction park was created. Given the MCC funding question, it's not clear what kind of budget we will have available for this project.

Sue L requests that Sue B, Green Thumbs and Mimi come up with a RFP draft that clarifies what kind of sculpture they are looking for and the parameters for materials and dimensions. Chris will contact his cousin for his advice. We will revisit at our January meeting.

Planning for Holiday Stroll - Sue LaChance

The date is Saturday, December 13th. We will repeat the much-loved jingle bells project and we will add a community suggestion box for ideas on local

projects for the committee to consider. Eva's and Debra's have given permission to decorate the alleyway. Lights are up but electricity is not working yet. Janet will help Sue L decorate the wrought iron gate entry way to the alley.

Sue L will send a Doodle poll asking committee members to volunteer for shifts.

MCC Plans for redesigning requirements - Sue LaChance

Sue L & Mimi G reported on the monthly MCC meeting. MCC announced new requirements to maintain a cultural district status. The new requirements are onerous and very different. A much heavier lift. The established cultural districts are upset about the demands, particularly on such short notice. MCC is now rethinking things. Consequently, there is no communication about our annual funding or likely grant sizes. Not clear if we will get \$15K again this year. Mimi G thinks MCC is striving for more clarity on outcomes. It gets complicated, though, with the variety of towns and sizes and budget needs. Mimi G thinks WC cultural district is considered a very successful model and will continue to be in good standing.

Art Loop - Phase 1 - Anne Mauk

Anne M thanked Sue L and Chris R for taking up the ArtLoop decals yesterday before the snow storm. Ann Sussman took the preserved decals back to the ArtsScape studio. Feedback on the ArtLoop has been so very positive; Anne is encouraged to do it again. She believes there would be a lot of interest from artists and from business owners to do it again. 2nd time around will be much easier! People are reaching out to Anne M wanting to have their own loop for their neighborhood or town. Even though our budget status is unsure, Mimi G encourages Anne M to proceed with planning for year 2 and asterisk "pending funding" in any outreach to artists.

Sue B made an appeal to include artists' names on the tiles. Anne M worries about the work this will require. Sue B offered to help Anne M format the names on the files.

Mimi G shared that the DEI Committee will be getting approval to install rainbow tiles on crosswalks for pride month in Concord Center and West Concord.

Kiosk banner- Chris Randall

Chris R presented two design options for the Kiosk bulletin board. There was discussion. Sue B made a motion to approve #2 with a blue border added, Chris R 2nd the vote. The committee unanimously voted to approve.

Mimi G suggested that Chris R send her the materials he needs to purchase, so she can procure through one of the town's sources.

Collaboration with West Concord Advisory Committee

Sue L suggests to defer this discussion to January when Anne Feldweg or Barbara Morse can give us an update on the WC Village Center Master Plan of 2010.

Next meeting

Sue L will send out a doodle poll to determine a better time for the next meeting. Committee discussed meeting in person at Harvey Wheeler if possible.

Public Comment

No comments.

8:32 Sue L adjourns the meeting. Chris R 2nds, unanimously approved by the committee.

Next Meeting: (time and location - TBD)

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modification, please contact the ADA Coordinator, Jessica Porter at 978-318-3028 or jporter@concordma.gov, at



Keys to the Community: Piano Project

June 2026



Vision and Purpose

Celebrate Concord250 and
CCM20

Foster Collaboration

Elevate Local Talent

Build Community Connection



Project Phases

Planning & Partnerships (Dec–Feb)

- Steering committee formation
- volunteer recruitment
- sponsorship tiers,
- artist call
- Concord250 endorsement.

Announcement & Preparation (Mar–Apr)

Artist reveal event, piano procurement, PR blitz with maps and QR codes.

Artistic Creation & Logistics (Apr–May)

- Artist painting, performance schedule, permits, and site logistics.

Launch & Sustainment (June onward)

- Public launch event, ongoing performances, piano care plan, evaluation of impact.



Pianos!



Sponsorship and Legacy

Sponsorship Opportunities:

Tiered packages for businesses and individuals, including naming rights and visibility at events and on pianos.

Legacy Plan:

After the summer, pianos may be auctioned, donated, or permanently installed, ensuring lasting community benefit.



Impact

Keys to the Community will:

Activate Concord's public spaces with music and art.

Celebrate CCM's 20th Anniversary as a cultural milestone.

Unite diverse community groups in celebration of Concord250.

Leave behind a joyful, unifying artistic statement that resonates beyond the anniversary year.



Deciding On The Kiosk Banner Style And Wording

Wording proposed at our May meeting: Sponsored by the WCCC to Promote Local Arts

Alternate Proposals

1) A sign centered on the bulletin board



2) A banner across the full top of the bulletin board



Annual Report 2025

West Concord Cultural District Committee (WCCDC)

Sue LaChance, Chair
Jennifer Hurley-Wales, Clerk
Sue Beck
Sue Gladstone
Maureen Goldin
Anne Mauk
Chris Randall

The West Concord Cultural District Committee (WCCDC) serves to promote the unique cultural, entrepreneurial, and historical character of the District. We offer support to the arts and business communities with projects aimed at attracting and engaging both residents and visitors to West Concord.

Highlights from some of our most festive events and installments in 2025 include:

Art Loop Installation

This was a literal “show-stopper” - 130 local-artist-designed sidewalk decals placed in a half mile walkable loop around Main Street in West Concord. The project celebrated the creativity and talents of our local community and often prompted residents, shoppers, and commuters alike to “stop in their tracks” to admire the spirit-lifting artworks. The decals were pulled up just in advance of the first snowfall in December. But, we plan to install a new round of artwork in 2026. Funding for the Art Loop was provided by the Mass Cultural Council.

Poetry Phone Seasonal Changes

This solar-powered art installation launched last year along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail invites visitors to listen to spoken poetry by written people with a connection to Concord. This year, we received 62 submissions for our “Call for Poetry,” which were divided into four seasonal presentations of poetry, each season featuring poems recorded by their authors. The little parking lot island housing the Poetry Phone is evolving into a vibrant gathering spot, enhanced by planters with colorful flowers, native landscaping encircling the booth, and a bench that invites passersby to linger.

Ever Popular Porchfest - the streets were alive with the sound of music

Six years running and the annual Porchfest just gets more robust every year! On June 6, the neighborhoods and business district of West Concord were hopping with solo acts and funky bands, jazz musicians and classical artists. This year’s Porchfest extended into the business district more than ever before, and many shops reported an increase in business as a result. The event attracted 54 performers hosted by 29 venues from porches to parking lots and enjoyed by several thousand attendees.

The Art Walk: A Self-Guided Tour of West Concord's Public Art

West Concord has an impressive concentration of public art that helps give the village its artistic vibe – ten outdoor murals, painted signal boxes, exhibit spaces, the sign museum and Poetry Phone. To help people explore and discover this art, the Committee created and posted signage by each mural with a map showing the location of all the art, the story of how each mural was created, and a description of how the mural illustrates an important chapter in West Concord's history.

Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Mural upgrade and Our First Pollinator Garden

As a collaborative effort with the West Concord Green Thumbs, a pollinator garden was created to beautify the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail mural, which had just received a vibrant blue border. With locally sourced flowering plants, and a sweet little bird bath - the birds and the bees and the public all enjoy a lovely spot for photos and reflection along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. When the MBTA Fall Rail Ride came through on October 25, the BFRT mural and pollinator garden served as a great backdrop for group photos taken by the 75 cyclists visiting from out of town.

Partnering With Our Businesses

A hallmark every year is our participation in three town-wide events that are organized by the business community. This year, Spring into West Concord featured a super fun “Flamingo Bingo” event where we partnered with Art for All to decorate and distribute recycled pink plastic flamingos that were then displayed at most of the businesses around town. The “Bingo Cards” were a big hit with businesses and participants alike...you couldn't help but smile every time you spotted a colorful bird. Discover West Concord Day this fall enabled us to celebrate our Art Loop and Poetry Phone and mingle with passersby, many of whom played our new WCCDC Corn Hole games. And finally, we brought back the “Make a Joyful Noise” event to the Holiday Stroll, distributing 300 jingle bells that became festive zipper pulls, earrings, and dog collar adornments. As an extension beyond West Concord, we also partnered with the local businesses to take donations for Open Table, helping to provide nourishment to 42 surrounding communities with our collection of \$1400.

Sharing Joy and Creativity in 2025 by the Numbers

- **1** colorful pollinator garden was dug, planted and nurtured to beautify the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail mural surroundings
- **2** Celebratory 250th commemorative benches purchased and installed
- **4** corn hole forms were purchased and beautifully painted for community engagement at multiple events
- **10** informative signs designed to facilitate a self-guided tour and an appreciation of our village's public art
- **40** pink flamingos were repainted and repurposed by Art for All and distributed to local businesses for crowd-pleasing “Flamingo Bingo”
- **54** bands and **29** hosts came together to ignite West Concord's June Porchfest

- **62** poetry submissions were received from local residents to be installed at our Poetry Phone in seasonal increments
- **250** submissions to the West Concord Artloop; **130** submissions were accepted to build a half mile sidewalk “walking gallery”
- **300** jingle bells distributed to Holiday Stroll participants to help “Make a Joyful Noise” in the streets
- **\$1400** in cash donations (and a hearty supply of food) collected for Open Table in the week leading up to the Holiday Stroll

Photos:

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1uIL9Ylpfb8TKXi3ua_6SASWsl9iN71e2UWZZnFZILpA/edit?usp=sharing

Call for Sculpture

CALL FOR ART

Sponsor:

West Concord Cultural District Committee of the Town of Concord, Massachusetts

Background:

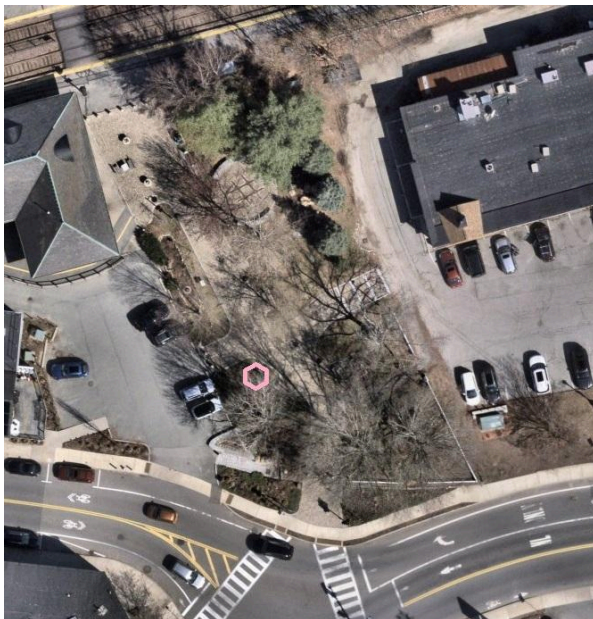
The West Concord Cultural District Committee (WCCDC) seeks a temporary installation of a sculpture that will celebrate nature and the peace it brings while inviting visitors to enjoy the gardens of Junction Park. The artwork is proposed as a one-year loan, with the potential for renewal of the term of installation.

West Concord is home to artisan shops, cafés, restaurants, artists, performing-art centers, and a rich array of natural and historical landmarks. The WCCDC leverages these local resources to strengthen the Village's identity and increase visitation. Since its founding in 2016, in partnership with the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the WCCDC has provided financial and organizational support for community celebrations and public art.

Site:

The proposed site is within a grassy area of Junction Park near the corner of Main Street and Commonwealth Avenue in West Concord. This lively pocket park is steps away from the West Concord MBTA commuter rail stop, beside the path of the regional Bruce Freeman Rail Trail, and is within our business district. It is a frequent gathering place for neighbors, visitors and commuters and has attractive gardens well-tended by the team of volunteers of the West Concord Green Thumbs.

Junction Park is modest in size, with flower plantings and tree cover. The selected artwork will be of an appropriate scale. It is anticipated that the artwork will rest upon a concrete base approximately 3 feet square.



Specifications

The materials and fabrication should be suitable for long-term, outdoor exposure, assembled and installed in a viewer-safe manner.

Artwork should not be intended to be climbed upon or require much physical interaction.

Artwork should be inspired by nature and the peace it brings and should harmonize with its surroundings.

Sculpture shall have a maximum height of 8 feet and width of no more than 5 feet.

A concrete pad of up to 3' x 3' will be provided. A gravel or woodchip base is an alternative option.

Artwork is to be delivered and installed by the artist. Sculptures shall be installed in a manner that is sensitive to its environment.

Artists will be responsible for any maintenance required during the exhibition.

It should be understood that this is a town-sponsored exhibit, so the work should be thought of in terms of a small-town center rather than an art museum.

A plaque with identifying information will be displayed nearby by the Town.

Other Information:

- **Deadline:** Applications close April 3, 2026.
- **Eligibility:** Artists, aged 18 and over, working individually or in teams, in any phase of their career are encouraged to apply.
- **Creative Approach:** Preference will be given to designs that creatively respond to the proposed site.
- **Honorarium:** The artist/creative team selected for installation will receive \$4000 for a one-year loan of their artwork and maintenance.
- **Installation:** The art installation will be a temporary installation for a period of one year. The intended display period is August 2026 through September 2027. Specific dates and installation period shall be determined in dialogue with the selected artist(s) with an eye to how the artwork is best suited to engage the public in meaningful ways.
- **Project Assistance:** The Town will facilitate any necessary local permits and collaboration with municipal departments.

- **Insurance:** Artwork will be insured by the Town of Concord for the duration of the loan, excluding general liability for installation, de-installation and maintenance which shall be provided by the artist.

Selection Information:

- Only original artworks will be accepted.
- If an artwork is accepted, artists may not substitute other works.
- Application materials submitted as part of the application process (excluding personal contact information) may be displayed on the Town of Concord website and other town sponsored digital and print media.

SELECTION PROCESS

Submissions will be reviewed by the West Concord Cultural District Committee with additional community representatives. A finalist will be presented to the Concord Select Board for final approval. If approved, a contract is expected to be awarded in June 2026 for installation in the late summer of 2026. As part of municipal contracting requirements, proof of general liability insurance is required for installation and deinstallation of the artwork.

Selection Criteria:

The WCCDC is committed to fostering an inclusive environment that welcomes diverse perspectives and does not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, race or any other protected characteristic.

Preference will be given to Massachusetts-based artists.

Applications will be evaluated including, but not limited to, the following criteria:

- Artistic merit of artwork.
- Strong site-responsive design.
- Potential for artist's work to engage passersby in an accessible way.

- Completeness of application.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Applications Due: April 3, 2026

Finalist Announced: May

Contract Drafted with Artist: June

Select Board approval: June

Installation: August-September

Community Celebration: October

De-installation: September 2027

Mimi Graney's Feedback on MCC's Funding Guidelines

Feedback of MCC New Guidelines

The revised MCC Cultural District guidelines reflect many best practices in cultural planning and place-based economic development. At the same time, the proposed guidelines represent a substantial departure from the organizational structures under which existing Cultural Districts like the Concord Center and West Concord Junction were established and have operated successfully. The changes raise the question of the value of state designation for established districts and the specific model of a "cultural district" that undermine the primary goal of advancing the creative economy.

New Framework

The new direction appears aimed at increasing rigor and consistency across Cultural Districts, and perhaps at aligning them more closely with other place-based economic development models such as the Main Street approach (strong elsewhere in the U.S. but formally limited to the City of Boston) and the Transformative Development Initiative (TDI) program (available only to Gateway Cities).

Fundamentally, the new framework treats Cultural Districts less as a designation of *place* and more as a prescribed *organizational model*. In effect, the guidelines appear to expand the definition of a Cultural District from a place-based strategy to a management entity.

While the guidelines are a valuable blueprint for an ideal organization and a thoughtful synthesis of best practices in cultural planning and economic development, the challenge for Concord and West Concord, and I expect other existing districts, they were not established with these ambitions in mind—or with the staffing, funding, or administrative capacity required to meet them.

The draft guidelines also introduce a fundamental shift toward municipally led Cultural Districts, with mandated cross-departmental engagement, formal staffing requirements, demonstrated municipal financial commitments, and

more rigorous planning and reporting expectations. In addition, MCC grant funding is no longer positioned as a predictable annual allocation.

While many communities—including Concord—could technically meet these requirements, much of the work that already advances arts-, culture-, and place-based economic vitality has not historically been organized exclusively under the Cultural District framework. The new guidelines introduce a level of intentionality that may be beneficial, but they also require significant institutional and administrative changes that will take time and resources to implement.

Value and Return on Investment

The core concern raised by many communities is whether the benefits of maintaining Cultural District designation are commensurate with the scale of investment now being required. MCC funding, still unclear at this time, may not justify the administrative, staffing, and financial commitments expected of municipalities, particularly in Concord that manages two districts.

The guidelines appear to prioritize conformity to a specific operational model rather than accommodating the diversity of existing, functioning districts. Multi-year funding commitments and enhanced technical and programmatic support would demonstrate the MCC's role as a partner rather than as a regulatory body to advance place-based economic vitality through the arts. Without information from the MCC regarding future grant levels and organizational support it is difficult for municipalities to assess the return on investment.

Process

The rollout of the draft guidelines, without time for advance feedback before it was issued, created confusion and concern among municipalities and district leaders. The “take-it-or-leave-it” framing has, regrettably, negatively shaped how the guidelines are being received. The extension of the written comment period is appreciated and necessary given the scope of the proposed changes.

Areas of Concern

Organizational Model and Partnerships

- The required committee composition and member counts are overly prescriptive and should be recommended rather than mandated.
- The model leans heavily toward municipal staff and institutions at the expense of sector leadership and community-based expertise.
- Cross-departmental collaboration does not necessarily occur through committee participation alone.
- Requirements duplicate work already being done by BIDs, Main Streets organizations, TDIs, or similar entities.

Municipal Commitment and Staffing

- The mandate for paid District Manager staffing, combined with required municipal financial commitments, represents a significant lift—particularly for communities with more than one district.
- In-kind support beyond basic municipal functions should be encouraged, not required, recognizing differing municipal capacities.

Planning vs. Implementation

- The emphasis on integration into municipal planning processes prioritizes meetings, documentation, and compliance over on-the-ground project execution.
- Many districts have been most effective when focused on implementing projects that advance policy goals, rather than on policy and interdepartmental collaborations that reflect a later-stage or fully mature district.

