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TOWN OF FRANKLIN AWARDED CULTURAL DISTRICT STATUS BY STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS

Franklin, MA (January 18, 2019): In a unanimous vote on Tuesday, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the offices of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, approved an official State-designated Cultural District in Franklin. The vote came after a multi-year effort by the Town of Franklin and a group of its citizens, making Franklin the 46th Cultural District in the state.

“I’m delighted to announce the designation of the Franklin Cultural District,” said Mass Cultural Council Executive Director Anita Walker. “We look forward to supporting Franklin’s commitment to incorporating the arts and culture into the daily life of their residents and making the town a tourist destination for visitors. Home of the first Public Library in America, the Franklin Cultural District has the potential to enrich their community with innovative ways to preserve and reuse their many historic buildings like the Red Brick School, Franklin Historical Museum, and the Ray Memorial Building.”

The Franklin Cultural District (FCD) will be a demarcated region within the town that encompasses the cultural facilities, activities, and assets that lie in a compact, walkable area. Along with having the first public library, Franklin’s vibrant cultural atmosphere is already home to the Dean College School of the Arts, Franklin Historical Museum, the Franklin Public Schools (a district well known for its strong music and art programs, including FHS’ Arts Academy), over 25 other cultural, performing, visual arts and dance studios and associations, and a variety of restaurants and cafes. Establishment of the FCD will likely attract additional arts and cultural organizations in the future, driving economic development.

Cultural District status makes the FCD eligible for a variety of state grant programs, state economic development opportunities and monies, strategic planning and historic preservation assistance, and marketing through the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism.

Philip Regan, Chair of the Franklin Cultural District Committee, was thrilled with the vote. He went on to say, “I want to thank the original steering committee, the current committee members, the District’s Partners, the Town administration, Rep. Jeff Roy, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council for their dedication, encouragement, and support in seeing our application through to certification. Everyone has done a fabulous job, and we should all be proud of this achievement for the Town of Franklin. We have a lot of exciting and beneficial work ahead of us, and we are well positioned to make the best of our new Cultural District.”

A contingent from Franklin attended the State’s meeting where the Cultural District vote was held. The group included not only Regan, but Franklin’s Deputy Town Administrator Jamie Hellen, Director of Planning and

Community Development Bryan Taberner, FCD Partnership Subcommittee Chair Nancy Schoen, and Massachusetts State Representative Jeffrey N. Roy (D-Franklin).

“It’s a great thrill that after five years of work and dedication, the Franklin Cultural District has been approved by the Cultural Commission. Many thanks to so many committed folks who put in the time, energy, and enthusiasm to make it happen. I think it’s really going to be the next major economic boost for the city known as the Town of Franklin,” said Representative Roy.

The economic impact of the arts is not something to be taken lightly. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, “Arts and cultural production contributed \$763.6 billion to the nation’s economy in 2015 [the last year for which data is available]. This represents 4.2 percent of the GDP—a larger share of the economy than transportation, tourism, or construction.” Massachusetts’ creative economy generates over \$2.2 billion each year, and accounts for 150,000 jobs statewide. Franklin revised their Town Master Plan in 2013, putting greater emphasis on the growth of their natural, cultural and historic resources; formation of the new Cultural District was one piece of this plan for economic development through the arts.

Franklin Cultural Council Chair Stacey David, a Cultural District partner, said, “The conferring of Cultural District status is just more evidence of the recent boom in Franklin’s arts sector. We have seen such tremendous support for cultural programming in recent years, from the community’s attendance at Dean College dance and theater performances, to the huge number of ArtWeek events last year, to the school department slowly changing the focus from STEM to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math). We’ve reached a sort of critical mass, which I think reflects society’s recognition that the arts aren’t just esoteric, but have a real importance in our lives.”

This is a belief held by Senate President Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland), who congratulated the Town and the Franklin Cultural District Committee on the State’s conferring of the official Cultural District status, and added these words, “The arts are an integral part of our lives and benefit the overall wellbeing of all of our residents. This important recognition will attract new businesses and visitors to the area and will lead to an increase in cultural activities of all kinds. The Cultural District designation will help Franklin expand on arts and culture programs, foster economic development and job growth and enliven the area.”

The Franklin Cultural District Committee (FCDC) plans to work closely with the District partner organizations to create and promote a variety of arts and cultural programs in coming years, including unique cooperative events and co-branding offers. The FCDC has already begun holding quarterly Partners meetings and is in the process of building a new District website, which will include an events calendar that will be a central hub for finding all arts programming in town. The FCDC has launched a new social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the purpose of which is to help spread the word on arts events, cultural articles, and Partner news. They have begun a “Did You Know?” campaign, sharing interesting facts and information about the official Partners of the District, including the Franklin Public Schools, Dean College, Franklin Downtown Partnership, the Public Library, the Franklin School for the Performing Arts, Franklin Performing Arts Company/THE BLACK BOX, the Franklin Historical Museum, LiveARTS, Circle of Friends Coffeehouse, the Franklin Senior Center, the Franklin Art Association, the Franklin Cultural Council, and many more. Some of the partners were involved in the FCD initiative from the very beginning, others, such as Drummer’s Studio, Encore Music Academy, and Feet in Motion School of Dance, have signed on more recently as the momentum for establishment of the District increased.

“As we all know in Franklin, arts and culture is the heart and soul of the community,” says Deputy Town Administrator Jamie Hellen. “We’re extremely pleased with the certification as a Cultural District, and we look forward to this being the next phase of economic development in the creative economy of Franklin.”

The FCDC has formulated a set of goals for the District, including:

1. Foster collaborations between the District's Partners.
2. Attract artists and cultural enterprises to Franklin and promote their activity.
3. Encourage and collaborate in culturally-related, locally-minded and -based business development by advocating for creation and support of small business incubators, makerspaces, and other cultural economic development resources to stimulate economic activity.
4. Establish the District as a cultural tourist destination in the region.
5. Preserve and reuse historic buildings and other sites.
6. Foster local cultural appreciation and development via active community and school/education engagement.

To learn more about the Franklin Cultural District, their partners, and upcoming activities and events, visit their website at www.franklinculturaldistrict.org, or follow them on Facebook (www.facebook.com/FranklinCultureMA), Twitter (@FranklinCulture), and Instagram (@franklinculture).

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A cultural district is a compact, walkable area of a community with a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. Mass Cultural Council's Cultural Districts Initiative grew out of an economic stimulus bill passed by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2010. With 46 Cultural Districts, more than any other state, the Cultural Districts Initiative is designed to help communities attract artists and cultural enterprises, encourage business and job growth, expand tourism, preserve and reuse historic buildings, enhance property values, and foster local cultural development.

The Mass Cultural Council is a state agency supporting the arts, sciences, and humanities, to improve the quality of life in Massachusetts and its communities. It pursues its mission through a combination of grants, services, and advocacy for nonprofit cultural organizations, schools, communities, and artists.