

Lynn's art scene gets a \$500,000 boost from MassDevelopment

By **John Laidler** Globe Correspondent, Updated June 16, 2022, 4:52 p.m.



A RAW Art Works 2022 exhibit, "The Art of Celebration" opened at the organization's block party in May. RAW Art Works is just one of the creative partners in Lynn's Creative Cities efforts. SPENSER HASAK

As Lynn builds its reputation as a hub of creative activity, the city is embarking on a new effort to spur collaboration within its diverse arts and culture community and better connect it to the local economy.

MassDevelopment recently chose Lynn as one of three cities to participate in an initiative aimed at building sustainable artistic and cultural infrastructure in those communities to

support economic growth.


The state agency is providing the three cities — the others are Fitchburg and Springfield — a combined \$1.65 million, including more than \$500,000 for Lynn, over two years through the Creative Cities program.

“We’re very excited about it,” said LaCrecia Thomson, who was hired last year as Lynn’s first arts and culture planner. “This is going to help enhance the collaborative spirit found in Lynn’s creative ecosystem.”

“Lynn has an outstanding tradition of community engagement and collaboration through arts and culture, which was unfortunately impacted negatively by the pandemic,” Mayor Jared Nicholson said.

Noting Lynn’s commitment to “growth that includes all of us and benefits the community,” Nicholson added, “Supporting our local, creative economy is a great way to promote inclusive economic opportunities while also embracing and reflecting on our city’s identity and culture.”

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Thomson said the creation of her position reflects “the value and emphasis the city places on the creative sector. So for us to be able to participate in the Creative Cities program means a lot to the city.”

Lynn’s is partnering in the initiative with several local organizations. Details have not been finalized, but Thomson said the project may include grants to support cultural activity; training of young people in undertaking community arts projects; and encouraging businesses to tap the talents of local artists, for example, to beautify their storefronts or enhance their logos.

A key focus is to expand opportunities for underserved communities to participate in the local arts scene, and to showcase their work, according to city officials.

Creative Cities is part of MassDevelopment’s Transformative Development Initiative, which supports economic development in targeted districts in Gateway Cities, with funding from the Barr Foundation. Lynn’s downtown area was previously designated a TDI district.

MassDevelopment piloted Creative Cities New Bedford in 2020-21 and is now bringing it to the three other cities.

Dan Rivera, MassDevelopment’s president and CEO and formerly mayor of Lawrence, said New Bedford’s Creative Cities program supported that city’s “vision of becoming a destination for arts and culture [and] we’re excited to expand this intensive arts-focused initiative into Fitchburg, Lynn, and Springfield.”

Lynn’s selection is timely given the recent resurgence of its arts community, said Carolyn Cole, former director of the state-designated [Downtown Lynn Cultural District](#).

“Lynn has a rich creative tradition, but art in the city now is so highly visible and

tangible. Everyone sees it,” said Cole, currently cultural district program officer for the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

Cole pointed to the large-scale downtown murals painted by artists through the efforts of the nonprofit Beyond Walls as an example of the blossoming arts scene. She also cited the Lynn Museum/LynnArts building’s growth into a vibrant cultural center, the ongoing arts programs Raw Art Works provides for underserved children; and Lynn Main Street’s art-oriented economic development initiatives.

The city has contributed to the emerging arts scene by hiring Thomson and through its ongoing work with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council to design a public arts policy that is intended to be a state model, she said.

The Creative Cities initiative will help the city knit together the different creative efforts into a unified arts scene, said Cole, a Lynn resident who has been a performing arts professional herself.

“It’s what we all have hoped for and didn’t quite know how to achieve,” she said.

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