



Massachusetts Cultural Council

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MCC Designates State's First Cultural Districts

Arts Centers in Boston, Gloucester, Lynn, Pittsfield & Rockport Launch New State Initiative

(Boston, MA) - The Massachusetts Cultural Council (MCC) today named five vibrant, diverse centers for arts and cultural activity across Massachusetts as the first state-designated Cultural Districts. They are:

The Fenway Cultural District in Boston
Gloucester's Rocky Neck Cultural District
The Central Exchange Cultural District in Lynn
The Upstreet Cultural District in Pittsfield
The Rockport Cultural District

MCC's Board voted unanimously today to approve this first group of state-sponsored Cultural Districts during its meeting at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the Fenway.

"Our Cultural Districts Initiative shines a brand new spotlight on the breadth and depth of creative activity happening in every corner of Massachusetts," said Anita Walker, MCC's Executive Director. "Each of these communities has something very special to offer a visitor -- whether they are coming from across town or across the globe. With this designation, these cities can now take their cultural life to a new level."

A cultural district is a compact, walkable area of a community with a concentration of cultural facilities, activities, and assets. Districts attract visitors to enjoy and experience a range of cultural and commercial activities.

MCC's Cultural Districts Initiative came out of an economic stimulus bill passed by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2010. It 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. Each district will have new signage, [online profiles](#) on the Mass. Office of Travel and Tourism and MCC websites, and other amenities.

The Initiative builds upon one of the great strengths of Massachusetts: the distinctiveness and authenticity of its communities. Cultural Districts will help cities and towns identify, support, and promote their unique identity and sense of place.

It also advances MCC's long-term effort to harness the power of the nonprofit arts, humanities, and sciences to improve quality of life in Massachusetts cities and towns. [Recent data from MassINC](#) showed that using the arts and culture to enhance the quality of life enjoys broad public support in eleven major Massachusetts cities, and that residents who participate in cultural activities develop more positive perceptions about their community. More than 100 communities statewide have expressed interest in establishing a cultural district since the guidelines went public last year.

Supporters from each of the newly designated Cultural Districts successfully petitioned their local governments to endorse their plans, and then worked with the MCC and local partners to define the objectives and geographical contours of their district. Hundreds of nonprofit leaders, local business and civic groups, working artists, and citizen activists contributed to this process. The result is five distinct, well defined creative hubs. Descriptions of each of the first Mass. Cultural Districts follow:

Designated Massachusetts Cultural Districts

Fenway Cultural District, Boston

A walk through the Fenway Cultural District in Boston puts you at the doorstep of the world's most acclaimed cultural destinations: the Museum of Fine Arts with its new Art of the Americas wing; the incomparable Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum and its new performance venue where every seat is in the front row; and Symphony Hall, home of America's favorite

orchestra, the Boston Symphony. And you haven't even scratched the surface. Art and history lovers will feast on the best of American culture and still come back for more. Dine in a museum courtyard, or duck into an authentic ethnic restaurant. Other top destinations include Fenway Studios, the New England Conservatory, the Boston Conservatory, Berklee College of Music, Massachusetts College of Art, Simmons College, and the Massachusetts Historical Society. All are easily accessible by public transportation.

Gloucester's Rocky Neck Cultural District

There's something special about the light here. Find out why artists from around the world are drawn to one of America's first artist colonies: Gloucester's Rocky Neck. Stroll through artist galleries and studios nestled on this Cape Ann peninsula. Talk to the artists and watch them work. Grab lunch on the water overlooking a working fishing harbor. Rocky Neck is one of America's oldest art colonies, supporting an impressive number of year-round working artists. The district is home to numerous galleries and restaurants as well as the critically acclaimed Gloucester Theatre Company. Venues offer a calendar of special events like Nights on the Neck and the Rocky Neck Artist Ball. A dynamic new cultural and visitor center is also in the works.

Lynn's Central Exchange Cultural District

The core of this city may be one of Massachusetts' best-kept secrets -- a fusion of contemporary artists and multicultural cuisine and the authentic bricks and mortar of a city steeped in a history at the forefront of America's industrial history. Mingle with the artists and entrepreneurs who are drawn to the myriad of street activities, performances, and museums. Lynn's Central Exchange Cultural District includes historic museums, multiple performance spaces (like LynnArts' Neal Rantoul Black Box Theater), galleries like RAW showcasing young artists, numerous artist studios, WFNX Radio, ethnic restaurants and marketplaces reflecting the city's diverse population, and a resurgence of new restaurants like the Turbine Wine Bar.

Upstreet Cultural District, Pittsfield

How do you decide among the 50 restaurants, wine bars, and cafes that populate the Upstreet Cultural District? A calendar chock full of events and celebrations that regularly fill the street with vendors and artists that will tempt your aesthetic and culinary taste buds. This vibrant district will lure you into its amazing theater scene and to its family-friendly Berkshire Museum. Upstreet is home to dozens of visual, performing, and literary artists and numerous cultural institutions, including the [Barrington Stage Company](#) and its Musical Theatre Lab, the [Hancock Shaker Village](#), and the beautifully restored [Colonial Theatre](#). The district also boasts a number of locally-run retail shops, art galleries, a diverse selection of ethnic restaurants, and a year-round calendar of events and celebrations like 3rd Thursdays and the WordXWord Festival.

Rockport Cultural District

From the tip of Bearskin Neck and the iconic Motif #1, to Rockport Music's world-class Shalin Liu Performance Center with its stage overlooking the Atlantic, you'll have a once in a lifetime experience in Rockport. Shop in more than 40 art galleries. Grab a cup of coffee while watching the waves. Find out why international visitors make this a regular destination. Rockport's district boasts over 40 individual artist galleries and studios, as well as cultural institutions like the Rockport Art Association, one of the oldest active art associations in the nation.

About the Massachusetts Cultural Council

The [Massachusetts Cultural Council](#) is a state agency that promotes excellence, access, education, and diversity in the arts, humanities, and sciences, to improve the quality of life for all Massachusetts residents and contribute to the economic vitality of our communities.

The Council pursues this mission through a combination of grant programs, partnerships, and services for nonprofit cultural organizations, schools, communities, and individual artists. MCC's budget for the current fiscal year is \$10.8 million, including \$9.1 million from the state of Massachusetts and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Bank of America, and other sources.