

# Cultural district head aims to take Lynn to next level

By Chris Stevens / The Daily Item | Posted: Wednesday, June 11, 2014 3:00 am

LYNN — Emily Ruddock said in the four weeks she has officially held the title of downtown cultural district director, she has learned three things: The city is full of committed and positive people who want to see the cultural district succeed, the arts and cultural district is drawing people to the downtown and that Lynn is at a tipping point.

“Lynn really is poised to explode, and the people here want that, and that is really exciting,” she said during a meet and greet Tuesday at the Lynn Museum and Historical Society.

Ruddock said she believes the city is on the cusp of being one of the state’s hotspots for people to come to dinner, a show at Veterans Memorial Auditorium or Arts After Dark or one of the downtown art outlets. Her goal is to propel the city to the next level and to figure out what that means. It includes thinking strategically about where the district will be in six months, a year or five years.

Since she got here, Ruddock said she’s been doing a lot of listening, and she viewed Tuesday’s event as a chance to do more.

“I want to meet a lot of people, to get to know people and see what they value in arts consumption,” she said.

When she came to Lynn for her interview, she stumbled across Raw Art Works and immediately fell in love, she said. In part because of that meeting, she went into the interview with a lot of ideas.

“I learned in my first week here that some of those ideas will stay and some will go,” she said.

What makes Ruddock’s path interesting is that she has no immediate roadmap to follow, since she is the city’s first cultural district director.

“Cultural districts are not a new phenomenon,” she said. “They exist in other states and in other communities, particularly in Massachusetts.”

She said that gives her plenty of other roadmaps she can borrow from.

She can also borrow from her own path.

Ruddock went to Louisville, Ky., for a nine-month theater program and stayed nine years and, during that time, watched the city coalesce into a mixture of arts, culture, sports and business, not unlike what Lynn is shooting for today.

With a master in public policy, Ruddock calls her new position her dream job. She said she knew she

wanted to be in a position where she could bring the importance of the arts to the table in terms of policy.

“I’m so lucky,” she said. “It’s wonderful to be in a place where the mayor and Jim (Cowell, executive director of Economic Development and Industrial Corporation) and EDIC and Jamie (Marsh, community development director) get it, and the City Council understands why it’s important.”

Cowdell called Ruddock wonderful, Ward 5 Councilor Dianna Chakoutis said she is excited to see more collaboration between business, the arts and residents in the downtown, and Lynn Area Chamber of Commerce President Taso Nikolopoulos said the city is on the right track.

He said no city has ever succeeded without a vibrant downtown, and Ruddock is the trigger to make it happen in Lynn.

“Emily Ruddock will take it to the next level, and then the cultural district will be here to stay,” he said.