

Natick Center Cultural District

Strategic Plan 2015 - 2020



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I. INTRODUCTION

Natick is our home and Natick Center is the place where we come together as a community. Natick Center is the heart of our town, where residents and visitors gather for shopping, dining, events, and connecting with each other.

With the state designation in 2012 of the Natick Center Cultural District (NCCD), the stage was set for us to capitalize on our numerous cultural offerings and cultural anchors: The Center for the Arts in Natick (TCAN), the Morse Institute Library, the Town Common, and cultural partners like Walnut Hill School for the Arts.

The NCCD Advisory Board launched the strategic planning effort by selecting the non-profit consultants, Carlisle & Company, in the fall of 2013. The formal contract was written between Carlisle & Company and Natick Center Associates (NCA). Funding from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the MetroWest Visitors Bureau was combined for this purpose.

This plan builds on previous Natick planning efforts (notably Natick 360 and Natick Center Forward) and incorporates perspectives from a Strategic Planning Committee made up of diverse downtown stakeholders representing the public, private, non-profit and cultural sectors (see attached list of members). Meeting from January, 2014 through March, 2015, we considered how to make Natick Center a more lively and diverse neighborhood and an attractive regional cultural destination.

This plan is a strategic document. We encourage cultural activities and development efforts that are consistent with our goals, but trust that artists, business owners and landlords will balance their own needs and interests with what is best for Natick Center and the community as a whole.

Mission Statement:

The NCCD's mission is to cultivate a lively and diverse downtown neighborhood by enhancing the cultural, economic and social life of our community. We are led by an innovative partnership of public, private, non-profit and cultural voices.

Vision:

Natick Center will be a cultural hub of MetroWest, serving as a regional destination for arts, culture, dining, shopping, business, special events, and community gatherings for residents and visitors alike.

Values Statement:

We believe that supporting arts and culture is pivotal to creating a sustainable economic engine in Natick Center, and that the success of the Natick Center Cultural District will improve the downtown area for everyone's benefit. We value high quality and excellence in everything that we do, an honest and respectful exchange of ideas, teamwork and collaboration among differing stakeholders, and a respect for the diversity of perspectives that makes our town vibrant.



Operating Principles:

Collaborative decision-making, programming and event planning is integral to our mission and to our success. The Natick Center Cultural District is governed by Natick Center Associates, Inc., a non-profit, public/private partnership with over 40 years of history working for downtown revitalization. Natick Center Associates and the Town of Natick are mutually responsible for the successful achievement of NCCD goals and compliance with Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Districts Initiative requirements. NCA's Executive Committee, which includes Town, downtown business and cultural representatives, is responsible for working with the NCA Executive Director to achieve the District's goals. NCA's Programming and Events Committee is responsible for implementing cultural programming in the Cultural District.

Decision-Making Process:

- NCA and the Town of Natick will work in a public-private partnership to assure the success of the Cultural District
- The Town of Natick will work closely with NCA to support local businesses that are the foundation of our sustainable local economy
- Decisions regarding the growth and development of the downtown will remain with elected officials and the Town of Natick professional staff
- NCA should be aware of, coordinate and collaborate with any planned redevelopment, any proposed or planned repurposing of buildings, or changing of business ownership within the District

Why a Cultural District?

Investing in a robust Cultural District brings more foot traffic to the downtown and keeps dollars spent in the local economy, ultimately resulting in more tax revenue and jobs created. A vibrant cultural community with opportunities for expansion attracts new artists, cultural organizations and businesses, improving quality of life and making communities more attractive for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

More than 8,000 arts and cultural nonprofits in Massachusetts, which employ 27,100 people, spend \$2.1 billion annually and generate another \$2.5 billion of economic activity across the state, according to a study of the impact of the creative sector by the Boston-based New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA).

NEFA's 2011 report noted that the creative sector has a major impact on the larger economy and is "a steady, reliable industry, less subject to the cyclical ups and downs of the overall economy than the average New England business."



What Do We Mean by “Culture?”

When we refer to “culture” in Natick, we intend it to cover the instruction, creation, performance and exhibition by artistic and cultural industries, organizations, and individuals. These cultural activities include: visual arts and crafts; music, dance and theater; film, media, and entertainment; history and architecture; writing and publishing; advertising and marketing; graphic and interior design, as well as activities of a cultural nature occurring in public or private spaces. Finally, we consider community gatherings such as the farmer’s market and Natick Days to be an integral part of Natick’s “culture.”

What Do We Mean by “Cultural Anchor?”

A cultural anchor is a cultural organization within the District that attracts large numbers of regional visitors from outside Natick, around MetroWest, and as far as Boston. Because they have large audiences, anchors should be included in NCCD marketing and fundraising materials. For their part, anchors can leverage their mailing lists and facilities, and help in other ways to shed more light on varied cultural and entertainment offerings in Town. This kind of partnership will only work, however, if it benefits all partners. The Center for the Arts in Natick (TCAN) and the Morse Institute Library are cultural anchors for the Cultural District. Walnut Hill School for the Arts, which is located outside the Cultural District, is a cultural partner.

Strategic Goals:

The Strategic Planning Committee has identified four Pillars of the Cultural District which sustain the District and represent our strategic goals. *These goals are interdependent and connected.*

Pillar One: Culture - Increase Capacity for Arts and Cultural Development

NCCD will increase its capacity to develop programs, events, creative spaces, and partnerships that will sustain and support Natick Center’s cultural growth.

Pillar Two: Community/Social: Enhance Natick Center as a Community Gathering Place

NCCD will be a popular destination where residents and visitors gather to experience arts and culture and connect as a community.

Pillar Three – Economic Development: Foster Economic Development in Natick Center and the Community Overall

NCCD will create a sustainable economic engine that increases foot traffic and dollars spent in downtown businesses and the town as a whole.

Pillar Four – Governance/Sustainability: Ensure the Long-Term Stability and Success of the Cultural District

NCCD will become the keystone to maintain an alliance of landlords, merchants, artists, and the Town of Natick with a focus on building a sustainable and vital Natick Center



II. GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, TACTICS AND METRICS

Pillar One: Build Capacity for Arts and Cultural Development

NCCD will increase its capacity to develop programs, events, creative spaces and partnerships that will sustain and support Natick Center's cultural growth

Objective #1: Create a sense of place in Natick Center that is attractive to visitors, artists, performers, desired tenants, consumers, and investors

Strategy #1: Strengthen the image and identity of Natick Center as a first class destination for individuals and families seeking performing arts, entertainment, dining, art, concerts, community events, and downtown shopping

- Maintain a NCCD Calendar of Events that includes year-round cultural activities that are stand-alone (i.e. gallery shows, TCAN performances), cooperative (i.e. Art Walk, Open Studios, Farmer's Market, Restaurant Week), and complementary to long standing community events (i.e. Fourth of July Celebration, Natick Days, and Concerts on the Common).
 - The NCA Programming and Events Committee will create and maintain the NCCD calendar
 - The NCA Board of Directors will set the rules regarding inclusion in the NCCD Calendar
- Brand the NCCD by co-promoting cultural and other town activities with cohesive, integrated marketing materials under the NCCD umbrella and logo
 - Use print, digital and social media outlets to spread the word
- Educate partners about the benefits of including the NCCD logo in signage and marketing materials

Strategy #2: Produce cultural events and activities that become regional as well as local attractions

- Build on the results already achieved with 2013 Town of Natick funds, including murals, mobile tourism app, unified NCA/NCCD website and calendar, and new logo
 - Publicize self guided cultural and historical walking tours, offered through new mobile app
- Develop a large arts festival in the future that serves as a signature, collaborative NCCD event
- Collaborate with and enhance existing cultural programming that features Natick history and origin
- Capitalize on Massachusetts' celebration of its 400th Anniversary in 2020

Objective #2: Take better advantage of existing cultural resources by improving communication and coordination

Strategy #1: Utilize partnerships to better integrate cultural and artistic activities and broaden their reach

- Fully utilize available local performing arts facilities and resources of anchors and partners such as TCAN, Walnut Hill, the Community-Senior Center and the Morse Institute Library
- Work with the Recreation and Parks Department to take better advantage of Natick Common as a venue

Pillar One, Objective 2, Strategy 1 (continued)

- Engage the NCA Programming and Events Committee to help coordinate NCCD programming
 - Selectmen will appoint community members, including at least one Board of Selectmen representative
- Encourage collaborative and cooperative efforts that integrate merchants, businesses and the Town into partnerships with cultural organizations
- Develop partnerships and promotions with local corporations and the Natick Mall to encourage downtown visitation

Pillar One Measurements of Success:

Metrics	Baseline	2015 Forecast	Annual Target	Tool	Key Person(s)
Collaborative arts events in multiple community venues	2014 Art Walk Open Studios Farmers Market Concerts on the Common Natick Days	Expanded Art Walk + Fall Event	One event per year in multiple public and private spaces (streets, Town Common, library, TCAN, restaurants)	NA	NCA Executive Director NCA Programming & Events Committee, Event Chairs
Publicize NCCD accomplishments	New murals but no marketing	Add mural tour to Art Walk 2015	Potential Annual event	NA	Programming & Events Committee
NCCD Social Media • Facebook • Twitter • Mobile App	• 426 likes • 308 followers • 850 page views per month	• 900 likes • 600 followers • 1700 page views per month	100% growth	Google Analytics	NCCD Website Host
Total # of visitors to NCCD events and organizations	87,000	100,000	15% increase	Multiple estimates	NCA Executive Director
Coordinated event promotion	NCA website NCCD Facebook Multiple calendars in different locations	Consolidated NCA/NCCD website with calendar	# hits and open rates increase	Google Analytics	NCA Executive Director

Pillar Two: Enhance Downtown Natick as a Community Gathering Place

NCCD will be a popular destination where residents and visitors gather to experience arts and culture and connect as a community

Objective #1: Facilitate the patronage of current retailers, restaurants and other amenities

Strategy #1: Improve pedestrian access to the downtown area

- Improve and develop the pedestrian and walkway areas in and around the NCCD and downtown areas to encourage pedestrian and foot traffic
- Work with local, regional and state agencies to improve public transportation to and from NCCD

Strategy #2: Improve parking in the downtown area

- NCA will support the Town's efforts to develop a comprehensive parking management plan, potentially including new parking facilities

Objective #2: Highlight the friendliness, safety and accessibility of the Center

Strategy #1: Encourage “comfortable collisions” in the community by utilizing open public space

- Hold more events more often in various public spaces such as Natick Common, streets and sidewalks
- Create public spaces for art displays by tying new events to established events, e.g., arts performances during Farmers Market
- Establish means for non-traditional or seasonal businesses to occupy public space

Strategy #2: Give people reasons to think about Natick Center and to stay longer when they visit

- Encourage visitors to do more by recommending restaurants, stores, and other activities
- Create a visitors center and/or other community information stations
- Recruit and encourage broad community involvement in event planning and participation, including new volunteers and residents and those who are not just from Natick Center
- Expand markets by developing events and offering promotions that appeal to consumers of all ages, including those under age 30 and those of different demographic backgrounds

Pillar Two Measurements of Success:

Metrics	Baseline	2015 Forecast	Annual Target	Tool	Key Person(s)
Parking improvements	Meters covered during certain events	TBD by Town of Natick	TBD	TBD	Town of Natick Parking Committee
Use of open public spaces	Street closed for Art Walk, Concerts & Farmers Market on Town Common	Find one new way of adding culture to public space	TBD	TBD	NCA ED with Programming & Events Committee

Pillar Three: Foster Economic Development in Downtown Natick and the Community Overall

NCCD will be a catalyst for economic development and increased visitation to downtown businesses

Objective #1: Make the Cultural District an added value for property owners, investors and the community

Strategy #1: The newly hired Natick Community and Economic Development Director shall work closely with NCCD

- The Community and Economic Development Director shall review this strategic plan and make edits to the economic development goals according to his priorities, working closely with NCCD to incorporate these strategic goals into his office's overall plan

Strategy #2: Target and recruit specific businesses that will enhance the Cultural District

- The Town of Natick will develop a list of targeted/desirable businesses and promote Natick Center in particular so as to encourage these businesses.
- The Department of Community and Economic Development will share this list so that NCA and others can help recruit
- Use the Town's comprehensive communication and marketing materials with specific NCCD collateral materials to attract businesses, investors, and strategic partners

Strategy #3: Identify and resolve impediments to investment

- When and where vacancies exist, the Department of Community and Economic Development will assist landlords by providing guidance and support through the marketing and permit processes
 - The Office of Community and Economic Development Director will work with current and prospective landlords regarding tools available to assist them and their tenants, and potential locations for targeted businesses
- Identify potential public and private partnerships that can serve as a resource for business incubators in the NCCD district and greater downtown footprint

Strategy #4: Better utilize existing buildings, facilities and resources by examining their ability to support the NCCD and downtown area

- Develop upper level spaces
- Encourage landowners to house attractive new restaurants and other targeted/desirable businesses on the street level
- Support zoning changes that will encourage desirable development and/or increased visitation
- Look at development opportunities for artists' living/work space

Pillar Three (continued)

Objective #2: Make the downtown area a more attractive place to live and visit

Strategy #1: Improve the experience for shoppers

- Diversify retail shopping options (types, time of operation, targeted audiences, etc.)
- Improve pedestrian and parking accessibility (see community pillar #2, objective #1)
- Improve street level aesthetics (sidewalks, street furniture, signage, plantings and storefronts)

Objective 2, Strategy #2: Create a bustling neighborhood in Natick Center

- Expand mixed and multi-use, including residential, diversity in businesses
- Offer programming, events and promotions to bring visitors in during the day, on under-attended weeknights and later at night

Objective #3: Natick Center Associates will work closely with the Natick Department of Community and Economic Development to help businesses thrive in Natick Center

Strategy #1: NCA will help advocate for the approval of a Natick Center Business Opportunity District

- The Business Opportunity District would include provisions for an Economic Opportunity Area (EOA), Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and other incentives intended to enhance and encourage growth in the district.

Strategy #2: The Town shall consult NCA representatives on the local business perspective

- NCA will reach out to the new Town of Natick Community and Economic Development Director to share this plan and discuss ways of working together
- The Town will regularly seek input on improvements and procedures (e.g., lighting, signage, street furniture, plantings, and snow removal)
- The Town will offer a series of informational workshops throughout the year coordinated through the Department of Community and Economic Development. NCA will provide input on these workshops.
 - *Priority Action: Hold a landlord Outreach Forum to share information and research on the value of the Cultural District*
- NCA will communicate frequently and clearly with Town departments and non-NCA organizations
 - *Priority Action: NCCD representatives should attend key Town meetings when appropriate*

Natick Center Cultural District Visitation Metrics

Metrics	2011 Baseline	2012	2013	2014	2015 Forecast	Annual Target	Source or Tool
Visitation:							
NCA EVENTS							NCA and Parks & Rec. data
Natick Days	7,500	8,000	8,500	9,500	10,500	1000 more visitors	See above
July 4 th Parade/other events	9,000	1,0000	10,500	weather cancellation	11,000	500 more visitors	See above
Monday Night Summer Concert Series-8 weeks	2,400	2,800	3,000	3,200	3,400	200 more visitors	See above
Wednesday Night Summer Family Performances-6 weeks	800	900	1,000	1,200	1,300	100 more visitors	See above
Spooktacular Halloween Celebration	500	600	700	800	900	100 more visitors	See above
Holiday Downtown Lighting Celebration	200	250	300	350	400	50 more visitors	See above
FARMERS MARKET	NA	NA	NA	28,600	28,600	Stable	F. Market data
The Center for the Arts in Natick (TCAN)	21,836	21,473	24,313	22,744	23,500	33% growth	TCAN data
Natick resident attendance (31.8% average)	7,014	6,738	7,433	7,364	7,683	33% of total	See above
Beyond Natick attendance (68.2% average)	14,822	14,735	16,880	15,380	15,817	67% of total	See above
WALNUT HILL KEITER PERFORMANCE CENTER (academic year end metrics)	10,363	9,844	8,972	9,131	9,290	5% growth	Walnut Hill data
MORSE INSTITUTE LIBRARY	NA	292,952	289,175	302,875	307,837	15% growth	Library data
FIVE CROWS	4,500	5,000	6,000	8,500	9,350	10% growth	5 Crows data
PALETTES		6,343	8,212	8,964	9,860	10% growth	Palettes data
TOTAL VISITATION	78,935	86,683	95,810	418,608	439,437	10% growth/yr	

Pillar Four: Ensure the Long-Term Stability and Success of the Cultural District

NCCD should become the keystone to maintain an alliance of landlords, merchants, artists, and the Town of Natick with a focus on building a sustainable and vital Natick Center

Objective #1: Establish an agreed upon system of governance and management for the Cultural District to ensure sustainability and coordination

Strategy #1: Natick Center Associates will serve as the home of Natick Center Cultural District

- The NCA Executive Committee, which includes Town, downtown business and cultural representatives, is responsible for working with the NCA Executive Director to oversee the activities of the Cultural District
- Natick Center Associates and the Town of Natick are mutually responsible for the successful achievement of NCCD goals and compliance with Massachusetts Cultural Council's Cultural Districts Initiative requirements.
- NCA's Programming and Events Committee is responsible for implementing cultural programming in the Cultural District.
- A comprehensive (and ongoing) communications process will be established

Objective #2: Identify a consistent revenue stream to fund the Cultural District over the long term

Strategy #1: NCCD will seek out sustainable revenue stream with the goal of funding a full-time coordinator

- NCCD will seek a diverse mix of Mass Cultural Council grants, foundation grants, corporate/business sponsorships, individual donations, visitor fees, and Town of Natick funding
- NCA, as a 501(c)3 charitable organization, will apply for funding from grants and charitable donations to support NCCD initiatives

Strategy #2: Town of Natick will explore ways to support the NCCD financially over time

- Town of Natick support may or may not include grants and an increase in the standing annual contribution to NCA
- Any options which are pursued would be discussed and debated in a public forum

Measurements of success will include:

Metrics	Baseline	2015 Forecast	Annual Target	Tool	Key Person(s)
Coordinated governance structure	Compartmentalized governance structure, NCA and NCCD separated	Restructured NCA/ NCCD Board & Exec. Committee, full-time Executive Director	100% attendance + active coordination	Annual Board training + evaluation	NCA Board
Consistent Revenue	One-time grants and Town funds	Revenue stream secured	Full-time ED salary covered	NCA & Town of Natick	Town of Natick, NCA Board

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Strategic Planning Committee

Cultural Community

- India Young, Natick Center Associates
- David Lavalley, The Center for the Arts in Natick
- Steve Levinsky, Palettes
- Antonio Viva, Walnut Hill School

Town of Natick

- Michael Gallerani, Economic Development Planner
- Rick Jennett, Board of Selectmen and Parking Committee Member
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Business Community

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of the Natick Center Cultural District*

