

# Art at the Heart of Community: Integrating Culture into Public Spaces

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*...When people think of Maine, they think of forestry, farming and fishing, of beaches, woods and fields, T-shirts and souvenirs at Old Orchard Beach and foodie restaurants in Portland, of peepers and river paddlers.*

***But it is the writers, artists, makers, and performers who enhance our sense of community, and who continue to expand our senses and open our eyes, ears and minds to the wider world of imagination, and who have found in Maine a place to call home.***

**-Governor Janet T. Mills**

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*'Dancing for Joy' by The Myth Makers (2024). Located at Back Cove Trail Parking lot, Portland Maine. Commissioned by TEMPOArt. Photo Credit: Portland Wheelers Maine.*

# ECONOMIC IMPACT

The cultural economy positions itself at the intersection of **economics** (contributing to GDP), **innovation** (fostering growth and competition in traditional activities), **social value** (stimulating knowledge and talent), and **sustainability** (relying on the unlimited input of creativity and intellectual capital).

- The Policy Circle

The Maine arts and culture sector was a **\$2.2 billion** industry in 2022 (2.6% of the state's GDP), representing **18,749 jobs** (2.9% of Maine's workforce), and total compensation of **\$1.2 billion**.

*Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis & National Endowment for the Arts (2024). Data collected for 2022.*

# PORTLAND, ME — WHEN ART SOLVES COMMUNITY PROBLEMS



Marty Pottenger during "Forest City Times"

# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

Art isn't just decoration. When it's rooted in a community's real life — its tensions, its pride, its history — it becomes a powerful civic tool.

# BELFAST, ME — THE POWER OF AN ADAPTIVE REUSE ARTS CENTER



# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

Belfast's story started where Bowdoinham is now — a town-owned building, a decision to be made, and a creative community ready to grow into it.

# WATERVILLE, ME — WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CITY GOES ALL-IN



# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

Bowdoinham isn't Waterville. It doesn't need to be. But Waterville proves the principle: arts investment produces economic returns that are measurable, and community pride that is priceless.

# BIDDEFORD, ME — COMMERCE FOLLOWS CULTURE

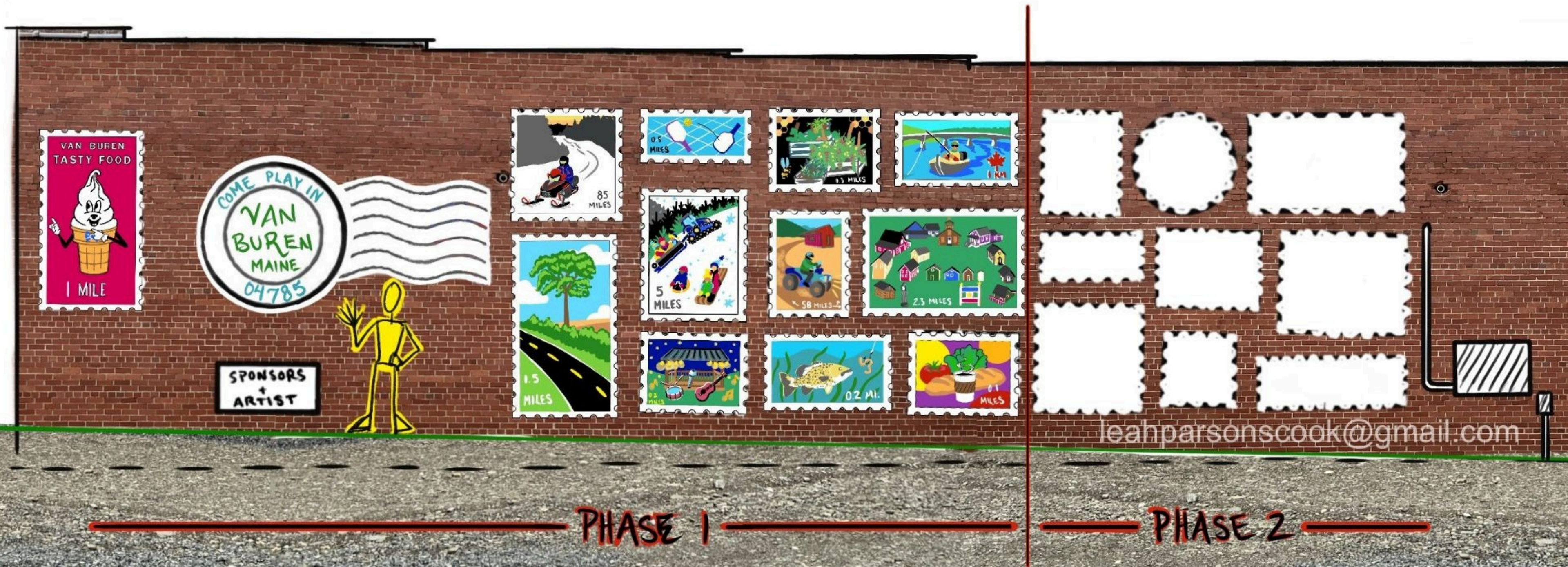


*BANDALOOOP's LOOM:FIELD at Lofts on the Levee, Biddeford (presented by Subcircle)  
photo by Gregg Hryniewicz*

# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

You don't need a Colby College or a major philanthropist to get started. Biddeford began with a small nonprofit, a vacant building, and artists who believed in their city. The investment followed the culture.

# VAN BUREN, ME — A TOWN REBUILDS ITSELF THROUGH CULTURE



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# FLOOR PLAN

*spatial narratives - crafting stories through form and flow*



Entrance Information Desk

1

Maker's Market

2

Communal Kitchen & Dining

3

Maker's Space

4

Small Business Incubator

5

Telehealth Clinic

6

Consultation Area

7

Exam Rooms

8

Staff Support

9

Building Support

10

Storage & Soil Room

11

# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

Van Buren started from a hard place: few resources, and a deep economic hole. What changed everything wasn't a big developer or a windfall grant. It was a community that decided its culture and identity were the foundation of its future, not an afterthought.

# NORWAY, ME — A FACTORY BECOMES A FUTURE





Neville Caulfield  
Harlan Crichton  
Chelseá Ellis  
Nick Gervin  
June Kim  
Scott Vlaun

Photography Exhibit  
**36 WINDOWS**  
SEPTEMBER 14<sup>th</sup> thru OCTOBER 13<sup>th</sup> open THURS - SUN  
11:00a - 4:00p  
Gingerbread House, 500 Main St. Norway, Maine  
lightsoutgallery.org/36windows @lightsoutgallery

Presented by Lights Out with support from The Bakery Photo Co.  
Photo by Neville Caulfield



# **THE TAKEAWAY:**

Norway's story is about what happens when artists are trusted as community development partners, not just performers or decorators, but builders. Three young people with a vision, a derelict building, and volunteer weekends are now the stewards of Norway's signature annual festival and its new arts hub.

# WHAT THESE COMMUNITIES HAVE IN COMMON:

- **They started with what they already had.** Belfast had a vacant school. Biddeford had mill buildings.
- **They involved the community from the beginning.** The best projects weren't designed for the community; they were designed with it.
- **They found a partner or operator.** In Belfast, it was Waterfall Arts. In Biddeford, it was Engine. In Waterville, it was a coalition of existing institutions.
- **They were patient and intentional.** None of these transformations happened overnight. They were the result of committed decisions.

# ART BELONGS INSIDE THE PLANNING PROCESS

Creative placemaking places the arts at the center of shaping the character and vitality of neighborhoods, cities, towns, and regions. The key is to integrate art and culture into community revitalization work.

# CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

1. Are artists/arts professionals actively engaged in your committees? Do you use participatory art to help collect community input? Are there grant opportunities to support the arts? What partnerships should you pursue?

2. Is thoughtful, locally-driven, public art a part of your design projects? Are local artists and arts professionals helping to determine the kinds of art that are pursued? How does art support your cultural preservation work?

3. Are you paying artists fairly, especially if you pay other professionals?



# THE STATE IS ALREADY INVESTING IN THIS

- The Maine Arts Commission offers a Creative Communities Grant specifically designed for towns like Bowdoinham.
- The program funds arts-based projects that respond to community needs and strengthen local identity, making Maine's communities more vibrant, connected, and desirable places to live, visit, work, and play.
- By integrating artists and culture bearers into community development, this grant enables projects that shape the social, physical, and cultural character of a place.

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*At their most powerful, **arts and culture do not exist in a silo**, separate from all other dimensions of our society. We are able to unleash their power when we position the arts in all facets of our daily lives, communities, towns, and cities.*

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**-Dr. Maria Rosario Jackson**

**Former Chair, National Endowment for the Arts**

# QUESTIONS?



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