

Arts & Culture

Introduction

Monroe County's explosive population growth is well-known. Indeed, this rapid expansion has been one of the principal reasons for the county's creating Monroe 2020 to chart a course for the community's future. With the county's growth and change, it has become an increasingly attractive place for arts and cultural activities. Moreover, as the Monroe 2020 Economic Development Policy statement recognizes, visual and performing arts and related activities are now a solid component of the county's economic base.

- *Artists and crafts people are increasingly attracted to the County. Monroe County is a hospitable, affordable place near the metropolis, and tourists are also a market for their products. Indeed, some crafts endeavors, such as Liztech Jewelry in East Stroudsburg, are small businesses that sell to national markets. Activities of the Arts Council, the Jacob Stroud Main Street program in Stroudsburg, and the showcasing of local musicians (many with national and international audiences) at clubs such as the Deer Head Inn in Delaware Water Gap are part of a mutual support structure. Encouraging a continual flow of artists, musicians, and crafts people to the County will add to its attractions and reputation for quality and economic diversity.*

But reach of the arts goes far beyond the economy. Arts are a potential resource for:

- Involving the residents of Monroe County - especially the youth - in creative pursuits.
- Adding to the outside world's positive image of this area.
- Providing activities that help create community cohesion.

Though vital to community identity, arts and culture alone do not make up the character of this community. They are part of a larger array in which the county's educational system - from public and private schools to the community college and East Stroudsburg University - play a major role. Educational opportunities for residents of all ages, youth through mid-career retraining as well as enrichment of the lives of retirees, all factor into the quality of community



Part III . . . The Policies

life. These institutions are part of Monroe's "sense of place," alongside the county's outstanding scenic views and physical features, its distinctive landmarks and development pattern, overall visual impression, economic activity and the pattern of human relationships.

The Goals Revisited

The Monroe 2020 Task Forces fully believe that creating community cohesion is one of the most important missions of the planning effort. Public agencies, the private sector and voluntary groups should establish facilities within municipalities and school districts where activities can take place that have community-wide appeal. Here's what the task forces have said:

1. County-wide

Goal: Enhance a sense of community and community identity for newcomers and long-term residents.

Action: Expand opportunities for participation in cultural activities related to the visual and performing arts.

2. East Stroudsburg

Goal: Establish activities that bring newcomers and long-term residents together and promote community cohesion.

Action: Seek and obtain grants for promoting arts and history.

3. Pocono Mountain

Goal: Expand arts and cultural activities, as well as area offerings of higher education.

Action: Work with Northampton Community College and ESU to add programs in Pocono Mountain area communities and increase theatrical/concert performances in school facilities.

4. Pleasant Valley

Goal: Create gathering places, especially for recreation for local people.

Action: Make facilities and volunteers available for recreation and other community purposes, especially to address teenager needs.

5. Stroudsburg

Goal: Create gathering places for community activities

Action: Establish priorities for acquiring, developing, and operating public recreation facilities.

These goals and actions were supported by most municipalities and school districts and endorsed by the County Commissioners in October 1997.

Monroe County Arts Council Initiative

Monroe County Arts Council represents the arts and cultural community. Energized by the

D. Arts and Culture Policy

concern for the future expressed by Monroe 2020, the Arts Council called a two-day conference at ESU, also in October 1997, on its future role. Almost 50 people participated, representing government, business, education, and the community-at-large as well as the arts.

In focus groups and plenary sessions the attendees discussed the cultural environment of Monroe County and established a vision of “Community Life and Culture in Monroe County” for the year 2020. The common themes from this vision involved the need for:

- A multi-purpose cultural center or centers;
- An environmentally friendly and uncluttered community;
- Appreciation of the importance of education at all levels;
- Emphasis on the Internet and computer literacy in the schools; and
- Transportation alternatives to lessen reliance on the automobile.

All of these themes parallel and support the goals and action ideas of Monroe 2020. Two specifically relate to the roadscape initiatives of the 2020 Infrastructure and Community Character sub-committee:

- The need to foster aesthetic qualities in the manmade environment and remove the clutter of billboards.
- The imperative to create a pedestrian-friendly environment and develop easily accessible hiking and biking paths as well as markedly improved public transportation.

Creating “Communities of Place”: multi-purpose arts centers

The conference’s major initiative, and one which MCAC intends to pursue energetically, is mobilizing the resources to create multi-purpose centers. These are envisioned as places where both visual and performing arts can be created and experienced, places where education in arts can be provided to a wide range of age and interest groups, and especially as places where people from varied backgrounds can come together and share in a common identity as members of the community.

First priority will be the conversion and upgrading of the ArtSpace building at 534 Main St. in Stroudsburg into a more complete cultural center. This will be the prototype for a larger building and/or a network of satellite



Part III . . . The Policies

centers throughout the county when funding becomes available. Conceivably, such centers would involve use of facilities and cooperation with the school districts who have arts education, exhibition and performance space and a strong commitment to working with the larger community.

Monroe 2020 Policy Support

Monroe 2020 endorses the efforts of the Monroe County Arts Council to foster community cohesion, personal creativity, and a sophisticated image through creation of one or more multipurpose cultural centers in Monroe County. Monroe 2020 proposes that the cultural center concept be incorporated in the county-wide Comprehensive Plan. Monroe 2020 urges, further, that in the course of plan preparation and thereafter, the county make available to the MCAC and affiliated groups the Geographic Information System to aid in identifying potential locations for such facilities.

