

City of Biddeford
Conservation Commission
January 03, 2022 6:00 PM Zoom: Jan 3, 2022 06:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Topic: Conservation Commission-Comp Plan Work

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1. **Call to Order**
2. **Discussion -Finalize comments to Comprehensive Plan**
3. **Climate Change Task Force**
 - 3.1. Financial Support for Climate Change Task Force Public Engagement Project
[SHARP GRANT 10_29 v2.pdf](#)
4. **Adjourn**

What is your organization's mission? (2500)

Incorporated as a city in 1855, the City of Biddeford is the principal municipality in York County. Its mission is to govern locally and deliver public services. The City of Biddeford is committed to open government and public participation while recognizing that transparency is the foundation of public trust. We strive to make information readily available to the public daily. The City is now a service center community, providing retail, healthcare, educational, recreation, and entertainment amenities for the area. The Biddeford Climate Task Force operates as a committee created by Mayor Casavant in 2020 and seeks to broaden public participation and engagement in the work being done to develop a Climate Action Plan. A strong Climate Action Plan relies heavily on the lived experience of ordinary citizens to inform a meaningful response to the growing threat of climate change. The City of Biddeford is collaborating with Engine, the city's premier arts organization, to encourage thoughtful public responses through art and to provide a platform for communicating and processing complex ideas and experiences.

Please describe what you do in more detail. (3000)

Together, working with the Mayor, city leadership, city staff, and all community stakeholders, the team has adopted both short and long-term objectives and targets to develop a Climate Action Plan. This plan, through strong public participation, will develop recommendations to help the city mitigate and adapt to the most pressing effects of climate change. Through engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders and the general public, the Task Force will develop equitable and inclusionary strategies to help residents navigate the climate crisis.

Engine's mission is to connect and inspire our community through art, design, and education. Engine envisions a community and economy in which art, design, and education are valued, integrated, and celebrated. Founded on the belief that artistic expression and creative vibrancy are the gateways to cultural, social, and economic revitalization, Engine is committed to designing, launching, and promoting community-based arts programming. Engine aspires to be a driver of artistic expression, creative industry, cultural vitality, community connections, and socially responsible practices. Engine received its 501(c)3 status in December of 2010. Engine's mission makes them an ideal partner to engage the public in this existential crisis.

Please explain how your organization has been impacted by the pandemic. (3000)

The start of the pandemic brought many changes to a city focused on face-to-face engagement. To maintain the public access to all open government meetings, interactions shifted from in-person meetings to virtual meetings. To date, Biddeford residents, business owners, and City staff engage in meetings and conversations over video calls. This humanities project allows the City to present compelling programming that cannot be replicated virtually.

Additionally, Engine has had to suspend most earned-revenue programs. These public programs cover various areas like education, community classes, wide-ranging classes, and a shared-makerspace. Since the return of these programs, it has been quite difficult to build them back in caliber, from attendance to reach. This funding will help Engine address an earned revenue shortfall caused by limited capacity in our education programs and decreases in staff capacity due to budget cuts. By partnering with the City, this program will allow Engine to return to its former operating capacity.

Please describe in more detail how these funds will help your organization's and/or your communities recover and move forward from the impacts of the coronavirus? (4000)

The common goal for the City of Biddeford and Engine is to engage the public in important and timely conversations and the connection between the coronavirus pandemic and the growing climate crisis. Creating opportunities for connection, inspiration, and creativity for our community through free participatory experiences is part of Biddeford's and Engine's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has exacerbated the existing public health crisis of loneliness and disconnection. These free participatory experiences will build our community's resilience by increasing our overall health and well-being. The City's collaboration with Engine intends to provide a platform for discussing complex lived experiences and following this discussion with outlets for specific community action, especially actions through the Task Force. Our program will allow residents to meet new people and make new connections throughout the city.

More than ever people are in need of opportunities to safely connect, feel a sense of belonging, and creatively process our experiences. Art is a key tool in developing an awareness and understanding of people's lived experiences, which holds true for the pandemic experience. Participation in art improves mental health and well-being which are key to building resiliency in a community. It is very important for community members to see their ideas reflected in such a meaningful way from a cultural organization in the city. This humanities project will bring healing to space and place and foster public imagination for our shared future. The use of personal stories and art will be able to ground conversations and exhibits, which is especially important for intense discussion around the pandemic and climate change. The humanities have the power to activate the imagination and the sense of what is possible which is an antidote to despair and disconnection. Humanities allow us to dream together, to question together, and to create together. As a community in transition and crisis, we believe that this investment in free art experiences will uplift the community through the transformative nature of the humanities.

Specific goals for this humanities program include the following:

- Increase community resiliency through inspiration, connection, and providing a platform for communicating and processing complex ideas and experiences
- Expand access to high-quality art experiences in an underserved economic and geographic area, with a focus on outreach to our increasing population of new Mainers
- Engage youth meaningfully in envisioning our collective cultural futures
- Engage local artists with experience using art for community building
- Support creative use of our community's public spaces

Describe the humanities programming for which you are applying for funding. (4000)

The City of Biddeford's Climate Task Force will partner with Engine to create an exhibit of the work of renowned artist and climate scientist Jill Pelto to communicate the existential threat of climate change to the Southern Maine community. Ms. Pelto specializes in creatively communicating information about environmental issues through her art. At our kick-off event and through the duration of the exhibit, the community will be asked to respond, in words and images, to the climate crisis as depicted in Jill's work. The participants' reactions will then be displayed for the broader community. The programming done by

the City will be rooted in the humanities, by prompting participants to think deeply, respond, and state their informed thoughts about the intersection of data, people, and art. This program will focus on art-making, climate science, and community engagement with art at the forefront. Based on the artists' availability, the exhibit will be held in early 2022.

This is a critical step in creating our city's Climate Action Plan, as the Task Force aims to coordinate educational and community outreach events surrounding climate change. This is an intense topic, but the incorporation of arts will certainly make a discussion more accessible. Ms. Pelto has agreed to exhibit her work at Engine and to present her process of data visualization to participants. This is a unique opportunity to discuss the intersections of art, climate change, the city of Biddeford, and lived experiences of the current global crises. We imagine (1) a night where Jill will present her process and invite participants to respond or create their own art, (2) a 4-6 week exhibition of Jill's work in the Engine gallery, (3) a physical space throughout the exhibition where residents can respond to Ms. Pelto's work on an ongoing basis, and (4) photographic and video documentation of the event.

In addition, we hope to work with Biddeford schools. We will either translate this event so it can be delivered to classrooms and/or send a guide of information to schools before they visit the exhibit. A humanities program like this will tie into educational standards for that age group, including both arts and science standards.

What are your objectives for this project? (4000)

Perhaps most important, this program will provide a space and platform for community gathering around the humanities. The goal of this project is to garner a robust reaction from the community to the climate crisis and to engage the public in the work of the Biddeford Climate Task Force. The interactivity of this project can be used as a barometer to gauge the level of knowledge and concern surrounding this very important topic.

Our objectives are as follows:

Promote the intersection of climate science and art. Use art as a platform for science communication.

Raise awareness of the global climate crisis and the coming challenges that will happen locally.

Raise awareness of the work of the Biddeford Climate Task Force.

Engage the public in a thoughtful and provocative manner that increases awareness without creating offense.

Offer Engine an event that allows them to move beyond the restraints created during the long pandemic.

Strengthen the networks that connect neighborhoods throughout the city by building the path towards continued resident involvement in issues such as climate change.

Provide an outlet for the public to express themselves, build community, and build understanding across differences.

Who will this project serve, and how? (3000)

Engine's current programs serve youth and adults primarily in Biddeford, a community with the lowest median income and educational attainment rates in York County. 11.7% of its residents live in poverty, about 1.4 times the rate in the Portland-South Portland, ME Metro Area. Engine's target for education programs is at-risk underserved youth. There are approximately 4,000 children between the ages of 5 - 19 in a town of 21,000 and 2,500 in the public school system. More than 40% of these students qualify for free or reduced lunch. 50% of Engine's program attendees utilize our sliding scale pricing and we expect that to increase with the inclusion of New Mainer students.

Community members will benefit by participating in arts activities that improve health and well-being and share new skills through exposure to various artistic and creative practices. This project utilizes arts as a tool for healing and connection provides new points of access to the arts for our community. Our intended beneficiaries are predominantly the people who have lived here for generations or are living here because of the services the community provides, such as the burgeoning immigrant and refugee community. We will use this as an opportunity to provide translated materials for the event and our two organizations based on the most common languages spoken by our immigrant populations. These groups are typically under-resourced. Both short-term and longitudinal studies demonstrate a positive association between art and/or cultural participation and mental and physical health benefits, including both quality of life and increased lifespan.

Are you collaborating with any other organizations on this project? If so, please list them below and describe the nature of the collaboration.

The City of Biddeford will be collaborating with Engine very closely throughout the planning and production of this humanities event. This collaboration allows for the use of the Engine Gallery in addition to their remaining facilities for Jill Peltó's exhibition and spaces for community art-making and responses.

Subcircle, a local dance organization, will also be a collaborator, as both a presenting partner and a source of event documentation.

Tilth Art & Agriculture, which also focuses on the intersection of art and the environment, will be an additional presenting partner to this humanities event.

Please list how you intend to use this funding. We are looking for a brief summary; do not include an itemized budget. (3000)

The City of Biddeford intends to use \$2,500 to stipend Jill Peltó and additional teaching artists that will help deliver the program to various groups around the city. This can include taking the art into classrooms, community groups, and other non-profit organizations in Biddeford. Additionally, we expect a \$500 budget for materials to be used in the event space and materials needed to bring an adapted version of the larger program around the city. To ensure that this program reaches the maximum audience, we intend to utilize \$1,500 on marketing, outreach, and communications tools prior to the kick-off event, exhibit, and mobile community art sessions. We will use some of this money to advertise in and through organizations that have already built rapport with various community members. This budget includes in-person convening for communications strategists and digital marketing tools. The City also plans to spend \$1,500 to reimburse Engine for their exhibit space rental, hanging fee, event space, gallery space, and any other spaces we may utilize throughout this program. Documentation of

this event will also be critical for deepening an art program into a humanities program. For those unable to join, the documentation and publishing of a humanities event will ensure a wider impact across space and time. Photograph and video documentation and video editing of this event will cost \$1000. We also plan to set aside \$500 for miscellaneous items to plan for contingencies.

What else do you feel is important for us to know when reviewing your application?

This will be the first community event since the creation of the Task Force. Both coronavirus and climate change are daunting issues to face in daily life. This humanities program will provide an opportunity to educate the public about climate change and the Task Force, as well as provide healthy community engagement.