

**WESTBROOK CITY COUNCIL  
FACILITIES & STREETS COMMITTEE AGENDA  
MONDAY AUGUST 5, 2019 AT 6:15PM  
WESTBROOK HIGH SCHOOL ROOM 114**

---

Westbrook City Council's Facilities & Streets Committee, chaired by Councilor Ann E. Peoples, will meet at 6:15pm, immediately prior to a Finance Committee meeting and regular City Council meeting. The agenda items are as follows:

1. **Establishing Limited Parking on Beechwood Avenue**
2. **11 Mechanic Street**

# A Proposed Reuse: Mechanic Street Fire Station

(A creative combined use exhibition, education and project space in Downtown Westbrook; with office/conference space for Discover Downtown Westbrook and a METRO waiting area)



## **INTRODUCTION:**

*(While there are three proposed uses for this space the largest and most unique is the creative space. Thus this will focus on that use.)*

This proposal is to create within the Mechanic Street Fire Station a space for contemporary art exhibitions and projects. This could work synergistically as a home for Discover Downtown Westbrook and a waiting area for the METRO. A creative space would seek to be highly visible, engage a broad range of people and draw visitors to, and increase the quality of life and sense of place within Westbrook. It would be a place for material transformation, the creative arts and the flow of ideas. This would have capacities for exhibition, education, fabrication and community engagement and be a cultural anchor for downtown. It could also work collaboratively with Discover Downtown Westbrook, the Metro and Westbrook Arts and Culture. As well as, with area non-profits, colleges and schools. As such, it would have a mission of integrating the broader community into the production, exhibition and location of artworks. As well as embracing the function of a METRO waiting area and DDW. This combination of uses would be highly unique and visionary.

## **NEED:**

There are very few if any focused exhibition spaces and no such project spaces. The arts has always been perceived as the domain of other communities. Portland in particular with the PMA, many galleries and MeCA has dominated the perception of where art should be. Smaller cities such as Rockland, Belfast, and Ogunquit have thriving visual arts communities and institutions. These serve as a draw to their downtowns and enhance the quality of life and civic pride of its citizens. Nationally, one can see many cities, or sections of cities, that have found new life through the infusion of a creative culture brought on by civically engaged and quality exhibition venues and institutions. Westbrook is very receptive and poised to grow in this direction. With a first-class exhibition space and a strong and innovative ethic of community engagement such a space can not only flourish in Westbrook but it can be an active participant and a cornerstone to its future. With creativity it can set a new bar for engaged creative spaces.

## **OPPORTUNITIES and SYNERGIES:**

Small galleries such as the Saccharappa Art Collective and Continuum for Creativity have set a foundation for the growth of exhibition spaces in Downtown Westbrook. The Westbrook Arts and Culture Committee has developed a number of high profile initiatives to bring art into the public sphere. There is a culture of small creative businesses throughout the city. In the past three years new shops and restaurants have opened up and are expanding. The river once dominated by industry and ignored is now being revived into be a major natural asset. The Westbrook Performing Arts Center is one of the finest performance spaces in the region if not the state. In addition, there are a number of small music venues and the Rock Row Venue is a major addition to the cities portfolio of performance spaces.

The lack of a major space for contemporary art is a void that needs to be filled. To do so with an innovative community centered program so much the better. Because of a number of elements there is a great opportunity to create a synthesis between the need for such a space and the opportunities at hand.

- The Mechanic Street Fire Station was built in 1976. It has a strong modernist feel. It is a space that is well suited for the creation and exhibition of contemporary art and not unlike many such repurposed spaces nationally. It has a large versatile space (the Bays) that can be opened up or subdivided with movable partitions. It has a series of smaller side spaces that wrap around 2 sides and can be used for a combination of functions such as office space, workshops, storage, and projection and exhibition spaces. It has large doors that face the street and with transparent panels these will have a dramatic visual access from the street and easy access to the exhibition space.
- The Fire Station is located in the heart of downtown abutting Mast Landing Brewery and within close proximity to Saccarappa Falls, the Dana Warp Mill, and a concentration of restaurants and coffee shops.
- Westbrook sits between and has easy access to Portland and Gorham (both of which have USM campuses) with the USM Art Program being in Gorham.
- The Metro has created the Husky Line, an express bus that goes between USM's two campuses and then into the heart of Downtown Portland. The stops for the bus lines that serve this area are literally at the door of Mechanic Street Fire Station. It is the Westbrook hub and could have a unique and innovative cross utilization with a creative space.
- As an exhibition space that engages in site-based projects there is great opportunity to provide a resource for, and collaborate with: Westbrook Schools, MECA, and USM students and programs as well as organizations such as My Place Teen Center and the Intercultural Community Center.
- Various community business partners could be developed adding support in various ways. In fact projects can be built around and out of those partnerships.
- As a Project Space it can enhance the city. There are, across downtown, and through out the city many spaces for two dimensional (murals), three dimensional (sculpture and sited installations) as well as time based (projections, performance art). From the sides of buildings, and the river walk, to architectural and park spaces works can be sited in and build interest through-out the city.
- Such a space and utilization can build on the cities industrial past of papermaking, wood products and textiles. It's strong sense of community, and the beauty of its natural and built environment, creative people are moving to Westbrook to live and work. All, adding a tremendous vitality and richness to Westbrook. It can be a place that holds the reputation as a place where entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity can take root and thrive.
- The city is scaled well. It has a responsive and collaborative city administration and a citizenry that is more than willing for, and excited to be, creatively engaged.

#### **KEY PARTICIPANTS and COLLABORATORS**

There are many potential key participants and collaborators. Some would be long-term and foundational, others may be project based.

City of Westbrook\*

Westbrook Arts and Culture (WAC)\*

Discover Downtown Westbrook (DDW)\*

Portland Metro\*

University of Southern Maine, USM/Department of Art\*

Westbrook School Department and WRVC

Local Businesses, Neighbors, and NGO's

Westbrook/Gorham Chamber of Commerce

Westbrook Recreation and Conservation Commission

Westbrook Environmental Improvement Corporation

Local businesses

MPTC, Intercultural Community Center (ICC), Opportunity Alliance, etc.

As an exhibition space that engages in site-based projects it can strongly engage with Westbrook Schools, Vocational Technical School and USM as well as other area schools, colleges and community programs. Also, various community business partners could be developed relative to the nature of the projects. Relative to support some projects may be able to transition as permanent or semi-permanent works in the community.

### Examples

A wide range of artistic practices can and will occur in this space. From intimate works to the large scale this space can accommodate works such as Drawings to paintings, video projections, performances and large scale sited temporary projects. It can also be a catalyst to activation surrounding spaces and locations. This space is uniquely situated and adaptable to many creative and expressive potentials that may extend throughout downtown and the larger city. While we are most familiar with the more traditional media, examples of non-traditional installations and sited works are in the links below. While the Mechanic street Fire Station reuse would be of a different sort and situation than those below. It is possible to get a sense of the artists and types of projects that could happen as well as the way buildings have been repurposed into art spaces.

### EXAMPLES SIMILAIR SPACES:

All art spaces are unique and arise out of distinct circumstances, communities, and visions with distinct missions. All have unique physical circumstances, focus on new artistic approaches, have exhibitions focuses and are directly or indirectly community engaged. Below is a list spaces, and links that could, while not replicating directly, inform what may be able to occur at the Mechanic Street Fire Station.

#### PS1, Long Island City, NY

<https://momaps1.org/>

PS1 was Public School #1 in Queens. It was a historic school that was and is a full city block in size. With minimal conversion it became Project Space One. Beginning in the 70's PS1 was a non-profit with dual missions of Artist residencies and Exhibitions. It was very visionary and had many national and international artists housed in studios which were in one wing and exhibition spaces were in another. It became the anchor artspace for long island city and queens and now is owned by the Museum of Modern Art.



#### Rice University Art Galleries, Houston, TX

<http://www.ricegallery.org>

Rice University Art Gallery was unique and well known as the only University exhibition space solely dedicated to Installation Art. If one can imagine the front of the Fire Station having an open front it would resemble in scale this

space. Please look through the archives to see the various artists, and projects that have been created here. It closed its doors last year and is the catalyst to the development of the more expansive Moody Center for the Arts.



### **Mass Moca, North Adams, MA**

<https://massmoca.org/>

Massachusetts Museum of contemporary Art (Mass MoCA) is by far the largest Museum of Contemporary Art in the world. It is housed in the vast industrial complex that had known many uses but its last such use was as Sprague Electric Company. With the company's closing North Adams declined precipitously economically and socially. The space was a key opportunity and in it Mass Moca was born. It's industrial use add great ambiance and are often incorporated into the works that are created there. Hundreds come daily to the museum and thousands come to is many festivals and performances.



### **Mattress Factory, Pittsburg, PA**

<https://www.mattress.org/>

Begun in 1977 the Mattress factory is located in Pittsburg's North side and is internationally known for its commitment to experimental and community engaged arts. It has been a corner stone to the revitalization of the neighborhood. The MF has had a focus on non-commercial installation art but has broadened into incorporating as well various forms of New Media.



### **Grand Arts, Kansas City, MO**

<https://www.grandarts.com/>

Of a similar scale and space as the fire house. Grand Arts was established as a residency/fabrication and exhibition space. Works produced in a fabrication studio were exhibited in the gallery. They were oriented toward but not exclusively toward 3D and media art and often pushed boundaries. Once exhibited all works belonged to the artist. Grand Arts was an anchor of the Kansas City Arts district. It closed a few years ago as its mission evolved and it's leaders moved to Los Angeles to form Fathomers. <https://www.fathomers.org/>



### **SPACE GALLERY, Portland Maine**

<http://www.space538.org/>

This is a space we may know. It is a Space founded by a number of USM Art Students. It was created in an old vacant storefront on Congress Street at a time whenb they were many. It established itself as a place for "Unconventional Arts, Artists and Ideas". It was an exhibitions, music and performance venue that also involves lectures, plays and films. It evolved to have a more dedicated exhibition space and gained ownership of the entire building and its many upstairs artist studios. It now has an artist in residency program and offers grants through its kindling fund.



Future planning would entail a feasibility study to establish a strong base knowledge to work from. This would need to be undertaken to verify concept viability, desirability and community engagement options. It would determine projected long and short-term income and expenses; structural and mechanical condition of the building; community engagement opportunities and potential stages and scalability. Importantly it would look at potential funding sources, foundation support and a donor Study.