

A Manchester Cultural District

The Manchester Cultural District Coalition

The Manchester Cultural District Coalition was formed in March 2015 as a loose affiliation of non-profit community organizations, churches, and downtown businesses located within the city's cultural district that came together with a shared interest in affecting positive change in Manchester and spurring economic development through an emphasis on art, design, and creative placemaking. The coalition meets monthly to discuss, identify, and recommend specific actionable measures to help improve the neighborhood. Attendees at our monthly meetings include:

- Mike Skelton, President & CEO, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce
- John Clayton, Executive Director, Manchester Historic Association
- Kent Devereaux, President, New Hampshire Institute of Art
- Peter E. Ramsey, President & CEO, Palace Theatre
- Jon Sparkman, President, Devine, Millimet & Branch
- Matt Wilhlem, Executive Director, Old Sol Music Hall
- Denise van Zanten, Director, Manchester City Library
- Diane Raymond Fitzpatrick, Chief Executive Officer, Boys & Girls Club of Manchester
- David Preece, Executive Director, Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission
- Marjorie Gerbracht Stagnaro, Rector, Grace Episcopal
- Monsignor Anthony R. Frontiero, Rector, Saint Joseph's Cathedral
- Borja Alvarez de Toledo, President, Child and Family Services of New Hampshire
- Pat Long, Alderman, Ward 3, City of Manchester
- Chris Sullivan, Park Planner, City of Manchester Dept. of Parks and Recreation
- Nate Linstad, Officer, Community Policing Division, City of Manchester Police Dept.

What is the Manchester Cultural District?

The proposed Manchester Cultural District would comprise the six blocks around present day Victory Park—what was originally Concord Square, the city's first park—bounded by Elm Street to the west, Union street to the east, Lowell Street to the north, and Hanover street to the south. The District is home to significant arts and cultural institutions, among these: The Palace Theatre, the Manchester Historic Association, the Manchester City Library, the New Hampshire Institute of Art, and soon, Old Sol Music Hall.

The new District would encompass the entirety of the Victory Park Historic District, so designated in 1996 for inclusion on the U.S. Department of Interior's National Register of Historic Places and recognizing the historic and architectural significance of the four early 20th century stone buildings in the District designed by famed architect Edward Tilton (the architect for Ellis Island) and William Rantoul surrounding the park. These buildings are:

Carpenter Memorial Library, 405 Pine Street. Constructed in 1914, through the generosity of Frank P. Carpenter in memory of his wife Eleanor Blood Carpenter, the Carpenter Memorial Library is a two-story structure faced with rusticated white Vermont marble blocks which conceal reinforced concrete floors and roof above a foundation of Concord granite. It is designed in a decoratively rich Beaux Arts or Italian Renaissance style by Edward Tilton.

New Hampshire Institute of Art, 148 Concord Street. Constructed in 1916 across Concord Street from Carpenter Library, the original Manchester Institute of Arts and Sciences building was made possible by a gift from Frank Carpenter's sister-in-law, Emma Blood French. The building, constructed of New Hampshire granite, was designed by Boston architect William Rantoul.

Manchester Historic Association, 129 Amherst Street. Facing Amherst Street, on the south side of Victory Park, the Manchester Historic Association is a two story, flat-roofed block, designed by Edward Tilton but constructed in a more restrained Classical style which typifies its construction date of 1931.

Former U.S. Post Office, 111 Amherst Street. A two-story granite structure which served as the Old Post Office until 1978. Designed by E.L. Tilton (of Tilton and Githens) in 1932, the building typifies the stripped down or "starved" classicism used for government buildings during this period. Since 1985 the building has been occupied by the law offices of Devine, Millimet & Branch.

In addition to the four historic structures included in the Victory Park Historic District, the proposed Manchester Cultural District would also include several other historic structures important to the cultural life of Manchester:

The Palace Theatre, 76-96 Hanover Street. Built in 1914, the 880-seat theater was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 as the Athens Building. Constructed by Victor Charas and Henry Macropol on a design by architect Leon Lempert & Son, the venue operated originally as a vaudeville house fashioned after its Broadway namesake.

Lowell Hall, 88 Lowell Street. Standing at the corner of Lowell and Chestnut Streets, this simple brick building erected in 1841 at a cost of three thousand dollars served as Manchester's first public school. In 2009 the building was renovated for classroom space by the New Hampshire Institute of Art and combined with a newly constructed, Gold LEED certified six-story residence hall located directly behind it.

Old Sol Music Hall, 23 Amherst Street. Designed by Manchester architect Norris W. Corey, the Rex Theatre operated as a first-run cinema from 1940 until 1961. Subsequently, the building served as both a cinema and a nightclub under various names (King Cinema, The Movies, Club Liquid, Realm). In 2015 the Manchester Development Corporation purchased

the building for redevelopment and now is slated to become the home of a new non-profit performing arts institution, Old Sol Music Hall.

Why Establish a Cultural District?

There are various benefits to establishing a cultural district in Manchester, primary among them:

- Attracting businesses, tourists, and residents to a central part of the City;
- Spurring economic development through increased private investment in the District;
- Serving as a focal point to visually brand and market the District and the various City-sponsored events and local nonprofit cultural organizations located there;
- Recognizing the unique history and character of the Queen City and some of its significant architectural and historic landmarks;
- Improving the quality of life for City residents who attend cultural events and access the services provided by organizations located within the District;
- Providing formal boundaries lines to facilitate securing private foundation, state, and Federal funds set aside specifically to promote cultural districts (see list below);

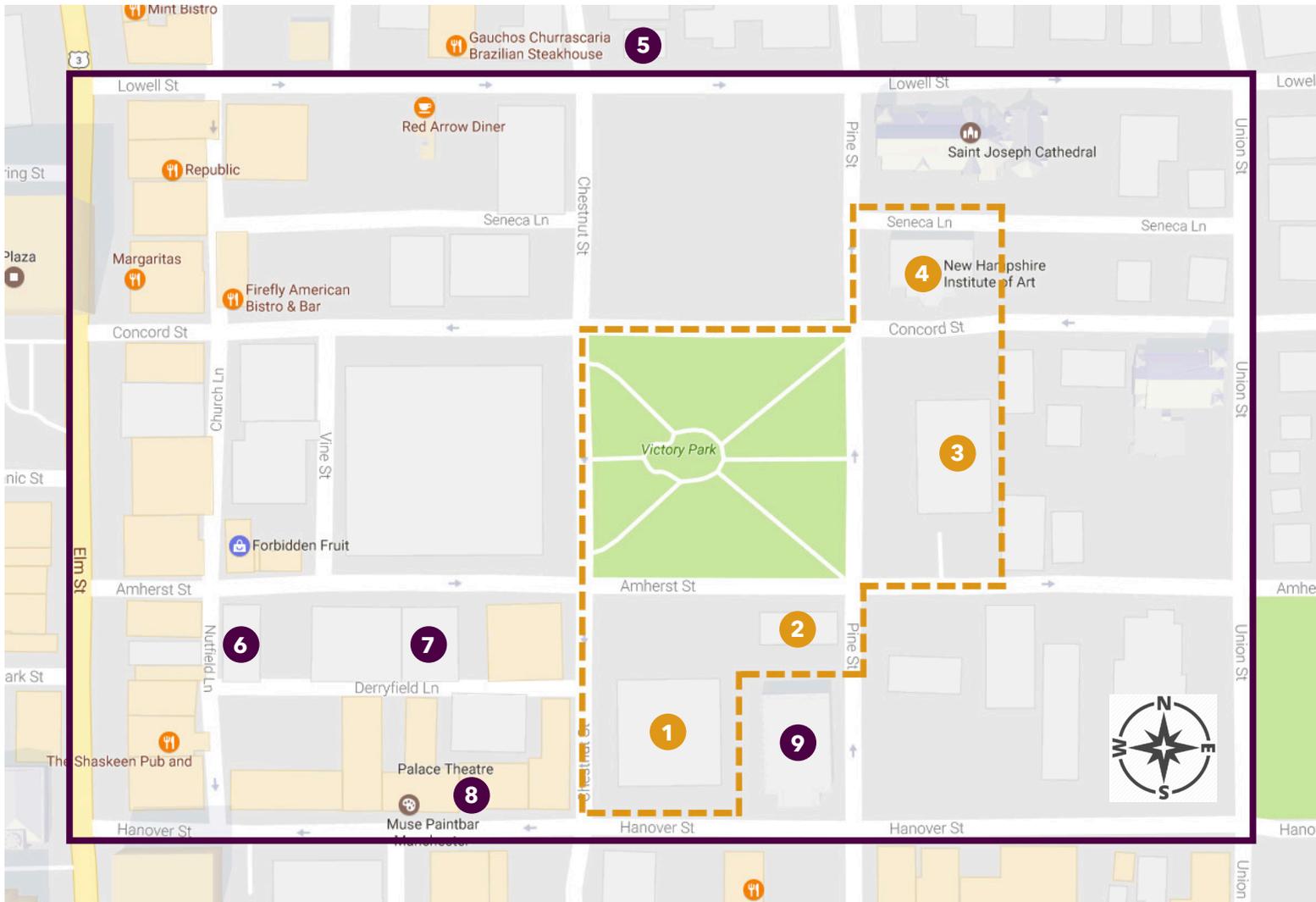
Significant progress has already been achieved just in the two years since the Manchester Cultural District Coalition was first convened. An official designation of a Manchester Cultural District by the Board of Mayor and Alderman would assist the constituent organizations in seeking additional funding from a variety of sources that could be used to enhance cultural programming, implement façade and streetscape improvements, and deepen community engagement within the District. Just a few of the programs under consideration (along with application deadlines and average grant amounts) include:

- ArtPlace America National Creative Placemaking Fund, February 22, 2017 (\$500K)
- Land & Community Heritage Investment Program, May 20, 2017 (\$300K)
- National Endowment for the Arts, Our Town, September 12, 2017 (\$200K)
- Southwest Airlines Heart of the Community, December 4, 2017 (\$200K)
- Surdna Foundation, January 30, 2018 (\$600K)

In Conclusion

We hope we have clearly articulated the rationale for officially designating the six blocks surrounding Victory Park as the Manchester Cultural District as well as a few of the many benefits that would result from such a designation. Our collective organizations look forward to continuing to enhance the cultural and civic life of Manchester.

MANCHESTER CULTURAL DISTRICT PROPOSED BOUNDARIES



--- VICTORY PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT

- 1 Former U.S. Post Office
- 2 Manchester Historic Association
- 3 Carpenter Memorial Library
- 4 NHIA, French Hall

— CULTURAL DISTRICT

- 5 NHIA, Lowell Hall
- 6 Old Sol Music Hall
- 7 NHIA, Williams Hall
- 8 Palace Theatre
- 9 NHIA, Fuller Hall