

8. Cultural Opportunities

Central Vermont is a region alive with arts organizations. Of the approximately 200 Vermont arts organizations registered with the Vermont Council on the Arts, over 40 make their home in Central Vermont, and more than half of these are based in Montpelier. Because these numbers reflect only organizations such as theater and dance companies, art galleries, and musical groups, they do not encompass the myriad individual artists, artisans, performers, and crafts people who make Montpelier, and the other communities of Central Vermont, their home.

Montpelier also has four institutions of higher education, Vermont College of Norwich University, Vermont Community College, Woodbury College, and New England Culinary Institute. These four schools serve a student population of approximately 2,500 full and part time students. In addition to the private library facilities available through the colleges, Montpelier is also served by the Kellogg Hubbard library, a facility that has over its 100 year history developed into an important regional resource.

The Library

The Kellogg-Hubbard library, while not an educational institution, is one of the major cultural institutions in Montpelier. The library, built in 1896, houses over 60,000 volumes, and has the highest circulation of any public library in the state. It is a regional center offering adult and children's reading programs. The children's programs serves over 3,000 children annually.

In 1999, a two story, 5,500 ft² addition to the rear of the library was begun, which will allow the Children's Library to move from the basement into larger and dryer quarters. The \$1.5 million addition will also allow for the expansion of the adult library and includes renovations to the existing building.

Museums

The Vermont Historical Society, a private, non-profit organization located in Pavilion Building on State Street, is another of Montpelier's major cultural organizations. The society has been located in state buildings since it was founded in 1838. It currently occupies 13,700 square feet in the Pavilion Building on State Street, a 19th century hotel reconstructed in 1970 for state offices. The society operates a museum and library (both open to the public) and sponsors educational programs, all of which attract approximately 18,000 people a year to Montpelier.

The Historical Society plans to move its offices to Barre and renovate the space in the Pavilion Building to expand the museum by 6,600 square feet. This expansion will feature a permanent exhibit on Vermont history, a classroom for educational programming, and an expanded museum shop for visitors. In 1999, the Vermont Legislature and the Montpelier City Council endorsed a proposal by the Vermont Academy of Arts and Sciences to study the development of a new facility to house interactive exhibits on Vermont's contemporary civic and technical accomplishments.

The Wood Art Gallery, located on the Vermont College campus, with an art collection valued in excess of \$3 million dollars, is a focal point for the visual arts in Montpelier. Hosting 15 to 25 major exhibits a year in addition to the standing collection, the Wood Gallery brings in over 6,000 visitors a year.

Educational Institutions

Four institutions of higher education reside in Montpelier. The largest, Vermont College of Norwich University, enrolls almost 1,000 older, non-traditional students. The Vermont College campus, comprising approximately 35 acres and several buildings, is a growing institution expected to continue to grow over the coming years. While current space needs are not clearly defined, the college has acquired

additional acreage for anticipated development, which could potentially disrupt surrounding residential neighborhoods.

The Vermont College campus is also home to the Montpelier campus of Vermont Community College, which enrolls about 900 students, which like Vermont College, largely serves non-traditional students. Its development plan at this location is clearly bound to that of Vermont College.

Woodbury College, which occupies approximately 8 acres and enrolls 130 students annually, offers a curriculum of specialized one year certification programs, primarily to non-traditional students. The College had been operating out of one building, but in 1999, developed and began to implement a five year master plan which includes increasing the number of students from 150 to 250; construction of a 12,000 ft² addition for training and office space; expansion of parking area from 64 to 115 spaces; and the creation of a campus green. Their longer range plan is for a separate facility (est. 6,000 ft²) to accommodate expansion of training; division for approximately 75 to 100 workshop participants at any one time; and short-term overnight guest facility (est. 4,000 ft²) to accommodate 30 or 40 people.

New England Culinary Institute, a two-year culinary school, enrolls approximately 400 students annually and occupies a campus of less than four acres, with two primary buildings. In addition to the main campus, the school also owns and operates a number of fine restaurants in the downtown district. As the Culinary Institute is one of the few colleges with a more traditional student population, they do provide dormitory facilities to house some of their students, while others choose to live independently elsewhere in Montpelier. The school's space needs, such as for administrative functions, has been on the rise and they would like to establish demonstration facilities.

In order to address some of the issues raised by past Vermont College and New England Culinary Institute expansion plans, the City of Montpelier, on February 10, 1993, created an institutions overlay zone around both institutions. The intent of this designation was to provide the schools with room for expansion, to buffer adjoining residences, to address housing needs of students in their land use development plans, and to simplify the review process for institutional uses.

Arts Organizations

Montpelier boasts a sizable arts community for a town of its size. The most prominent of the arts organizations serving the community are the Lost Nation Theater, Wood Art Gallery, and the Onion River Arts Council. All of these organizations have facilities they utilize as performance or display space. Lost Nation Theater Montpelier's resident professional company, holds theatrical performances six days a week June to October in the City Hall Auditorium, and conducts the drama program at Montpelier High School.

Lost Nation Theater is the city's resident theater organization. It's mission is to "... to create and produce stimulating drama in original and innovative ways for the greater Montpelier community, which will in turn provide financial support for: a professional performing arts ensemble, a quality-oriented training program, and a physical plant, resulting in benefits for local artists, local businesses, the theater program at Montpelier High School, and special events."

Lost Nation Theater, depends primarily on the City Hall Auditorium for its performance space and manages the rental and promotion of this facility. This structure, with a capacity of 1,300, was renovated in 1994/95 with a new lighting grid, walling and drapes. While this construction addressed some of the lighting and acoustical shortcomings of the facility, there are still sound system and lighting needs that must be addressed to make the auditorium a high quality performance space.

The Montpelier Theater Guild, a long-time theater troupe, offered theater productions for over 60 years at Montpelier's Union Elementary School Auditorium. It was resurrected in 1999 after a several-year intermission.

The Monteverdi Music School, a private music school, offers voice and instrument lessons to children and adults.

The Onion River Arts Council, a regional arts organization, utilizes the City Hall Auditorium during the winter months as a space for dance and musical performances, as well as for a variety of performing arts classes. Additionally, as the officially designated City Arts Agency, the Onion River Arts Council sponsors a wide array of performance events throughout the city and region.

Another regional force for artistic endeavors is the Vermont Council on the Arts, the official state arts council, offers grant funding to Vermont artists and performers. While all of these organizations currently have some performance space, or access to performance space, there is a general feeling among the arts community in Montpelier that current performance, studio, and display space is inadequate for the size and robustness of the arts community. Of particular need is adequate studio space for performing and visual artists.

The Pyralisk Arts Center was founded in 1989 to offer a home for arts activities in Central Vermont. It provided performance space for a wide variety of concerts, readings, dances, cabarets, art openings, classes, and community events. Located for many years in the Old Post Office building behind the Fire Station, the Pyralisk lost its space when the lease expired. Efforts are currently under way, however, to reestablish the Pyralisk in a new and innovative facility in the former Salt Shed/Skating Rink building on the new Stone Cutters Way in partnership with the Central Vermont Skating Association and other partner organizations.

The Montpelier Gallery Walk was initiated to increase the promotion of and access to the artists, their studios, and gallery spaces in and around Montpelier's downtown. Offered on the first Friday of each month, the gallery walk is becoming increasingly popular and is among the many initiatives to strengthen and grow Montpelier's arts community.

8.1 Cultural Opportunities Goals and Recommendations

1. Support the growth of arts, historic, and other cultural organizations in Montpelier, and cultivate Montpelier's role as a regional arts and cultural center.

Recommendations:

- a. Utilize public facilities and space as venues for visual and performance artists, historical exhibitions, and cultural events wherever possible.
- b. Consider establishing a downtown "Arts District" offering arts organizations economic incentives to locate in the district.
- c. Explore alternative funding sources to augment contributions to local arts organizations.
- d. The City of Montpelier will actively promote the local arts community.
- e. Encourage the retention of artisans and arts organizations in Montpelier.

- f. Encourage cultural events, festivals and cultural tourism.
 - g. As part of its World Wide Web Home Page (<http://www.montpelier-vt.org>), the City could integrate information about local arts organizations, or link it to the home pages of arts organizations.
 - h. Consider publishing, in conjunction with the Central Vermont Chamber of Commerce, materials such as pamphlets or maps describing and identifying locations of local arts, historical, and other cultural organizations and venues.
2. **Better integration of local arts organizations into the social fabric of Montpelier, and the downtown business district.**

Recommendations:

- a. Seek opportunities to develop gallery and studio space for local visual and performing artists. There is currently a large amount of under utilized upper floor space in downtown, that could, through zoning and fire code upgrades, be rendered usable by local artists.
- b. The City could offer property owners that develop affordable studio or gallery space tax incentives or abatements.
- c. The public schools and local arts organizations will look for opportunities to share facilities and programs to produce educational arts programs.
- d. The public schools, and organizations such as Onion River Arts Council, Lost Nation Theater, the Wood Art Gallery, and the Vermont Council on the Arts, should continue to work jointly to produce educational visual and performing arts programs for the public school children.
- e. Explore feasibility of cooperative studio space.