



# Albion Arts Corridor

## Cultural Economic Development Strategy Executive Summary



Prepared for the Town of Wakefield  
Prepared by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council  
June 2017

# Acknowledgments

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This project was made possible through the enthusiastic participation of a number of individuals in Wakefield who were either interviewed, participated in a focus group, filled out the online survey, or gave us feedback and insight through their participation at the October First Thursday, November Community Forum, or December Holiday Stroll.

A special thanks to the Albion Cultural Exchange Committee whose members served as an Advisory Committee to this project. In addition to providing feedback and insight throughout the project process, the committee also helped to facilitate a number of outreach activities, provided invaluable local knowledge and insight and were critical to making this project a success.

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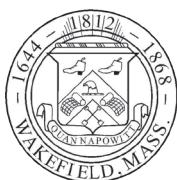
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# Overview

The Albion Arts Corridor Cultural Economic Development Strategy engages arts and culture as part of a broader economic development strategy for downtown Wakefield. While a strong arts and culture sector can make Wakefield an even more exciting and enriching place to call home, it can also serve as a key driver of economic development that creates jobs, supports small businesses, and increases Town tax rolls. The plan lays out short and long term action steps that can be taken by the Town and its partners to develop Albion Street (the Albion Arts Corridor) and the surrounding Downtown (defined roughly as the areas between Main Street and North Avenue south of Lake Quannapowitt) into a thriving arts and culture destination. The report includes recommendations for achieving this vision that are structured around five major goals:

- 1. Creating a distinct arts & cultural identity for Downtown & the Albion Arts Corridor**
- 2. Transforming Albion Street into an active street & focal point for arts and culture**
- 3. Redeveloping the Albion Cultural Exchange Building into a permanent arts and culture center**
- 4. Marketing arts and culture in the Downtown**
- 5. Zoning and Redeveloping to support and grow a thriving arts and culture district Downtown**



These recommendations are based off of a review of the Town's existing assets, an analysis of feedback heard through an extensive community engagement process, and an overview of the economic development benefits of increasing arts and culture opportunities in the Downtown.

# Historical Identity & Cultural Assets

The Town of Wakefield is a historic and scenic New England Town with a strong historical identity tied to individual creativity. The Town is rich with arts and cultural assets, including people, places, and activities. Cultural assets are defined broadly and include creative individuals, arts and cultural organizations, venues for the arts including outdoor areas and natural features, historic buildings and sites, annual events, festivals, traditions, and local products. The Town today has over 40 core creative businesses and around 20 different arts and culture organizations that support artists or various aspects of Wakefield's culture. The Town also has some beautiful venues that host theatre, music, and visual arts and over 100 places listed on the National Register. Wakefield has regular festivals and events that incorporate or feature art or culture in some form and boasts an impressive community of active artists with over 60 individuals registered with the Arts Collaborative

of Wakefield, a group whose mission is to support Wakefield's visual arts and craftsmen. There are also a number of venues Downtown that host arts or culture related events, including the library and the Americal Civic Center. The Albion Cultural Exchange in particular has been a tremendous asset for the Downtown, drawing a number of people out for arts and culture events as part of the First Thursday program. The building has great potential to be permanently redeveloped into an arts and culture center and to serve as an anchor for arts and culture activities in the Downtown.

## Festival Italia



## Cultural Core Businesses Map



# Demographics

The Town of Wakefield has significant Irish and Italian populations and there are a number of events throughout the year that celebrate the Town's heritage. Wakefield is also an affluent and highly educated community with a growing senior population. By 2030, the number of households in Wakefield is projected to increase by almost 14%, with the most growth in households with a householder over 60 years old. This demographic information is important to consider because retirees and seniors who have disposable income and free time are

often interested in supporting the arts. Research also demonstrates that educational attainment has a high positive association with attendance at visual and performance arts events. Higher household income also has a positive link with attendance at particular types of performance art events (National Endowment for the Arts). The median household income for Wakefield residents is \$85,573 and almost half of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher.

## Educational Attainment

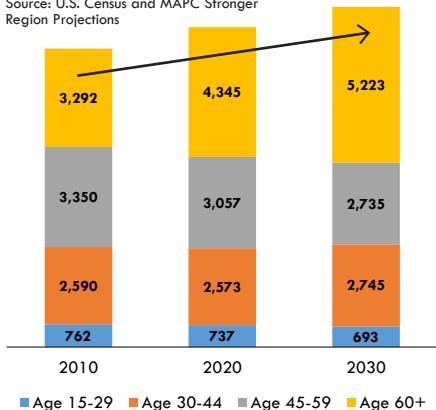


47% of Wakefield residents have completed at least a bachelor's degree

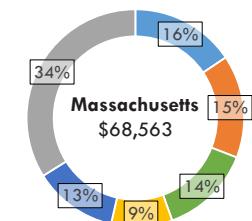
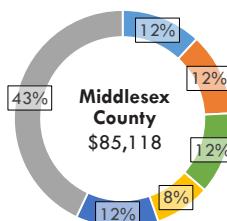
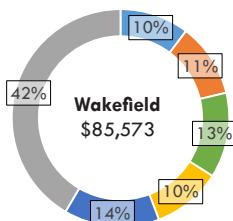
Middlesex County: 52%  
Massachusetts: 40.5%

## Household Projections by Age of Householder

Source: U.S. Census and MAPC Stronger Region Projections



## Household Income Distribution with Median Incomes



■ < \$20k  
■ \$20-44k  
■ \$45-60k  
■ \$60-74k  
■ \$75-99k  
■ > \$100k

## Community Outreach

Through an extensive community outreach process, MAPC learned that there was great enthusiasm for growing arts and culture in Wakefield. This feedback was captured through focus groups with artists, an online survey, at a First Thursday event at the Albion Cultural Center in October 2016, during a public forum held in November 2016, and at a pop-up for the Holiday Stroll in December 2016.

During this process, we heard many great ideas from the community on how arts and culture could be more actively incorporated and featured throughout the Downtown. These ideas ranged from integrating more art into existing parks, doing guided tours of arts, culture, and history in the Downtown, identifying properties and/or sites that could be converted into artist lofts, creating more permanent spaces for art to be displayed, and better utilizing spaces such as the Americal Civic Center. The community suggested that more art in general around Town, artist studio space, galleries, and more venues for artists to perform were critical for Wakefield's success as an arts and culture destination.

MAPC also heard that more general issues in the Downtown needed to be addressed to draw more people in, such as parking management, more active landlords, streetscaping, lighting, and signage. Another suggestion that came up frequently was to designate one central organization that could manage arts and culture activities. The number of groups hosting different activities and sponsoring different initiatives in the Downtown was viewed as uncoordinated.

## **Survey Highlights**

Downtown Wakefield's..



- Walkability**  
(noted by **74%** of respondents)
  - Natural amenities**  
(noted by **53%** of respondents)
  - Central location**  
(noted by **46%** of respondents)
  - Programming**  
(noted by **42%** of respondents)



- Business Variety**  
(noted by **53%** of respondents)
  - Streetscape Improvements**  
(noted by **40%** of respondents)
  - Business Quality**  
(noted by **40%** of respondents)
  - Arts & Culture Identity**  
(noted by **30%** of respondents)

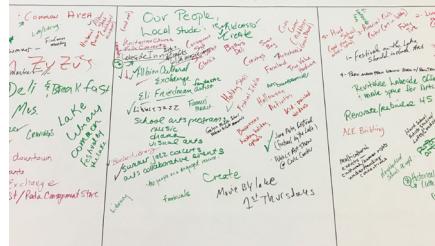
#### **First Thursday Event, October 2016**



around Wakefield for the first time

What do you think are some of the best arts and cultural assets in town? Cultural assets can include anything from artist studios and businesses, to museums, theatres and public art installations. Cultural programs and events are also important assets.

Are there spaces or places within town where  
a future arts and culture use can be made?  
Include the dot number if you marked



**Public Forum, November 2016**



**Holiday Stroll Pop-Up, December 2016**



# Market for the Arts

Through research, MAPC discovered that active promotion of the creative economy yields many benefits. According to Americans for the Arts, studies on consumer behavior show that tourists that seek out arts and authentic cultural experiences, such as festivals and performances, are more likely to stay longer at their destinations and spend more at local businesses. Attendees of arts events spend an average of \$24.60 per person beyond the cost of admission for their event on items such as meals, retail, childcare, transportation, and parking. Considering the cost of admission for events in community-based arts centers and venues typically ranges from \$20 to \$50, the local economic impact of each event attendee is potentially two-fold.

There is great potential to take advantage of these trends in Wakefield. In fact, consumers in and around Wakefield spend more on average for admissions to arts and culture events, arts & crafts, and media subscriptions than county and state-level counterparts. Wakefield consumers also have comparatively higher spending potential (SPI) in these categories compared to the US Average. Seniors in particular tend to be generous supporters of the arts and charitable organizations.

There is currently high demand within the regional arts and culture market for artist studio space, classes, and cultural events. The Albion Arts Corridor (AAC) and ACE Building are well poised to meet some of this demand. In addition to meeting demand, gallery space in the building can serve the community by

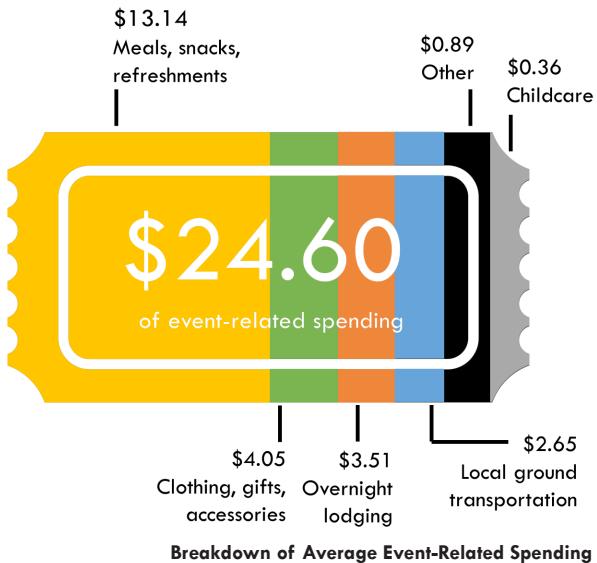
## The Creative Economy



Credit: New England Foundation for the Arts, 2007

allowing better access to art and culture while also providing exposure to artists who can showcase and sell their work. Classes or educational programming in the building can contribute to the local economy by generating jobs as well as fostering appreciation for the arts.

Outside of the ACE building, MAPC also learned through a survey that respondents had a high level of interest in seeing more performance space in Wakefield. A facility dedicated to performance arts in Wakefield's Downtown or in the Albion Arts Corridor can potentially meet the high level of resident interest in live performances and bring in more consumer spending at local restaurants and businesses. Working studios, space for arts programming, and exhibition space are lacking and needed in Town. Potential uses that should be prioritized for the Albion Arts Corridor should include these three types of spaces. Artist work space in particular is in high demand at the regional level.



**Survey Results - Artists who participated in the survey cited involvement in the following creative activities:**



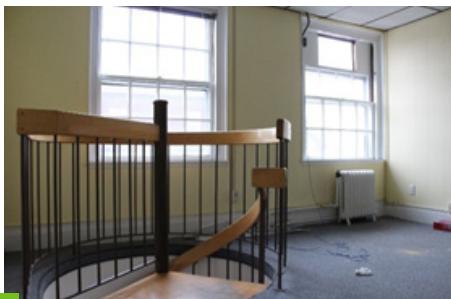
# Albion Cultural Exchange

The Albion Arts Corridor and ACE building have great potential to meet some of this market demand. The property and building on 9 Albion Street, also known as the Albion Cultural Exchange (ACE) Building, is currently owned and managed by the Town of Wakefield. The building comprises three levels and has a footprint of approximately 2,480 square feet, or a gross area of 7,440 square feet. The Town and the ACE Committee have made significant strides in repurposing the space, enabling the ground floor to be actively used for arts and culture events and programming organized by the Albion Cultural Exchange Committee. The events have been well attended and have demonstrated that there is interest within Town to support arts and culture

programming within the building.

The ground floor is, however, the only floor of the Albion Cultural Exchange currently in use; it still retains the layout of its former use, and much of the space is divided into closed offices and therefore unsuitable for a gallery setting. The basement and second levels are currently not in use due to accessibility issues and lack of functioning bathrooms. In order to continue the momentum of the Albion Cultural Exchange Committee and to realize the full potential of the building as an arts and culture center, significant updates and renovations will be required. The building should be renovated into a permanent arts and culture center that includes working studios, space for arts programming, and exhibition space.

**Albion Cultural Exchange - Existing Conditions**

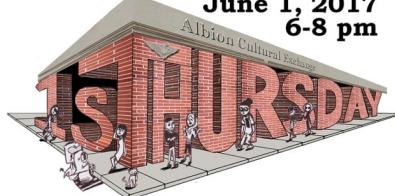


MAPC recommends the following structure through the renovation process and subsequent operation as a arts center. Management of the building can remain as the responsibility of the Department of Public Works' Buildings Manager. In order to lead programming at the building, the Town should hire a Cultural Affairs Coordinator to sit within the Town Administrator's office or another department deemed appropriate by the Town Administrator and Board of Selectmen. This coordinator can work with the ACE Committee to continue programming and to evolve the building through renovations. The Cultural Affairs Coordinator can also manage leases within the building and develop an annual strategy for leveraging arts and culture for economic development Downtown.

The Cultural Affairs Coordinator should also staff an Arts & Culture Economic Council, made up of various stakeholders who work with both artists and local businesses in Downtown Wakefield (e.g. members of the Albion Cultural Exchange Committee, Events Planning Committee, Merchants Group, Main Streets Group, Chamber of Commerce, etc.). The council should meet at least semi-annually and should advise the Cultural Affairs Coordinator on annual work planning and ideas for arts and culture events. The Cultural Affairs Coordinator should make (at minimum) an annual report to the Board of Selectmen on arts and culture activities in the ACE Building and throughout Town. It is also important to note that Town Counsel and other leaders should carefully craft lease agreements that protect the Town from liability risks.

#### Events at the Albion Cultural Exchange

You are invited to  
**"First Thursday Downtown"**  
**June 1, 2017**  
**6-8 pm**



**Albion Cultural Exchange**  
 Featuring artists from the WHS Visual Arts Department.



ALBION CULTURAL EXCHANGE  
 1ST THURSDAY EVENTS PRESENTS  
**Wreath Making**

Learn how to create a bow just like the professionals!  
 All materials included  
 November 3rd  
 Party begins at 6pm  
 Wreath making begins at 7pm  
 \$30



# Zoning & Redevelopment

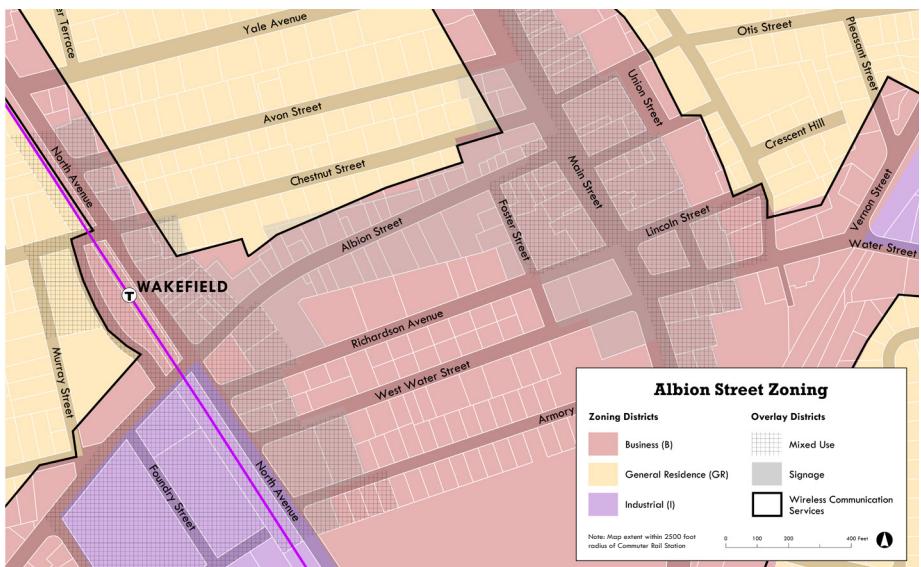
MAPC staff reviewed the zoning along Albion Street in order to assess opportunities and/or barriers to spurring economic development and generating arts and cultural activities in the Downtown. Staff worked with the Town to specifically look for ways to incentivize cultural and arts uses, mixed use development, and additional residential uses in the corridor. These uses would all contribute to more activity and vibrancy in Downtown Wakefield and potentially attract people who are interested in supporting arts and culture.

MAPC recommends creating either an optional Arts & Culture Overlay or a new underlying arts and cultural zoning district for Downtown Wakefield. The new zoning should include a clear purpose, site plan review, arts and culture definitions, procedures, and dimensional requirements. Shared parking and design review should also be explored as part of this zoning. MAPC created a series of renderings to show how the corridor might look if streetscape elements, higher density mixed use development, and more active arts uses were incorporated.

**Rendering of Potential New Mixed Use Development on Albion Street**



## Existing Zoning in Downtown Wakefield



## Rendering of Albion Street Incorporating Favermann Design Concept



# Summary of Recommendations

## Create a distinct arts and cultural identity for Downtown and the Albion Arts Corridor.

**Establish an organizational structure to promote the arts.** A Cultural Affairs Coordinator can develop an annual strategy for leveraging arts and culture for economic development and facilitate partnerships between informal groups, town committees, and local businesses. The Cultural Affairs Coordinator can staff an Arts and Cultural Economic Council made of various stakeholders who work with artists and businesses in the Downtown.

**Diversify arts and culture offerings to meet wider demand.** A Cultural Affairs Coordinator could coordinate promotions between businesses and arts organizations, encouraging retailers to host arts and culture events while directing arts patrons to local restaurants and stores. Experience-based arts and culture exhibitions can broaden the arts' reach within the community.

**Identify additional venues to host performances.** Wakefield's school auditorium spaces and the American Civic Center represent ideal spaces for arts and culture events – they can be more frequently leveraged.

**Strengthen resources available to existing artists.** The Arts Collaborative of Wakefield (ACW) directory is a valuable resource for connecting local artists and should be strengthened. Wakefield should explore other ways to connect and support its artists such as providing opportunities for artists to participate in temporary public art projects, continuing to actively integrate arts and culture into existing festivals, hosting events such as Open Studios, and providing technical support to artists who may want to open a gallery and need assistance in running a business.

**Attract new artists and creative enterprises.** Tracking and marketing available studio space can help with recruiting or expanding creative businesses. Coordinating outreach to existing creative businesses in other communities that may want to open another location in Wakefield is another effective strategy.

## Position Albion Street as a focal point for arts and culture.

**Install wayfinding elements in Downtown.** Local artists can help in designing signage that makes Downtown more visitor-friendly and alerts residents to artistic and cultural events or businesses.

**Implement streetscape improvements.** Parklets, bike lanes, crosswalks, and landscaping can encourage foot traffic by creating a friendlier pedestrian environment. Creative temporary streetscaping can also directly involve artists.

**Improve building facades.** The Town can work to link artists to local businesses who would like to upgrade their storefront facades or window displays.

**Activate Albion Street to draw foot traffic.** Pop-up galleries, food vendors and pedestrian-only outdoor events can build a festival atmosphere that makes Albion Street a natural draw.

## Redevelop the Albion Cultural Exchange Building into an arts and culture center.

**Create a long term plan for management and programming of the building.** The building should ultimately function as an incubation space and include studio space, programming, and exhibition/rehearsal space. The DPW Buildings' Manager and a Town-hired Cultural Affairs Coordinator can work with the ACE Committee to manage and program the building.

**Explore redevelopment opportunities for the site.** The transformation of the building into a true arts and culture hub will require architectural plans, fundraising, advocacy, and further study, but can give Wakefield a long-term competitive advantage in arts and culture.

## Market Downtown Wakefield as an arts and culture destination.

**Create a website to feature arts & cultural assets.** An interactive site can feature artist profiles and a well-maintained Town Calendar to get the word out about events.

**Use technology to market the arts.** Apps, social media, and other technologies can help artists and business owners to engage with potential customers in more exciting ways. Geo-linked apps can help interested visitors learn about the Town's history, assets, and events in real time as they move about Downtown.

**Promote the Albion Cultural Exchange building as an anchor for the arts.** First Thursdays, Open Studios, and similar events cater to a wide audience and grow the number of arts-supporters in Wakefield. Active programming during the anticipated renovation period will be critical to maintaining a presence as an arts hub and institution.

**Cross-promote with local businesses.** Later business hours, coupons, and well-placed advertising can help drive attendees of arts and cultural events towards other Downtown businesses like restaurants and retail. The Wakefield Main Streets organization's newsletter presents an opportunity to market the arts among the business community and encourage collaboration.

**Consider applying for cultural district designation.** The Massachusetts Cultural Council's designation can result in increased marketing and priority funding when the state allocates funding to the arts.

## Encourage zoning and redevelopment that can support and grow a thriving arts and culture district in Downtown.

**Modify zoning and encourage mixed use development.** New residential and mixed use development can create a critical mass of customers for both arts & culture endeavors and local businesses.

**Remove regulatory barriers.** A zoning bylaw can help to clarify, encourage, and facilitate creative enterprises and arts and culture uses. A streamlined permitting process for artistic and artisanal uses can reap large dividends.

**Create incentives for landlords to invest in their properties.** Well-maintained and attractive Downtown properties can make the area a more vibrant and pleasant space in which to linger.

[albionartscorridor.mapc.org](http://albionartscorridor.mapc.org)  
[albionculturalexchange.org](http://albionculturalexchange.org)

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