

~AD HOC REPORT~  
*Connecticut Film Festival*  
Reference #12 – December 2007

24

Chairwoman Diggs called the meeting to order at 6:40 p.m. on Thursday, January 10, 2008, in Room 3C, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Danbury City Hall, 155 Deer Hill Avenue. Present were Committee members Michael Calandrino and Paul Rotello. Ex Officio members: Benjamin Chianese, Gregg Seabury, Mary Teicholz. Also present were Director of Economic Development Wayne Sheppard, Director of the Connecticut Film Festival Tom Carruthers, Director of Finance David Hilaire, Chairman of the Danbury Cultural Commission Ben DaSilva, Member of the Danbury Cultural Commission Chris Rotello, City Center Representative Andrea Gartner Jabara, Northwest Connecticut Convention of Visitors Bureau Representative Jim Whitney, State Representative Jason Bartlett. Members of the public: Jean DaSilva, Joe DaSilva, Mr. Schwartz (*name inaudible*).

Chairwoman Diggs explained the purpose of the evening's meeting was for Danbury to consider hosting the week-long 2008 Connecticut Film Festival event.

Chairwoman Diggs opened up the evening's meeting by asking Mr. Sheppard to provide everyone with some background regarding the request before the Committee. Mr. Sheppard explained that the Festival is a 9-month competition of evaluations and screening of films throughout the State of Connecticut. They are films that are submitted from throughout the United States. The Festival concludes with a 6-day event in May which would take place in Danbury should the request be approved. It is anticipated that the event would draw 5,000 people and generate approximately \$600,000 in direct spending to the City of Danbury. The Festival has been in existence since 2005. Mr. Sheppard believes this event has the potential to be a great signature event for the City of Danbury—one which has not been seen since the Danbury Fair. Mr. Sheppard provided the Committee with a letter of support from the Connecticut Main Street Association. Mr. Sheppard pointed out to the Committee that at the conclusion of the evening's presentation, the Committee would need to evaluate the value of intangibles (i.e., promotion and marketing of the City of Danbury and the economic impact to the City of Danbury). Mr. Sheppard introduced and opened the floor up to Jim Whitney. Mr. Whitney was charged with providing research regarding economic impact and projection. He distributed materials to the Committee which he reviewed with them. One of the challenges that tourism marketing faces is that the average person is exposed to more than 100 times the marketing messages today than they were 10 years ago. The problem is that the more traditional ways of marketing do not work as effectively (i.e., advertising in *The New York Times*, printing brochures, etc.). The costs continually rise and the aspect of how you market is not as easy as it used to be as there is too much clutter now. His bureau looks for special events and projects as an alternative. They feel the time and money that is invested, the return is significant. Tourism is the purest form of economic development. There is no impact on the school systems, the police force, etc. Mr. Sheppard advised the Committee that his bureau puts together a full study of not only economic impact but also direct expenditures with every event they are involved in which he is confident are fair and representative. In basing figures on an attendance of 5,000 individuals and comparing neighboring area events, it is estimated that \$106 per person will be spent at this type of an event.  $5,000 \times \$106 = \$530,000$  of direct spending. In using the bureau's software models, the economic impact is 1.81%.  $\$530,000 \times 1.81\% = \$959,300$  worth of economic impact to the City of Danbury. These figures do not include what the event itself will spend in the region (i.e., renting chairs, advertising, etc.). Mr. Sheppard introduced and opened the floor up to Jason Bartlett. Mr. Bartlett was asked to facilitate some meetings and gain interest at the State level. The State of Connecticut passed the movie tax credit bill which has spawned a huge increase in movies being made in the State of Connecticut and helping to increase economic development in the State. He felt that the Festival was in line with what the State is trying to accomplish. The City of Danbury was the first choice—other towns that would be considered are Norwalk or somewhere along the shoreline. In the next session, the State of Connecticut is looking to put its own dollars behind the whole statewide concept. While Danbury has been chosen as the home where all 600 movies would be shown, the Festival will be moving throughout the State of Connecticut and generating economic impact across the State.

Danbury being the final stopping grounds is very important because the State of Connecticut is endorsing the concept and will be part of what makes that happen. In addition, the State is very interested in integrating our State University system with what is happening on the film side. WESCONN, Danbury and the State of Connecticut have the opportunity to integrate its efforts and gain student interest, develop curriculum and a labor force which may open up a host of opportunities. Danbury has the opportunity to utilize its vast diversity and create events. Depending on the theme of a film, i.e., an African-American theme, the film could be shown at the Marion Anderson Museum and build an event around that. Or, if the film had an environmental theme, the film could be shown in an environmental type of landscape and build an event around that. He urged the approval of the proposal. Mr. Sheppard advised the Committee that he receives approximately one phone call every two months from either a film maker or agent requesting a specific building to shoot a film. In addition, he advised the Committee that WESCONN has expressed their excitement with regard to the possibility of linking their arts program. Mr. Sheppard introduced and opened the floor up to Andrea Gartner-Jabara. She advised the Committee that in the past year, there has been a resurgence of interest in Danbury's downtown. The desire is for the downtown area to become a cultural and arts destination. She reviewed some changes that have recently taken place to assist in achieving this goal. CityCenter has updated its logo to appeal to a broader spectrum of people. The Center has worked with the Cultural Commission, the Escape to the Arts, the City of Danbury and Joseph DaSilva to install the first Gateway Mural Project. The idea behind the Project is to establish in a visitor's mind the sense that they have arrived some place special when they come downtown. She is pleased to see that Danbury will be the gateway to Connecticut's film industry. The Farmer's Market was relocated to Kennedy Park over the summer in an effort to establish a gateway down. The Concerts on the Green series has been expanded to include Thursday night family nights. A diversity of programming has been included to reach out culturally and artistically more to the community and include community groups. The Taste of Danbury had record attendance (5,500 people downtown). There is continued dialogue with arts organizations, civic groups, religious groups, community leaders, developers and property owners. A considerable amount of interest has been shown in revitalizing downtown. Danbury is fortunate in not having to face a lot of the same problems other Connecticut Cities face (i.e., rampant gang violence, etc.). Culture and arts helps to link the student population to the downtown area. It helps to bridge the gaps with ethnicity, gender, age and religion. The success of events helps to shape the public's perception and belief that downtown Danbury can become a cultural and arts destination. The Mayor has committed to forming a task force to create a strategic plan. First Night was a success and the response from the community to attend an event that was largely cultural and artistically based speaks to the attraction that the downtown could be to people outside of Danbury. There were a lot of families that attended from outside the community. The launch of the Housatonic Valley Cultural Alliance and reaching out to the 10-town region speaks to the growing interest in the region's artistic vitality. Ms. Gartner-Jabara submitted information to the Committee which was distributed at the Alliance's fundraising benefit that shows the economic impact of the arts, film, history and tourism in Connecticut. There is a growing acceptance that the arts can benefit a community and attitudes towards downtowns are changing and becoming more and more destination places. CityCenter wholeheartedly endorses the Connecticut Film Festival and hopes that the Council supports it as well. Mr. Sheppard introduced and opened the floor up to Tom Carruthers. Mr. Carruthers explained that when the Bethel Film Festival was produced in 2005, an extensive survey was conducted in order to ascertain who would be attending. A 100-question survey was used. From a mailing list of approximately 2,500 individuals, approximately 420 completed the survey. 80% of the individuals graduated from college and 50% continued on to earn post-graduate degrees. Approximately 50% had annual incomes of approximately \$100,000+ and 19% had incomes of approximately \$150,000+. 85% were likely to consider a brand because it sponsored a film festival in their community. The key to drawing a large crowd is diverse forms of advertising. The concept for the Connecticut Film Festival was a road show which would tour around the state. Sponsors are looking for multi-day events, multi-venues and multi-locations in order to gain as much exposure as possible for their products and services. An outcome of having the week-long event hosted in Danbury is over the course of the next three years, situations will be created that Danbury will constantly benefit from. People from all over the country will be attending as submissions are being made world-wide. Mr. Carruthers said Danbury is a great place to host the

week-long event. It's a walkable community to tie into an event like this. Chairwoman Diggs asked how the \$75,000 host city fee was achieved, if the City has to front the entire \$75,000 and whether or not the fee needs to be paid upfront. Mr. Carruthers said the fee was based on a budget. He said the fee was low for a sponsorship in the Festival. It covers a lot of marketing expenses for the City of Danbury (approximately 90% is being spent on marketing for the City). Councilman Calandrino asked David Hilaire for his feedback. Mr. Hilaire explained that the funds would be taken from Contingency. He asked the Committee to ponder whether or not Contingency funds should be used for such a purpose as the Festival. Councilman Calandrino wanted to know what the ancillary benefits were to the City. Mr. Carruthers used the Bethel Film Festival as the model. He said that he received positive feedback from restaurant owners. He said that information was not tracked but would be with this Festival. Councilman Calandrino asked where the films would be shown. Mr. Carruthers said that he and Ms. Gartner Jabara scouted some locations (i.e., library, Danbury Music Theater, Art Theater, Marion Anderson Hall). They went to a number of restaurants to secure locations for networking events. He pointed out that there are not only screening receptions taking place but also networking events which are an important aspect as well. The filmmakers desire to meet one another and collaborate. Councilman Rotello pointed out that the makeup of Danbury's population is such that he is concerned those that will not reap any benefits still have to foot the bill (i.e., school teachers, garbage men, retirees). He needs to explain to those individuals why spending this money would be good for them. He suggested the \$75,000 be considered a partial payment for the Festival as the total cost may be approximately \$1 million. He asked what the actual budget was for the Festival, what percentage that \$75,000 would entail, and what other sources of income have been explored. Mr. Carruthers pointed out that while the average person might not directly reap a benefit, the Film Commission and Danbury as a whole will because of the exposure and revenue that will be generated. In addition, as Danbury becomes more recognized as an innovative City, the potential for businesses to relocate to Danbury increases. Mr. Bartlett advised the Committee that he has been approached by individuals posing the question of what he can do to bring events to Danbury. Cities and Towns are defined by their downtown. This is a positive event which will brand Danbury and that benefits everyone. This event is an investment in the small businesses, in the downtown and gives both young and old something positive to do. Chairwoman Diggs questioned why the in-kind section was left blank on the informational sheets provided to the Committee. Mr. Carruthers was confident it was not hard to acquire in-kind services. He gave a few examples: HB Group in North Haven provides \$60,000 digital video decks and \$20,000 digital projectors. Chairwoman Diggs asked Mr. Hilaire if a portion of the fee could be taken from Contingency and the remainder coming from larger companies. Mr. Hilaire pointed out how difficult it was to measure an outcome of an event such as the Festival. The Council needs to decide what this intangible is worth. Mr. Bartlett pointed out that on the State level, they are trying to develop relationships with transportation groups and do whatever they can to help Connecticut reap the maximum benefits from such an event. Councilman Chianese was cautious allowing spending of \$75,000 with all of the unknowns. While it is a good program, Councilman Chianese did not see how downtown Danbury would benefit. He also expressed concern that the downtown area could not support 5,000 people which would mean having to utilize facilities in other parts of Danbury. In addition, he pointed out that those individuals who need hotel services would need to go to the outskirts of Danbury as the downtown area does not have any such facility. Those individuals would then spend a majority of their money outside the downtown area. Councilman Chianese did, however, say that he was willing to approve the \$75,000 on a trial basis for one year to see if the Festival is successful. If the Festival was a success, he would recommend the Council assign the project to the Cultural Commission as their main goal is to bring cultural events to the City. Ms. Gartner Jabara felt that any cultural event that were conducted downtown would benefit the downtown area. In the absence of that, there is no benefit. The success of First Night has brought a vitality downtown that has been absent for quite some time. She pointed out that the event drew over 1,200 who were congregated within a 1 ½ square block perimeter and the downtown accommodated the mass without incident. She pointed out that the Festival would draw approximately 5,000 individuals over a 6-day period not all at once. However, the Taste of Danbury in 2007 had approximately 5,500 in attendance. No complaints were brought to her attention. She urged allowing more events to take place downtown as the absence of them will be a detriment to the downtown businesses. Joe DaSilva, owner of the Palace Theater,

offered the use of his facility to assist the Festival. Ben DaSilva was in favor of Councilman Chianese's recommendation that the Cultural Commission take on the endeavor of a yearly Festival. He advised the Committee that their budget is approximately \$90,000. The funds are used to assist events such as the Danbury Music Center, the Concert Association, First Night, Taste of Danbury as well as smaller activities throughout the year. They acquire small grants that act as seed money. While the Commission would be willing to participate, they do not have enough funds for the \$75,000 fee for the Festival. Chris Rotello questioned the grading of the quality of films being shown. Mr. Carruthers explained that 30-40 films are being screened during the weekend events. They have been chosen out of 400 submissions. Several people screen the films, the films then go through a second screening, and then the films are shown to an audience and judges. There is an audience and judge's award given in the end. A member of the public, name inaudible (Ivan Alcimay), urged the Committee and the Council to approve the request for \$75,000 to move the project forward as the downtown area is in dire need of revitalization and he felt the Festival was a step in that direction. Councilman Rotello pointed out that should the City approve the \$75,000 fee, the City might want to have more of a hand in overseeing the event. He asked Mr. Carruthers if he could foresee any problems with that decision. Mr. Carruthers welcomed any input. Councilman Calandrino felt something happening downtown is better than nothing happening downtown. While it is a calculated risk, he approved of the Festival and expressed a desire to move forward.

**A motion was made by Councilman Calandrino and seconded by Councilman Rotello that the Committee recommends to the Common Council that they approve hosting the Connecticut Film Festival in May 2008 at a cost of \$75,000.00.**

*Councilman Rotello questioned whether or not the Corporation Counsel needed to be involved in this process. Councilman Calandrino advised that the vote will be brought before the Council and any questions he might have could be brought up during the Council meeting. Councilman Rotello desired having all that was needed in place by the Council meeting, contracts included.*

**A motion to amend was made by Councilman Rotello with approval of Councilman Calandrino to include: pending review by Corporation Counsel and pending a positive recommendation of the contract preceding the February Common Council meeting by Corporation Counsel.**

**The motion and the motion as amended carried unanimously.**

**A motion to adjourn was made by Councilman Rotello and seconded by Councilman Calandrino. The motion carried unanimously at 8:20 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Jane Diggs, Chairwoman

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Michael Calandrino

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Paul Rotello

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