

# New London takes step toward formation of arts council

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New London — City artists and arts organizations alike are welcoming an effort to create the New London Arts Council, a group whose purpose will be to better connect and support the city's thriving arts community.

The Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition has led the effort, laid the groundwork for the group's formation and worked over the past several months to organize dozens of local artists and representatives from a variety of city organizations.

The idea of an arts council was simultaneously championed by City Planner Sybil Tetteh and Marquee Gallery Director Clint Slowik.

Wendy Bury, executive director of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition, said "New London is rock solid when it comes to the arts," but there have been at times a lack of communication and organization among the arts-related organizations.

There are multiple reasons for the formation of the group, Bury said. It would create opportunities to make, exhibit and sell artwork. The council could advocate for more affordable residences for artists to live and work and have a voice to suggest that new residential or commercial development support a creative ecosystem.

The overall goal is to help stimulate and promote the arts, gain community support and increase public access to the arts through services, programs and funding. The council also would help the city meet its Sustainable CT goals that include "vibrant and creative cultural ecosystems."

The City Council on Monday showed its support by approving a measure that would allow the mayor to choose a city representative on the arts council. Tetteh, who already has been deeply involved in the effort, will be the city's representative.

The City Council's vote came after a show of support from members of the public, including several artists. Resident James Burke, who works as a sound engineer at two performing arts venues downtown, urged the council to vote in favor.

Burke, who is a City Council candidate, said the rich artistic community in New London played a role in his decision to start a family here.

The move to appoint a representative to the council, he said, "deepens the connection between our artists and city government, fostering our arts and music scene as essential to the future success of our economic development strategy as we work to attract new neighbors to the housing development projects that are underway."

For the time being, Bury said another new nonprofit is not needed. Instead, she said the New London Arts Council will partner with existing nonprofits and the city to capture grant funds where needed for the benefit of artists of all kinds.

Bury said in the last legislative session a bill passed that allows municipalities to establish cultural districts to promote “the public’s educational, cultural, economic and general welfare by marketing arts and cultural attractions, encouraging artists and cultural enterprises, and promoting tourism.”

The New London Arts Council, once it is formed, could help lead the city’s effort to become a cultural district, she said. The criteria for such districts is being developed by the state Department of Economic and Community Development, with the help of regional service organizations such as the Cultural Coalition.

A steering committee for the arts council will meet for the first time at 5 p.m. Sept. 10 at New London Main Street at 311 State St. The group will help define the council, its governance structure, and ensure all types of art and geographical areas of the city are represented. There are already 13 people on the steering committee, with spots for a few more, Bury said.

Bury said she hopes to have the council, with as many as 25 members, formed by the end of the year.

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