

Onetime town police station eyed for Nantasket Center for the Arts

By Carol Britton Meyer

An innovative recycling plan – to convert a former Hull police station into a Nantasket Center for the Arts – has won early support from the Board of Selectmen.

At the selectmen's Dec. 19 meeting, their last for this year, Hull Artists members Bart Blumberg and Irwin Nesoff presented to the board a proposal to transform the onetime police station at 213 Nantasket Ave., which is owned by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation, into an arts center.

Specifically, they asked the board to write a letter of support for a Hull Artists application to the Massachusetts Cultural Council for a feasibility and technical assistance grant for planning and assessment of the former police station as a potential "regional center for the arts." The building has been vacant for more than two decades.

"The Hull Artists/DCR discussion about our potential use of the former police station has been ongoing for several years," Blumberg told The Hull Times. "The key issue is that it may take upwards of \$1 million to renovate the building and bring it up to code." That's where the feasibility study comes in, he explained. "Obviously putting the entire cost of the renovation on Hull Artists is a huge barrier, but we'll face that issue when we get there."

The feasibility study is estimated to cost between \$25,000 and \$40,000. If the matching grant is awarded to Hull Artists, the Massachusetts Cultural Council would pay one-half of that cost and Hull Artists would have a year to come up with the remainder through private funding.

With such a grant, Hull Artists would engage qualified consultants to develop the feasibility study for such a center, Blumberg said, including renovating the building and determining the efficacy and sustainability of developing such a center in Hull.

Hull Artists has already engaged with, but has not yet hired, consultants who work in the field of cultural facilities and historic buildings to get their input, according to Nesoff. "We took a tour a few weeks ago," he noted. Those consultants could be hired if the grant were to be approved.

The Hull Artists group – founded in 1995 as a regional nonprofit arts association for more than 90 artists, craft artisans, and patrons from the South Shore area – envisions that the arts center could include:

- permanent exhibition space for regional exhibits that would attract artists and visitors from throughout New England;
- classroom space to provide a full range of art and performance classes for the community;
- studios and work space for artists;
- space for an after-school arts and cultural program for youth in the community;
- retail gallery space in which to display the work of local artists, with an expected positive impact on the local economy;
- community meeting space, which proponents say is at a premium in Hull;
- two national juried art shows a year to attract visitors to town and "to help make Hull more of a year-round attraction," Nesoff said.

"A regional Center for the Arts can provide an important anchor for the town, drawing people from across the region, thereby increasing tourism and economic development," states a letter distributed by Hull Artists to the selectmen, individuals, and community organizations seen as potential supporters of the group's efforts.

Selectwoman Jennifer Constable said the Metropolitan Area Planning Council is supportive of the grant application.

The selectmen agreed that either Town Manager Philip Lemnios or the board itself would write a letter to the Massachusetts Cultural Council advocating for the grant. "The Economic Development Council will also send a letter of support," Constable said. "The building has its challenges, but the location is perfect, and it's such a cool space for what's described."

It was noted that the building has a new roof and that asbestos abatement has already been accomplished under DCR ownership.

The grant application is due Jan. 10, with the outcome expected in June.

A