

Arts in Fall River, New Bedford in line for \$500,000 boost

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NEW BEDFORD — Hungry for a more lively arts scene, more public art and more venues for diverse artists?

Half a million dollars says the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts can make it happen in Fall River and New Bedford over the next two years.

On Tuesday, the Barr Foundation announced grants of \$500,000 to each of five community foundations across Massachusetts as part of an initiative to elevate the arts called Creative Commonwealth.

The private, Boston-based foundation expanded its arts-related work beyond Boston in 2016, according to San San Wong, director of arts and creativity. The local organizations will provide civic leadership and “on-

the-ground relationships,” she said. The same groups received \$35,000 planning grants last summer.

The Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts will focus on Fall River and New Bedford and will pay particular attention to youth and to artists who are not connected to the downtown arts scene, often for cultural or economic reasons, according to John Vasconcellos, president of the Community Foundation.

One of the planning meetings held in New Bedford’s North End attracted performing artists of Guatemalan, Honduran and Salvadoran descent. The foundation asked them where they practice and perform and how they think about developing their audience. The foundation also asked participants when they last visited any of the downtown arts organizations, like the Zeiterion Performing Arts Center,

New Bedford Art Museum or New Bedford Whaling Museum.

“Forget it. Total disconnect,” Vasconcellos said.

He said Fall River’s dynamic is similar even though it has different demographics.

“Access isn’t just about being able to walk through a door,” he said. “It’s about psychological access and economic access.”

The Community Foundation plans to make grants in the two cities for things like public art, pilot money for new projects, and innovative programs at existing organizations, he said. The foundation will convene interested parties on a regular basis to talk about best practices and work together, and it may also invest in a small nonprofit and become its mentor, he said. Specific plans are still in development.

To further the work, the founda-

tion plans to hire a program manager for arts and culture.

Stefan Lanfer, communications director at the Barr Foundation, said none of the community foundations outside Boston have had a dedicated staff member for the arts until now, to his knowledge. He said the Creative Commonwealth project aims to enliven communities through the arts, both for their intrinsic value and to drive the economy.

“We couldn’t be more excited to see the work begin,” he said.

The Community Foundation is responsible for raising \$100,000 to match the Barr Foundation grant — at least \$25,000 in the first year and the remainder in the second year.

In addition, Vasconcellos said he wants to raise enough money to establish Community Foundation arts funds of \$100,000 each for Fall River and New Bedford.