



NEWS RELEASE

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Beaufort fills Cultural District Advisory Board to promote downtown arts, celebrate local culture

Members of Beaufort's new Cultural District Advisory Board will work to promote the downtown arts district to increase tourism, foster more support for the arts, and celebrate and strengthen local culture.

The Beaufort City Council named members to the Advisory Board this week. The group will be led by Chairperson Bonnie Hargrove, director of the University of South Carolina Beaufort Center for the Arts.

"We have a lot of work ahead of us, but we have an exceptional opportunity in front of us as well," Hargrove said. "I want to thank our board members for offering their time and talent, and to thank the City Council for appreciating the value in our cultural arts."

The Cultural District Advisory Board's vision is: "By 2020, Beaufort's downtown has become a recognized and valued cultural district, actively sought out and utilized by artists, merchants, residents and tourists. This concentrated area of diverse cultural venues, activities, and experiences energizes economic growth and improves the quality of life for our community and its visitors."

The Beaufort City Council formed the Cultural District Advisory Board by ordinance Aug. 9, citing the arts' importance in Beaufort history and current economy. In November 2015 the S.C. Arts Commission formally approved Beaufort's designation as a Cultural District.

Consistently ranked among American Style Magazine's *Top 25 Small Cities for Art*, Beaufort combines southern charm with rich history and a thriving art community. The downtown abounds with opportunities to create, experience, and appreciate all aspects of the cultural arts. More than a dozen art galleries are scattered throughout the district.

Many of these galleries offer classes and have working artists creating throughout the day. One gallery alone, *Atelier on Bay*, hosts 14 working studios and strives to have at least three artists in residence during public hours. On the first Friday of every month downtown galleries remain open late, while local restaurants offer live music.

By ordinance, the board is to have seven members, six of them appointed by the Beaufort City Council to include a representative from Beaufort Arts Council, Beaufort History Museum, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce/Main Street USA, Historic Beaufort Foundation, Santa Elena History Center and USCB Center for the Arts. The seventh member is to be a city staff person.

“It is clear we have a thriving arts community in Beaufort,” Beaufort Mayor Billy Keyserling said. “Through collaboration, coordinated events and cross-marketing, our strong cultural community will become even more successful, adding value to our residents and visitors.”

Members of the Beaufort Cultural District Advisory Board are:

- Bonnie Hargrove, USCB Center for the Arts
- Delene Miller, Beaufort Arts Council
- Robb Wells, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Jacque Wedler, Historic Beaufort Foundation
- Megan Meyer, Santa Elena History Center
- Still to be named to represent the Beaufort History Museum
- Ivette Burgess, City of Beaufort staff liaison.

The new board’s plate is full with the following goals:

Increase tourism

- Promote the district through Chamber of Commerce print and online communities
- Provide branding opportunities for district businesses
- Provide supporting signage throughout the district
- Promote and increase cultural events within the district.

Foster a supportive environment for arts and cultural development

- Collaborate with City and County staff to position the district as a unique geographic place to live and work
- Offer district businesses opportunities to network and foster strong partnerships
- Maintain current statistical data that encourages for-profit and not-for-profit business to move into the district.

Celebrate and strengthen local culture

- Promote festivals in the district that evoke the unique culture of Beaufort
- Encourage gathering and connection through cultural experiences and activities
- Work with the City Planning Department to identify space for temporary works of outdoor art to define geographic borders of the cultural district
- Identify and connect district visitors to other cultural aspects of Beaufort County.

The board will measure success in achieving the goals and vision above by examining:

- level of sales, hospitality, and accommodation tax revenues collected in the district
- occupancy rates for accommodations and commercial spaces within the district
- number of cultural events held annually in the district
- level of event attendance
- the number of visits to the cultural district website/page.

“We have a strong foundation to build upon, and this is an exciting venture for all of us,” Hargrove said.

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