

WORCESTER

Salisbury Cultural District gets state OK

By Nick Kotsopoulos
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WORCESTER — The Massachusetts Cultural Council Board of Directors has approved state designation for the city's first cultural district.

The district, known as the Salisbury Cultural District, is in an area northwest of Lincoln Square.

Within its blocks are a dozen historically significant cultural and civic buildings, according to Erin I. Williams, the city's chief development officer.

It is also home to 14 cultural and civic institutions, six houses of worship, six specialty galleries/gift shops, 17 restaurants and 10 National Historic Register properties.

Those entities collectively host more than 1,000 community events annually, Ms. Williams said.

The MCC board approved the state designation for the district on Tuesday.

City Manager Edward M. Augustus Jr., who last year had the idea of establishing the cultural district, said he hopes the state designation is just the first.

"Worcester is fortunate to have so many stellar cultural institutions, artists, colleges and beautiful parks which bring our city to life," Mr. Augustus said in a statement. "The Salisbury Cultural District is a beautiful example of a walkable cultural district.

"We look forward to creating additional districts in the years ahead," he added.

The Salisbury District is

bounded by Park Avenue to the west, Highland Street and Institute Road to the south, Lincoln Square, lower Lincoln Street and Prescott Street to North Street in the east, and the current site of the Worcester Regional Transit Authority bus depot near Park Avenue and Grove Street in the north. Included in the district are such cultural and educational destinations as the Worcester Art Museum, the Worcester Historical Museum's Salisbury Mansion and Salisbury House, Tuckerman Hall, the Worcester Center for Crafts, the American Antiquarian Society and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

In addition, the district includes the now-vacant Worcester Memorial Auditorium and Little Theatre, Institute Park, Gateway Park, historic Rural Cemetery (second oldest cemetery in New England), and parts of two local historic districts (Massachusetts and Montvale).

Anita Walker, executive director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, said cultural districts attract artists and cultural enterprise, encourage business and job development, and establish the district as a tourist destination.

She added that it must be a walkable compact area that is easily identifiable to visitors and residents, and serves as a center of cultural artistic and economic activity.

"The proposed Salisbury Cultural District meets all of the necessary criteria," she said.

Ms. Williams said the Worcester Art Museum will play

an important role in the area's new designation.

"Great cities know that art and culture are catalysts for revitalization and engagement," said Matthias Waschek, executive director of the Worcester Art Museum. "The museum is very excited to lead this partnership and looks forward to bringing the arts and culture to life in new ways."

The cultural district designation is effective for five years and is renewable upon successful compliance with annual reporting requirements.

When he broached the idea of creating the district, Mr. Augustus said its goals would be to attract artists and cultural enterprises, encourage business and job development, establish the district as a tourist destination, preserve and reuse historic buildings, enhance property values and foster local cultural development.

In addition, the designation would make the district eligible to apply for outside and public grant funding, he said. Unlike local historic districts, there are no restrictive covenants associated with the cultural district.

Ms. Williams said the district takes its name from the Salisbury family, whose members in Worcester have been merchants, entrepreneurs, gentlemen farmers, founders and benefactors of art, cultural and civic institutions.

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