

March 12, 2015

House Appropriations Committee, Mitzi Johnson, Chair
Vermont State House
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Committee,

White River Junction (WRJ) is home to a burgeoning arts community. Once a bustling railroad town situated just five minutes from Hanover, NH, by the late 1980s WRJ had become a forgotten, run-down shadow of its former self. Today, this tiny town is in the middle of a renaissance.

Starting with the Main Street Museum, described as “quirky and avant garde” by the Washington Post, and the Tip Top Media and Arts Building, which now houses 40 artists, creative businesses, and an outstanding restaurant, WRJ and the State of Vermont have benefitted by the addition of the Center for Cartoon Studies, which brings 100 students from all over the world to attain their Master of Fine Arts degree, and Northern Stage, a professional regional theater company building its new \$7.5 million dollar home in what was once a downtown car dealership. The ebb and flow of goods and services from food, to lumber and hardware, to design and capped by the four-season attraction of cultural tourists and artists who take up temporary and permanent residence make WRJ one of the most vibrant, small, creative communities in Vermont, if not the country.

Added to all this, for the remainder of this year Northern Stage is employing over 25 carpenters, electricians, plumbers, dry-wallers, roofers, and “finishers” for a whole year under the direction of the Bread Loaf Corporation, a design/build firm out of Middlebury.

A small but important amount of credit for this renaissance is due to the work of the Vermont Arts Council and the other state(wide) agencies that provide small, but catalytic investment funds for facility improvements, programming support, educational outreach into nearby schools and hospitals (particularly the V.A. hospital), and professional development. In short, culture has built this community, literally and figuratively. And it more than pays back the investment the state puts in.

Stay tuned...

Janet Miller Haines
Northern Stage, Board Chair