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### **Main Street Skowhegan Receives Major Grant from Maine Arts Commission**

The Maine Arts Commission (MAC) recently awarded Main Street Skowhegan a Creative Communities - Economic Development Implementation (CCED) Grant. Main Street will receive \$75,000 over three years to implement Kennebec on Fire in collaboration with the Wesserunsett Arts Council (WesArts).

Similar to WaterFire in Providence, R.I., Kennebec on Fire will place sculptures with fire braziers in the Kennebec River, starting with an array of three to five sculptures in the Big Eddy in Skowhegan. Sculptures will be lit during festivals and events.

The majority of grant funding will be used for artist commissions, with preference given to local artists.

"This grant is so exciting for our region because several years of work by many dedicated people went into drafting a cultural plan for Somerset County, and Kennebec on Fire is a direct result of that planning effort," said Kristina Cannon, executive director of Main Street Skowhegan. "We are extremely excited to draw attention to our river, which has been the lifeblood of the community for so long, while at the same time further promoting Skowhegan and the region as a destination for cultural experiences, including outdoor recreation, local food, and of course the arts."

By combining the arts with one of Somerset County's greatest assets—the Kennebec River—and the allure of river lighting festivals, Main Street and WesArts plan to build a successful and sustainable business model that will bolster tourism, generate prosperity, create a sense of place, and draw interest among neighboring communities along the Kennebec.

In addition to Skowhegan, the Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce also received a CCED grant. The chamber—serving as the lead organization in partnership with L/A Arts, with support from Arts and Culture LA and the cities of Lewiston and Auburn—will use their funding to develop public art programs and policies.

"We are especially pleased to announce these grants," said Julie Richard, MAC executive director. "Both of these regions have worked so hard to get here. Their cultural plans are wonderful guides to move their work forward and we anticipate that the projects they have chosen to work on will provide excellent catalysts for economic success for their communities."

MAC provides CCED grants to support and stimulate initiatives in Maine's arts and culture sector. The grant requires the successful completion of a cultural plan prior to applying for the funds.

MAC also funds cultural planning for communities and regions as an impetus for this work. As a result, nine Maine communities to date have either completed or are in the process of completing cultural plans.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that Maine's arts and culture sector contributes



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\$1.5 billion annually to Maine's economy, representing 2.6 percent of the state's GDP.

#### About Main Street Skowhegan

*Main Street Skowhegan is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on the ongoing revitalization of historic Skowhegan, Maine. Main Street's mission is to grow a vibrant and inviting town by encouraging innovation and community and economic development. They spearhead collaborative efforts to support businesses and diversify the economy, stimulate tourism, and tell Skowhegan's story. In 2015-16 they led a community-wide effort to craft the Skowhegan Strategic Plan for Community Transformation. The plan's ultimate goal is to make Skowhegan a thriving economic, cultural, and recreational destination where residents enjoy a high quality of life. Learn more at [mainstreetskowhegan.org](http://mainstreetskowhegan.org).*

#### About the Wesserunsett Arts Council

*The Wesserunsett Arts Council (WesArts) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to cultivate creativity, harness historic strength, and weave culture into the future as they tell the story of Somerset County, Maine. They envision a region where residents, educators, businesses, and government value, support, and fully integrate the arts—in all their diversity—into the fabric of civic life. In 2016-17 they collaborated with Main Street Skowhegan on the Somerset County Rural Cultural Plan, which confirmed that Somerset County needs to look to its natural assets and to the arts to bolster tourism, the economy, and pride in place. Learn more at [wesarts.org](http://wesarts.org).*

#### About the Maine Arts Commission

*The Maine Arts Commission supports artists, art organizations, educators, policy makers, and community developers in advancing the arts in Maine. For more than 50 years the Commission has encouraged and stimulated public interest and participation in the cultural heritage and cultural programs of our state; has worked to expand the state's cultural resources; and encouraged and assisted freedom of artistic expression for the well-being of the arts, to meet the needs and aspirations of persons in all parts of the state. Additional information is available at [mainearts.com](http://mainearts.com).*

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