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## Summit on creative economy offers ways to help arts flourish ; The cost of studio space in Portland and parking for visitors are discussed.

BOB KEYES Staff Writer. *Portland Press Herald* [Portland, Me] 01 June 2006: pp. B2.

### Abstract (summary)

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Further, they help define Portland's image as an arts-friendly... [Show all](#)

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Portland should polish its identity as an international creative center, and artists and arts groups must find ways to connect with a diverse audience.

Those were among the conclusions reached Wednesday when about 200 artists, arts administrators, businesspeople and policymakers gathered for Portland's Creative Economy Summit.

Summoned by Mayor James Cohen, they met for nearly six hours in the Merrill Auditorium rehearsal room to discuss Portland's creative economy and to brainstorm ways to improve it.

At the close of the day, they had consensus: It's time to stop talking and start acting.

"The goal is not to talk, although talk is important. The goal is to do," said Cohen.

Wednesday's summit was an outgrowth of the Blaine House Conference on the Creative Economy, held in 2004 in Lewiston and hosted by the Maine Arts Commission. Since then, communities around Maine have assembled groups to define and strengthen their own creative economy segments.

The creative economy involves a cross-section of people, including artists, architects, designers, publishers and others. According to statistics presented Wednesday, Portland is home to 352 arts-related businesses that employ more than 2,300 people.

Those businesses are key to sustaining the city's economic vitality and a cornerstone of tourism and economic development.

Further, they help define Portland's image as an arts-friendly city, which attracts visitors and newcomers, said Jean Maginnis, director of the Portland-based Maine Center for Creativity.

"Portland is not just a destination," she said. "We are an international community of diverse thinkers and creators, and we want the world to know it."

In his opening remarks, Cohen affirmed that conclusion.

"I believe that the arts are certainly good for the soul, and I know that art means business in Portland," he said. "Arts, culture and our creative businesses are absolutely essential to what Portland is all about."

The challenge for the city is to maintain its arts and cultural base, while addressing fissures that have begun to show.

Among them is the issue of affordable housing and studio space. As Portland's housing and development markets have heated, many residents and workers have moved out of downtown for more affordable rents. As those people leave, they take some of the city's character with them.

Arts businesses also suffer because of Maine's climate. Creative organizations often define success by how little money they lose in the winter, Cohen noted. The city can help those groups improve winter traffic, he said.

Other issues include parking for visitors, the cost of doing business in Maine and the out-migration of Maine's youth.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon, a Massachusetts field office representative from the advocacy group Americans for the Arts, delivered the keynote address.

She said Maine is doing well at promoting its creative economy. When she checked into her hotel Tuesday, she found brochures on her bedside stand for events and arts organizations. "Something is working. All of these resources are in the right place," she said, waving the brochures.

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### Illustration

Caption: "The goal is not to talk, although talk is important. The goal is to do." Mayor Cohen

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