

**CITY OF NORWALK  
ARTS COMMISSION  
SPECIAL MEETING  
SEPTEMBER 17, 2019**

**ATTENDANCE:** Marc Alan, Chair; Helen Roman, Nori Grudin, Melissa Matuska, Emerson Straniti, Peter Smyth, Janet Evelyn, Sharon Baanate

**OTHERS:** Bob Abriola (new member, needs to be sworn in); Sabrina Church, staff, Wendy Bodden, Kiki Tarasidis, Damian Togridis, Gus Tsilfides, Sandra McClave

**CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME**

Mr. Alan called the meeting to order at 6:36pm. A quorum was present.

**INTRODUCTION AND PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mr. Alan explained why tonight's meeting is considered a special meeting instead of regular. Agenda's need to be posted 24 hours before meeting per FOI regulations, and due to many of the changes in City Hall the agenda was not posted on time and meeting date had to be changed.

Mr. Alan introduced Sabrina Church, The Director of Business and Tourism, who will be staffing meetings. Sabrina, introduced herself, she stated that she was born and raised in Norwalk, worked for the Redevelopment Agency for three years and is now working with the City as the New Director of Business Development and Tourism. She mentioned that under her new role she is responsible for bringing in new business and people into Norwalk. She will be staffing the Art Commission and minutes and agendas need to be submitted to her and Maritza Alvarado will be posting on-line. She will also be handling the backend of new policy and changes interactions at city hall and making sure that agenda items get on the Council agenda. She also mentioned that she is here for technical assistance and guidance and is familiar with process and is available to meet if the commission members have any questions.

Mr. Alan mentioned the re-appointments of Melissa Matuska and Helen Roman. He also introduced and welcome Robert Abriola, who was recently appointed by the Mayor to the Arts Commission last week. He mentioned that Bob has an art studio at S.P.A.G, he was the Art Director for EMI Records for over 10 years and has work for Heineken. He also mentioned that Bob is passionate about the arts and getting involved with the Arts Commission.

Mr. Alan gave the floor to Ms. Bodden from the Norwalk Film Festival. She stated that website is now live [www.norwalkfilmfestival.com](http://www.norwalkfilmfestival.com) and they are aiming to be all green. She thank the Arts Commission, the City and the Mayor for all their support. She passed out flyer regarding event a

week from Saturday. She mentioned there will be 6 venues with over 39 films from local studios and films from around the world.

### MINUTES

- **Review/Approve Minutes of the August 6, 2019 minutes**

Minutes were approved as amended to add Janet Evelyn's name under attendance.

**\*\* MR. SMYTH MOVED TO APPROVED MINUTES AS AMENDED.**

**\*\* MR. STRANITI, MR. ALAN, MR. SMYTH, MS. GRUDIN, MS. ROMAN, AND MS. EVELYN APPROVED**

**\*\* MS. MATUSKA AND MS. BAANATE ABSTAINED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSED (6 YES, 2 ABSTAINED)**

Sabrina mentioned that future Arts Commission meetings will be the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of every month, at 6:30pm in the Planning & Zoning Conference Room.

### **TREASURERS REPORT**

Mr. Alan announced that Nori would be the new treasurer, in place of Emerson. He stated all the invoicing is up to date. Going forward Nori would be doing the treasurer's report. He also asked Maritza for a copy of the current budget and we are still waiting to see if last year fiscal budget balance will be carried over. He also stated that he will going to city hall with Nori to introduce her to Maritza.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS & PROJECT UPDATES

- **Infrastructure/ Mural Committee Report**

Mr. Alan mentioned that the Infrastructure and Mural Committee will be passed on to Peter Smyth who has completed a draft of the mural policy. The policy will not be voted on tonight but was handed out for members to review and comment on. The policy will be posted on line for public to view before the October 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

Mr. Alan mentioned that Ms. Church will be working on application from in which anyone who is interested in installing a mural will have to get permission from Planning and Zoning.

Ms. Church mentioned that Planning and Zoning has a non-permit application which they are using to create the mural application form.

Ms. Matuska questioned the fact that application being used by Planning and Zoning is very vague and if they were going to submit a more detail application to Arts Commission.

Ms. Church said that form being used is just a template. Planning and Zoning will be creating form and will be adding required information needed to finalized permit application form and will forward to committee for recommendations and approval.

Mr. Alan stated that form will go to Arts Commission to hand to applicants who wants to do a mural. Applicants will apply with Arts Commission and once approved by Arts Commission they will have to go to Planning and Zoning for permit.

Ms. Matuska asked if application they are getting from Steve is going to be vague and not contain any of the information that they need to complete a review.

Ms. Church stated that Arts Commission will see and approve application before it is finalized.

Mr. Smyth recommended sending a word document to members so they can make any necessary comments. He recommended discussing at next meeting. He went over application briefly and specify that it was for private installation, not city. Policy describes what a mural is, application will be submitted to designated person and they would schedule a review meeting. Public would be notified of review meeting by placing a sign in area where mural will hang. If approved by commission final approval would go to the city through zoning. He also stated that the Arts Commission will design what the form will look like. Artists would have to sign over their rights and mural would be owned by the owner of the building. This would protect city of any law possible law suits. Once mural is put up the owner is responsible for the upkeep of the mural, and if building is sold, the next owner is responsible for the upkeep.

Mr. Smyth also stated that murals installed before January 1, 2020 that have a zoning permit can still exist, if they didn't have a permit then the commission would reserve the right to have them change or remove it.

Ms. Matuska asked who is policing mural regulations.

Ms. Church stated that city code enforcement officers will be enforcing based on complaints that come in from the public.

Ms. Matuska stated that the comments on the policy should be going to the infrastructure committee for approval, and that the committee should be meeting to approve comments before the policy is brought to commission.

Mr. Alan stated that the infrastructure committee has been meeting the last 2 months.

Ms. Matuska asked why she hasn't she seen an invite and invites should be going to the whole commission, not just infrastructure committee.

Mr. Smyth stated that the person applying for permit will have to go through application and go through the checklist, they will have to conform to the guidelines. Things that were excluded: excludes sexual explicit references, nudity, need to be high quality, reflect positively in the city, integrate in local community, cannot be offensive, and cannot target any current political officer.

Ms. Roman asked whether the artist would be giving up his ownership rights in regards to the owner changing his mural. She feels that the artist should be notified before his artwork is changed.

Mr. Smyth asked her to add it in her comments. They can add a check point in which owner needs to notify artist if he plans to change.

Ms. Matuska asked if existing murals will be grandfather in.

Mr. Smyth said, yes if they are existing and have a permit they are grandfather in.

Ms. Matuska mentioned that none of the exiting murals have a permit.

Ms. Church recommended that all existing murals should be grandfather in instead of retroactively enforcing they would just be non-conforming.

Ms. Matuska also recommended that any changes to mural need to go through approval and the former artist should be notified before any changes are made.

Mr. Smyth recommended to continue discussion at next meeting.

Ms. Church said she would forward policy to Corporation Counsel so they can review and add any necessary language regarding freedom of speech and first amendment rights.

- **Communication Committee – Item tabled**
- **Social Media Update – Item Tabled**
- **People’s Gallery Event Follow up, and Tentative plans to move/expand**

Mr. Alan stated that he spoke to Laoise King and she said that they are not diametrical opposed to moving the trophy case, but they rather not. They are considering moving the People’s Gallery to a different location in City Hall and making it bigger and they are against paying someone to do something twice.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

- **Membership – Status of the Chairs held by Melissa Matuska and Helen Roman – Tabled**
- **Mayor’s Gallery – seeking proposals for show -tabled**
- **Presentation of Pontos Society for Monument at Freese Park**

Mr. Alan gave a brief description of the Pontos Society Monument project. He stated that it is a Greek American fraternal society. They were interested in erecting a monument representing their culture and history in Norwalk at the park in the Green, but it was rejected based on size

and location. They are now considering Freese Park. This neighborhood is generally the center of the Pontos Community. A lot of the Pontos Greek settled here in Norwalk. They want to submit plans to commission. He wanted to let the commission know that when plans were first submitted to Parks and Recreation there was some immediate backlash from the music community due to miss communication. They thought location would be where the stage normally goes for music events. Recreation and Parks has asked them to scale down the size and they are considering putting monument close to where Nathan Hale rock is in Freese Park. He introduced KiKi, Damian, and Gus from the Pontos Society.

Mr. Togridis thanked everyone and spoke regarding the process of the project. He said it's been an ongoing process for the past 7 to 8 years. He said it began with a different scale and a different model. With different regimens coming in they had to reanimate contacts. He said monument has been scaled down. The monument would be contributing to the culture and the arts in Norwalk because they are part of the fabric of the city. He stated that project is time sensitive because this year they are recognizing 100 years since the genocide of their ancestors. Their ancestors came from the area of the Black Sea. His people speak a dialect that is similar to the ancient Greeks. He stated the purpose of monument is to give recognition to their ancestors that suffer the genocide. The monument will be away from the center and near the Nathan Hale monument. It would be a 2 tier base with each tier being 7 inches in height. In the center a monolithic white marble will be placed that is below 6 feet tall. A little below the center a bronze plaque would be attached with a description of brief history of ancestor followed by a warm show of gratitude to the city that has welcomed them and allowed them to live in a land that offers freedom. He stated that they want to be featured prominently close to where their society is. They hold a few events a year in honor of their ancestors, which would be within walking distance. Mr. Togridis also stated that they will be responsible for the maintenance of the monument and the area surrounding it.

Ms. Matuska asked what the original issue was.

The first issue was where to place it, they were considering the Green, but the green is reserved for the Veterans of the War. When Freese Park was mentioned they did measurements and spoke to the Mayor and other city employees. The size was discussed so they've scaled the monument so it doesn't overshadow the park.

Ms. Matuska asked why Freese Park and not Heritage Park.

Mr. Togridis stated that Heritage Park has a plaque and not conducive to holding an event of this size due to amount of traffic and there is no parking. Freese Park is more convenient and has the parking for their events.

Ms. Baanante commented that if we don't agree to put this at Heritage Wall, will we be setting a precedent for other groups looking to add cultural monuments to our city.

Mr. Togridis said there is precedence because there is another plaque which is bigger than what they are proposing. He believes monuments adds to the beauty and promotes the many cultures of Norwalk.

- **Approval of aesthetic qualities of monument**

**\*\* MR. STRANITI MOVED APPROVAL OF AESTHETIC/CULTURAL QUALITIES OF MONUMENT**

**\*\* MS. GRUDIN SECOND MOTION**

**\*\* MR. STRANITI, MR. ALAN, MS. BAANATE, MS. GRUDIN, MS. ROMAN, AND MS. EVELYN APPROVED**

**\*\* MR. SMYTH AND MS. MATUSKA ABSTAINED**

**\*\* MOTION PASSES (6 YES, 2 ABSTAINED)**

Ms. Church will contact Recreation & Parks and Law Department regarding process and rendering of Arts Commission purview to vote on location and size of monument in park.

**Presentation by Julio Pardo for Public Arts - tabled**

Ms. Matuska asked where is the People's Gallery moving and why?

Ms. Church said that they are planning to move, but due to reorganization and the moves of the many department that decisions of moving or where to move has not been made.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

**\*\* MR. SMYTH MOVED TO ADJOURN**

**\*\* MS. MATUSKA SECONDED**

**\*\* THE MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY**

The meeting adjourned at 8:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Maritza Alvarado

Economic and Community Development Office