

**CITY OF NORWALK
ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 3, 2019**

ATTENDANCE: Marc Alan, Chair; Peter Smyth, Vice Chair; Robert Abriola; Sharon Baanante; Nori Grudin

STAFF: Sabrina Church, Business & Tourism; Michelle Rakowsky, Social Media; Kadeem Roberts, Common Council; Bill Hayden, Poet Laureate

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Alan called the meeting to order at 6:31. A quorum was present.

ADMINISTRATION

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE NOVEMBER 12, 2019 MINUTES AS AMENDED**

****MR. ABRIOLA SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSED with one abstention (K.Roberts)**

FINANCE

a. Treasurer's Report

Ms. Grudin said that she was in the process of submitting budget requests.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

a. INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Mr. Alan began by describing what the Infrastructure Committee does, including the overseeing of City galleries, as well as day-to-day work in 3 subcommittees, i.e. the Murals or Social Media Committee.

i. Mural Policy

Mr. Alan said that they are updating the Public Art Policy for the Mural Policy. He said they had been determining the City's position on murals in comparison with other cities in the country, and other cities in the State of Connecticut. He offered Los Angeles as an example and said they took 8 years to make a mural happen. He said they want Norwalk to be a "City of the Arts."

Mr. Alan said that Mr. Smyth drafted a Public Art Policy and that Ms. Church sent to the Legal Department. He said they had some areas of concern, including but not limited to a First Amendment issue when municipalities are limiting and policing content. He said the Legal Department is making sure that the Arts Commission puts together a new policy that won't result in legal challenges ahead. Mr. Alan said they were going to distribute their notes by the next meeting and that they would be revising their policy based on those notes.

Mr. Roberts asked if the notes are straightforward and understanding. Mr. Alan said there were questions and notes, but not a lot of redlining. Mr. Alan said that he sent notes and clarifications back to the attorney and they had a conversation about them. He said that he thought that they were going to have enough to amend the policy at the end of that process.

Ms. Church said that the end result is to have an approval process in place. Ms. Church said they were looking for the policy to be as clear and straightforward as possible so that the Arts Commission has the exact information they need to review, and the Common Council has the exact information they need to review in order to obtain an approval. She said that there is nothing in place right now except Zoning approval, which regulates signage size.

Mr. Roberts asked how long the approval process currently takes for murals. Mr. Alan said they had some resources here. Mr. Alan said there was a time that they were considering changing this by way of an ordinance. He said that Mayor said that it should be part of the Public Art Policy because it would be easier to get done and it would be far less obstructionistic.

Mr. Alan said that one of his counterparts at the Carver Marketing board has a daughter who helped form the mural program in Philadelphia. He said he's asked her if her daughter will work or communicate with the Arts Commission as a sounding board.

Mr. Abriola asked if the Arts Commission got copies of the research on other cities' mural projects and public policy. Mr. Alan said that there are some cities like Boston that have chosen not to have a mural policy, and there are other cities who are more restrictive. He said there are

also national guidelines to consider and talked about VARA, or the Visual Artist Rights Act, which has been proven to be very hard to enforce, but it protects artists' rights.

Mr. Alan said that, under VARA, if a property owner wants to take down a piece of public art, the artist must have 30 days notice, so that it gives them the ability to document and safely move the work. Mr. Alan said that if you are a mural artist, cities write things to respect VARA, or they ask artists to waive their First Amendment rights, which is a little tricky. Ms. Church said that creates a term sheet that informs the artists of what they are getting into. She said this option protects the City and the artists.

Mr. Alan said that murals used to be part of Zoning regulations, which restricted murals to be considered as signage. He said that, through negotiations lasting about a year, they got Zoning to change their regulations making murals distinct from signage. He said that their compromise was that you would still have to go to Zoning for a permit, and that approval for a permit is now solely contingent on the Arts Commission.

Mr. Alan said they would share the notes from the Legal Department at the next meeting and also hold an Infrastructure Committee meeting on the matter.

ii. Mayor's Gallery Update

Mr. Alan said that Ms. Helen Roman discovered a trove of old photographs of the Norwalk Fire Department and said that she has selected 8 to be shown in the upcoming Mayor's Gallery show. He said that Eric Chapman is going to give them a photograph of today's fire department, which has won a design award. Mr. Alan said that it was all Ms. Roman's idea and he is helping out as much as he can. He said that he has a goal to get this done before the holidays.

Mr. Smyth asked about plans for framing. Ms. Grudin said she shared the information about the photograph size and frames to Mr. Alan. Mr. Abriola suggested that the photographs be matted, framed, and set behind glasswork, but they don't have to be mounted. He said that photographs should be behind glass. Ms. Church suggested getting reusable frames for the gallery. Mr. Abriola said that he could be consulted regarding frames. He also suggested the use of foam core to save money on framing. Mr. Alan said they are hanging artwork of varying sizes on 6 panels.

Ms. Church suggested reaching out to Josh Morgan of News 12 for further press.

b. BUDGET COMMITTEE UPDATE

Mr. Alan said they should make signs, legends and a press release for the show. He suggested selecting a printing vendor that they have used in the past for digital prints.

Ms. Grudin said that in the past they would be paying for the Mayor's Gallery show curator, but since Ms. Roman is not getting paid, she suggested paying \$500 in expenditures for frames and printing in connection with that show. Mr. Alan said that this is what they had anticipated.

Ms. Church said that the operating budget works by having "other professional services" as the catch-all for buying things that are not regularly purchased by the Arts Commission. She said that they transferred the money around last time. Ms. Grudin asked if the budget that Ms. Church sent her was approved. Ms. Church said yes to the movement of this year's money, but doesn't have approval for next year until April, although the Arts Commission doesn't receive the funds until July.

Mr. Alan said there are certain things that they are going to have to get approval on a case-by-case basis. He said that the instance of hanging art in the gallery has been discussed, but they have never voted on these spending matters before. Ms. Church suggested bringing in an invoice or quote for the approval process.

c. COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE UPDATE

i. Website and Social Media Updates

Mr. Smyth began by addressing a packets of documents he brought to the meeting. He started on the "Strategy" page and explained that the main issue they are addressing is awareness. He said they have to move the arts. He spoke next about the "Social Media Calendar" that illustrated how they plan for one type of post per week. He said that they are focusing on an "inspiration" type post now, meant to inspire in general. Mr. Smyth talked about other types of posts, including artist profiles and Norwalk public art/murals. He said the committee is currently focusing on Facebook and Instagram, and plans to work on Pinterest in the future.

Ms. Grudin asked if the Arts Commission pre-approves the social media event focus. Mr. Smyth said that they can do that for the next month. He said they are meeting again in January to review possible posts 2 months out in advance. Ms. Rakowsky said that right now she doesn't have posts for late December because she doesn't know which events are being highlighted by concurrent articles. Mr. Abriola asked if they could vote on social media matters via email.

Ms. Grudin gave the examples of Mr. Renee Soto, who helped with fundraising for Stepping Stones. She said that they had a tough time deciding on whether it was appropriate to share a fundraising event that had an art element. Mr. Alan said they didn't want to be discriminatory, but they didn't want to share one fundraising event over another.

Ms. Rakowsky said that they were planning a post for the Mad Lab Gala on December 7. Mr. Alan said that the gala was in Greenwich and questioned if the gala highlighted the arts community of Norwalk. Mr. Abriola said that they were local art openings every week. Mr. Abriola said that he will forward information on all art openings and shows of interest directly to Ms. Rakowsky.

Mr. Alan said that he asked Mr. Smyth to update the social media policy because the last update to their guidelines was about a year ago. Mr. Abriola asked if the social media posting is limited to Norwalk, or if it included events from nearby areas. Mr. Alan encouraged focusing on Norwalk. Mr. Smyth said they would also consider sharing really interesting events from Stamford, Westport, and New Canaan areas.

Ms. Grudin suggested contact the local libraries to promote their first Friday film showings, for example. Ms. Rakowsky said they shared outdoor movies over the summer. Mr. Alan said there was a free screen of an environmental film at the Wall Street Theatre the next day that they could promote.

Mr. Smyth said that sharing events on social media is a can of worms and they are going to tackle it in layers. He said that there are some barriers and that right now, they will just post everything they've got. Ms. Grudin said that they should remember how some events in the past have been promoted, but the event details didn't correspond to the website communications. She asked if the social media committee had a list of local artist galleries and studios to work from.

Mr. Smyth talked about boosting posts in January and said they can get ahead of the calendar in this way. Mr. Smyth said talked about other types of social media posts, like profiling posts. He said that these once-a-week posts would feature a Norwalk-based artist or organization, like SPAG or the Firing Circuits collective.

Mr. Smyth said they are trying to get the people of the City to see the public art collection, and are designing posts for that and for the murals. He brought up the mural by the Wall Street Theatre in the discussion and asked if it they should promote that. He said that LeeAnn Rimes

took a picture there and Ms. Grudin suggested they repost the picture of the celebrity with the controversial mural to promote awareness.

Mr. Roberts left the meeting at 7:29 PM. Mr. Roberts said that the social media schedule was amazing and wished he had that around election time. He shared his personal hashtag with the group, which is “#IFUDREAMITLIVEIT” and said that if they used it, he could see what they were doing. Ms. Rakowsky asked if he would share the Arts Commission posts in his Instagram Story, and he said that he would. Mr. Roberts said that he would attend the next meeting.

Mr. Smyth elaborated on the Public Art Collection and the lists that were started about it. Ms. Grudin said she forwarded what Ms. Evelyn had put together for local performing arts venues. Mr. Alan said that was on the Google Drive. Ms. Rakowsky said she did research on some of the public art and did not find the information on it in the arts inventory. Ms. Grudin said she would help Ms. Rakowsky with this research because she would like to see who painted these pieces and where the pieces are located. Ms. Rakowsky said that she researched the Norwalk mural information, the Historical Society, and the Art Inventory.

Mr. Smyth then reviewed the new social media policy. He encouraged them to look it over at home. He said that every voting member should have posting access and could post anything they want once a month or so. Mr. Alan said that the guidelines will help voting members determine what an appropriate post would be.

Ms. Church brought up the idea of brand guidelines as a City regulation that could influence the social media plan. There was discussion about redesigning the NAC logo.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Alan introduced Mr. Bill Hayden, Poet Laureate of the City of Norwalk. Mr. Hayden gave an update on his current projects with the City. He said that he attended a meeting in May at the walk bridge. He presented his poetry at some events in the summertime. He said there was an event that was rained out, but that he still was given a half hour of time to speak. He participated in a National Trail Day event where he shared his work and discussed the connection between poetry and nature, as well as the works of Emily Dickinson and Pablo Neruda. He said that he created an ongoing library workshop that hosts a community of 7-10 local poets on the first and third Mondays of every month.

Mr. Hayden hoped that he would set up readings with major poets to be set in the new year at the library. He said he is looking into John Murillo, the Wesleyan-based African American voice.

Mr. Hayden said that he and all the town laureates were invited to an artists' retreat at the home of the Connecticut laureate. He said that he met the Poet Laureate Emeritus from Washington, who can do improv painting and poetry writing combined events. She said she has a stipend for her events. He said that Norwalk doesn't have a stipend to provide, but suggested that the poets sell their chapbooks there.

Mr. Hayden said he is inviting the Westport Poet Laureate to feature her at a library workshop. He said she is currently attending Oxford, and she is known for her talk on haiku. Mr. Hayden also held some ekphrastic poetry workshops at galleries to write about the works of art on display there. Mr. Alan described it as response poetry. Mr. Hayden described it as descriptive and offered Homer as an example of an ekphrastic poet.

Mr. Hayden said that the mission of the Poet Laureate of Norwalk is to promote the awareness of poetry in Norwalk. He said that he could promote awareness on the placards of the Wheels bus transportation, on the traffic graphic box in front of the library, as well as in future murals.

Ms. Church said that the People's Gallery is an option to pair poetry and visuals for a public art reading. Mr. Smyth said he participated in a show of 15 writers and 15 artists that asked the artists to respond to the poetry and suggested that Mr. Hayden curate an event like that. Mr. Hayden said that he encourages multimedia and the collaboration of multiple branches of art.

Mr. Abriola asked if each town has a poet laureate. Mr. Hayden said that he applied by answering a call posted by the Mayor's office.

Ms. Grudin said that she was in the process of submitting budget requests for \$1,500. She said that Mr. Hayden should be submitting invoices and documentation for his expenses as poet laureate. Mr. Hayden said that he is sending invoices directly to Mr. Alan. Mr. Alan said he wasn't sure if the Arts Commission was splitting these expenses with the Library.

Mr. Smyth said that the writer's workshops could be promoted on social media. Mr. Hayden said he would like to keep a cap of about 12 people at these workshops.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Bloomberg Philanthropies Asphalt Art Grant

Ms. Church says that it is a \$25,000 matching grant to install art on pavement. She said that they are applying for it as a city and they are hoping to do something in the Martin Luther King Jr. corridor with it. She said that, in combination with the other \$50,000 in funding, they hope to do something really impactful for the community along with the other city departments (i.e. Transportation, Parking, and Mobility, and Redevelopment). She said that Business & Tourism has funding for this initiative as well.

Mr. Smyth asked if the artwork would get destroyed if people were driving over it. Ms. Church said she talked to Mr. Pardo about that, because he is doing the basketball courts, and he said that there are ways to seal the road art with a thermoplastic coating for about 10 years, and after that they would just have to reseal it. She said that the cost of covering 4 sidewalks would be about \$80,000, which includes milling and paving. She said that they have options on how to pay for this in combination with the other departments. She said this also estimated at \$10,000 for 20 feet.

Ms. Church said that she worked with Mr. Pardo to get the application out by the 13th. She said that they worked out the cost of a mural within the 4 sidewalks to be \$25,000, plus the thermoplastic coating of \$25,000 on top. She said that paying for the coating is worth it because of the amount they'll save on maintenance. Ms. Church said that the \$25,000 for the coating could come from any of the city departments.

Ms. Grudin suggested installing the statue of Horace Silver, jazz musician, on MLK, Jr. Blvd at the site instead. Ms. Church said they wanted to focus on MLK, Jr., and that the Bloomberg funding is specifically for asphalt and is designed to slow traffic and create a friendlier pedestrian environment. She said the site that she and Mr. Pardo are looking at is located at the intersection of MLK, Jr. Blvd and Lowe Street.

Ms. Church said that this project would be an Arts Commission approval of the whole initiative, and the Department of Public Works would have to approve the milling & paving.

b. Emerson Straniti to extend voting membership

Mr. Alan said that Mr. Emerson Straniti's ROTC proxy has been extended.

c. Kadeem Roberts interest in becoming Democratic voting member

Mr. Alan asked Mr. Kadeem Roberts, Common Council, to introduce himself to the Commission at the start of the meeting.

Mr. Roberts thanked Mr. Alan for his introduction. He said that his mother is a preschool teacher, his sister is an attorney, and his brother is Jamil Roberts, music producer and Grammy nominee. Mr. Roberts said he was born and raised in Norwalk and he had a strong background with youth and a Masters in Public Administration from Fairfield University.

d. Other New Business

Mr. Alan said that he was approached by Diane Barchel, who is working with a group that is promoting a lyric-writing contest for high school students in Norwalk, Westport, Fairfield, and Bridgeport. He said that this program is designed to promote the U.S. Census in underserved communities and minority communities where people are afraid of the census when it comes to immigration issues. Mr. Alan said Diane is part of another group that is called Norwalk To Bridgeport and that she sent him an outline of the contest and she is going to pitch it to the City and would like the Arts Commission to be a part of it.

ADJOURNMENT

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**

****MS. GRUDIN SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES AT 8:15 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

E.A.Sheils

Telesco Secretarial Service