

**CITY OF NORWALK
ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
JANUARY 7, 2020**

ATTENDANCE: Marc Alan, Chair; Peter Smyth; Nori Grudin; Helen Roman; Robert Abriola; Melissa Matuska; Kadeem Roberts; Emerson Straniti (7:03)

STAFF: Sabrina Church, Director, Business Development & Tourism; Michelle Rakowsky, Social Media Manager, Arts Commission

OTHERS: Brian Kaspr, Artist; Payton Turner, Artist; Lindsay Bartlett, Assistant Director, SoNo Arts Festival; Sheena Parker, Melissa Wilkinson Foundation and Junior Arts & Music (JAM); Chris Bradley, ex officio member of the Arts Commission

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Alan called the meeting to order at 6:35 PM. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Lindsay Bartlett, local shop owner, received an email regarding this meeting and decided to attend. Ms. Sheena Parker said that they are seeking approval for an upcoming mural project.

Ms. Payton Turner said that she recently rented a space in Norwalk. Ms. Turner said that she has a wallpaper and fabric store called Flat Vernacular that started in Brooklyn and relocated to West Norwalk 4 years ago, and she just rented a space on Knight Street in the Wall Street district. She thinks that Knight Street should be a design corridor.

Mr. Alan said that the Arts Commission has a number of subcommittees that are comprised of voting members of the Committee, as well as the Friends of the Arts Commission, which is comprised of interested citizens who are interested in the arts. He said that showing up in the main requirement and that they welcome new participants, who have the ability to participate in subcommittees and potentially affect future decisions by the Arts Commission.

ADMINISTRATION

Minutes

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 3, 2019 MINUTES AS AMENDED**

****MS. GRUDIN SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Budget Committee

Finance

Ms. Grudin said that as of January 6, the budget is \$21,340. She received an invoice from Ms. Rakowsky, and she was waiting for the photography invoice for the Mayor's Gallery show. She said they were planning on giving Mr. Hayden, Poet Laureate, \$1,500 as a stipend for his "meet up" poetry events. Mr. Smyth said that he will have the HootSuite invoice submitted by next meeting.

Communication Committee

Website and Social Media Update

Ms. Smyth said that Ms. Rakowsky was doing a great job on social media. He said there was more activity and more inspiration posts than before. He said that they did not use any social media boosts, and that they are still experimenting and plan to start fresh in January. He encouraged the assembly to send any events or potential content to his email address. Ms. Rakowsky said that social media was going well and that the HootSuite plan is very good.

Mr. Smyth distributed a list of arts businesses in Norwalk to the committee. He said that the goal is for people to take them home and add or edit it. He explained that this list excludes specific professionals, and that he wouldn't put himself on this list. He also made the designation between fine art and commercial art as a variable. Mr. Abriola said that some of the galleries listed are out of business, and Mr. Smyth said to send those updates to him.

Mr. Alan noted that, while promoting certain events, the Communications Committee could approach the event similarly to a newspaper. He said that a newspaper might cover an event the day before or the day after it occurs, because they aren't in promotions. He said that, instead of promoting an event, they could consider reporting on an event instead, and then sharing that content on social media.

Mr. Smyth said that this approach could increase event awareness. Mr. Abriola then said that this might not help event attendance. He said that missing events can be frustrating, but they can show past events that are noteworthy.

Ms. Payton Turner, local artist and shop owner, said that she uses the 'stories' and 'highlights' features on social media platforms to change the way content is displayed on her feed. Mr. Kaspr, local artist, recommended highlighting links on platform profiles to make it easier for the audience to buy tickets for an event.

Mr. Roberts, Common Council member, said that his brother was recently interviewed by Rolling Stone, who informed his brother that the Norwalk Arts Commission had shouted him out on social media recently. He said that his brother is nominated for a Grammy this year, and he told Mr. Roberts that he would offer to speak at a big event in Norwalk.

Infrastructure Committee

Mayor's Gallery

Ms. Helen Roman gave an update on the upcoming Mayor's Gallery show. She said that the Fire Department has pictures from the 1800s of horse & carriages, firehouses, and the like in their archives. Ms. Roman said she had trouble getting the pictures from Eric Trautman who photographed the archived photographs. She said that she was worried about the deadlines and variables, but she has the photographs and they look good. She said she was looking at the panels the day following the meeting and had some ideas to share with Mr. Alan.

Ms. Roman said that she had gleaned some information about the photograph subjects from the Fire Department, which will be used to write any accompanying captioning or text. She said that there are no references for the pictures in the archives, nor are there any references to the original photographers.

Ms. Roman was unable to provide an opening date for the show at this time, but said that she could provide one soon. Mr. Alan said that the Mayor wants the gallery space filled and that the Arts Commission wasn't able to make deadline updates at this time.

Mr. Smyth said that they could start planning the next show now. Ms. Roman offered an idea that she had for next Christmas for a photo exhibit capturing the lighting around Norwalk. Mr. Smyth recommended that, since the Mayor is waiting, it would be good to see what is ahead. Ms. Grudin said that the Student Art Exhibit goes up in August or September. Ms. Matuska said that they should consult the calendar. Ms. Roman offered another idea for a show that involves a Norwalk artist who went to France and returned with a series of paintings to share.

Maritime Gallery

Mr. Abriola said that he is the current curator of the Maritime Gallery and he has recently been in touch with Ms. Kathy Hebert in Transportation, Parking, and Mobility. He said that the Maritime Gallery has 3-4 scheduled shows per year, including a show in April and then shows every 3 months from there. He said that he is coming up with a theme for the next show by looking into the gallery's past to see what has worked so far, and then he will update the committee.

Mural Policy

Mr. Alan began by introducing the Mural Policy to the assembly. He said that Mr. Smyth made a draft of the Mural Policy, which Ms. Church then submitted for legal review. The Legal Department redlined the document because, if the Arts Commission votes on mural content, that action would be potentially unconstitutional. He said that the Arts Commission has to be careful about potentially policing messaging and content.

Mr. Alan explained that the Public Art Policy was first drafted in 2015, and was revised in 2018. He said that this policy, written by the last chairperson, was so outdated that it anticipated a Cultural Affairs department and made other assumptions about the City's organizational structure, so the whole policy needed to be addressed. He said that he worked with Ms. Church's office, Business & Tourism, to write the language that reflects the City's organizational structure as it is now. He said that they have terrific language in place now that they did not have in the original wording.

Mr. Alan said that the added language into the Mural Policy that addresses an organization like JAM, which could request a permit from the City. The permit would be based on an approval from

the Arts Commission, which would not be based on the content of the mural, but instead on its location and the positive impact it would have on the community.

Mr. Abriola asked about regulating religious content. Ms. Church said that the Mural Policy can regulate hate speech but not religious content. Mr. Alan said there are laws against hate speech and public decency that they must respect.

Mr. Straniti asked how to differentiate someone's vote on content and their true intentions. Mr. Alan said that this is part of why this would be voted on by a committee and not just one person. He said that this committee is currently defined as a component of the Infrastructure Committee, and they may decide to form a separate mural or public art committee. He hoped that this future committee be comprised of a group of voting members and members of the Friends of the Arts Commission, so personal opinion won't affect that.

Mr. Alan said that the Zoning Commission is looking to the Arts Commission with regards to regulating signage. Ms. Church said that the first step in obtaining approval for a mural is to go to Planning & Zoning to determine whether or not the mural is considered a "sign" or "art". Mr. Alan said that they would rather the Arts Commission make that determination. Mr. Abriola asked if Ms. Church would act as the go-between these two departments. Ms. Church said that if a very controversial piece of art were submitted for approval, the Arts Commission could always turn to the Legal Department for their opinion. She said that this is all to prevent the City from bringing on potential litigation.

Mr. Smyth asked if they should consider if a person who lives in the area, if they were to oppose a mural in question. Mr. Smyth said the Commission should be allowed to disapprove a mural because of community feedback, and how the mural fits in the community. Mr. Alan said that there is a precedent to protect public safety, i.e. if a mural is visually in the "right of way" and it could cause a hazard to traffic.

Ms. Church said that if a business owner paints his own mural on his own property, the Arts Commission can review the mural, but prevent it from being put up as they do not have that power. The Arts Commission can only control murals or public art commissioned on City property.

Ms. Matuska said that the old policy talked about the structure of its voting members. Ms. Church said that the Bylaws are in a separate document from the Public Art Policy. She said the Bylaws are a self-governing document while the Public Art Policy is an outward-facing document. Ms. Church suggested moving the committee definitions into the Bylaws instead.

Mr. Smyth asked if other cities in Connecticut are regulating murals and public art in the same way. Ms. Church said yes, in the case of private property. Mr. Alan said there are some cities that choose not to regulate, and there are some which are very conservative. Mr. Smyth said that he thought that it would be different in a town like Darien.

Mr. Alan said that he thinks one of the most beautiful things about Norwalk is the diversity and there is a melting pot of conservatives and liberals. He said that this is why he thinks that Norwalk has such great art. He said that he tried to write this policy to strike a balance between the rights of property owners and the rights of the City to create an environment to encourage positive artwork in the community.

Ms. Grudin brought up the concept of “neighboring approval” when someone is building on their property and their neighbor could disapprove of the action with the City. She referred to the paint splatter on Mott Street and the funeral home along that street. She said that people who are grieving and looking for the funeral home might not want to see the paint splatter when driving down that street. She said that neighbors should ask for mural or public art review before it goes up. She said that art could be like building on a property because both could potentially affect property value. Ms. Bradley said that neighborly approval only applies to permanent structures.

Mr. Alan said that they had an agreement to start a retroactive approval of the balloon imagery they posted on Wall Street. Ms. Church said that they didn’t have a permit from Zoning.

Mr. Alan said that Mr. Jason Milligan, local business property owner, wrote to him and he agreed that the Arts Commission can review his properties to review these murals retroactivity. He said that Mr. Milligan is willing to submit his murals for review, but feels that all the murals in Norwalk should be under review, so as not to single him out. Ms. Church said that they have a choice whether to grandfather all the current existing murals in, or to retroactively approve every mural - no matter whose property or where it is.

Mr. Kaspr, local artist, asked what public art is being approved by the Arts Commission. Ms. Matuska said that this includes the review process for the traffic graphic program. She said that the proposed art plan is reviewed, the commission makes suggestions and asks the artist to consider making changes before implementation.

Ms. Lindsay Bartlett of the SoNo Arts Festival Committee said that they were trying to get a kids’ mural approved, but they are still waiting to hear about the process. Mr. Kaspr asked if the Arts

Commission would disapprove of a kids' art mural based on the quality. Ms. Matuska said no, and she said that they just wanted to have a policy in place before that takes place.

Ms. Matuska said that, when they first started discussing an update to the policy, they had a definition for the term "mural". Ms. Church said that she will take the definitions of a "sign" and "commercial signage" incorporate them into the Policy. Mr. Alan said there are definitions of different types of art in a different section of the policy – including mural or wall art.

Ms. Roman asked if there was any language about quality in the Public Art Policy.

Mr. Roberts asked if the Arts Commission would be the sole authority on public art and murals once the new policy is put in place. Ms. Church said Planning & Zoning has final sign-off, and a vote of approval would only go to the Common Council if the art were to occur on a public building or asset. Mr. Alan said they would need Common Council for the ultimate approval of the updated Public Art Policy, because they are spending the City's money to get this done.

Ms. Church said that, in the future, public art approval on City property would work the same way as a "gift". She said the approval process would be as follows:

Part I

- Arts Commission (determines artistic quality of the proposal)
- Zoning Approval (determines if it is allowable)

Part II

- another governing body (ex. Board of Education, if the location is a school or Parks Committee if it is in a public park)

Part III

- Common Council (final approval)

Part IV

- Legal Department (contractual agreement that agrees to maintenance, length of term, terms of moving the art, etc.)

Mr. Alan said that it is a possibility that there will be no mural policy guidelines on private property. He said that someone from the Mad Lab community advocated against any approval process for murals. He said the Arts Commission's best chance is to consider the opinion of the

arts community via public participation. Mr. Alan said that there is a mechanism included that will allow the public the chance to disagree with murals. Mr. Abriola asked what would happen if the public doesn't like the mural. Ms. Matuska said that, in terms of permitting, most of the City's notifications are on the formal agenda and that is enough notice for the public to act on the matter.

Ms. Matuska asked when they are voting on the policy.

Mr. Smyth suggested that they schedule a meeting specifically focused on the policy.

Ms. Sheena Parker of the Melissa Wilkinson Foundation and Jam that that she noticed that Norwalk is wanting to be a "City of the Arts", but it seems like there intends to be a lot of restrictions. She said that Europe has murals everywhere. Ms. Roman said that they don't know enough about Europe's restrictions. Mr. Alan said that he has recently returned from Tel Aviv, where about 80% of their public art is graffiti. He said that Norwalk has conservative roots and they have to find a balanced policy that respects all people.

AutoCast Guide App

Mr. Alan gave an update regarding the prior development with the AutoCast Guide app, which provides its users with different tours in different cities. He said that the Arts Commission was using this for their public art tour. Mr. Alan said that Ms. Judith Bacal of the Norwalk Historic Commission has offered to take over this app to reflect the historical art catalog in the City. Ms. Matuska said that Westport, and maybe Stamford, has added the use of the AutoCast app to their cities.

****MS. MATUSKA MOVED FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE HISTORIC COMMISSION TO MANAGE AND OVERSEE THE AUTOCAST APP TOURS**

****MR. ABRIOLA SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

OLD BUSINESS

Slow Art Day

Ms. Grudin said that Slow Art Day is a worldwide event shared with people in art galleries and museums that invites the public to slowly look at 3-5 pieces and discuss them after the fact. She said that this event will take place on April 4, and that they could do 2 events, maybe one at 10 AM and another at 12 PM.

Ms. Church said it would be interesting to do a Norwalk Now partnership event. She suggested having people meet at different places in the City and then linking it to one of the local businesses (ex. Wall Street and Cafe Aroma).

Ms. Grudin said that the date of the event is the issue because of the weather. She said she thought of incorporating the traffic graphics, or the Perry Park art. She said the event could take place at SPAG, the Maritime Gallery, Renee Soto, or a dozen other places.

MLK Jr. Corridor

Ms. Church said that the Bloomberg Art Initiative grant application has been submitted. They will hear from them in March or April.

Ms. Church also said that budget season is in full swing, but now they are just waiting to present. She said that they won't know anything officially until March or April.

Art Trail/Artspeak

Mr. Abriola asked about communication and events with respect to Art Trail. Mr. Smyth said that the Commission has those lists of businesses to review and then they will design it with an outside contractor or if they want to do it internally. Mr. Abriola brought up the other events they talked about featuring artist talks. He asked if this was a part of the Trail. Mr. Smyth said that this was part of the Communications Committee. Mr. Alan said that this needs to be proposed as New Business with a plan.

ADJOURNMENT

****MS. MATUSKA MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:08 PM.**

****MR. SMYTH SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted,

E.A. Sheils

Telesco Secretarial Services