

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

ATTENDANCE: Marc Alan (Chair), Brian Kaspr, Nori Grudin, Peter Smyth; Kadeem Roberts, Emerson Straniti, Janet Evelyn (6:20); Bob Abriola (6:48)

STAFF/OTHERS: Sabrina Church, Director of Business Development & Tourism; Kay Anderson; Christine Bradley, Director of the Norwalk Public Library; Michelle Rakowsky, Social Media

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Marc Alan called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

“Get out the Vote” Street Art Proposal

Ms. Kay Anderson of Toilsome Avenue, Norwalk, has lived here for 30 years and she wanted to encourage people to vote. She said she would love to see the Arts Commission encourage street artists that will encourage people to vote. She said that people need to be reminded and she wrote a proposal with a way to go about it that would require money. She said she loves the art in the city, but she is not linked in rough to get this proposal going on her own.

Ms. Anderson sent her proposal to Chairperson Alan earlier this afternoon. Ms. Church said she would forward it.

Mr. Alan said they would definitely connect to members of the art community in accordance with the Commission’s role. Mr. Alan said they are working on the Public Art Policy, because there is no policy in place for that yet. He discussed a private exchange between artists and private property owners as a possibility.

Ms. Anderson said that she can’t be the lead and asked them to look through the proposal, linking the Commission to the project.

Ms. Christine Bradley said that the Library would like to work with this.

Mr. Kaspr offered to liaison for artists. Mr. Alan pointed out that Mr. Kaspr is a mural artist.

Ms. Grudin said she was thinking about the light post signs and discussed a lag time for posting.

Ms. Bradley said they were looking for art on banners, especially at the time of the new fiscal year. She talked about a campus banner coming down and would love a banner about voting.

Mr. Smyth asked about the project's target demographic. Ms. Anderson said they need to reach young people. She said that Connecticut doesn't make it easy to register. She said that young people fill the auditoriums for political campaigns, but they don't actually vote. She said they also need to know where to vote and, if they can get them to register, then they have a good chance to get them to the polls.

Mr. Smyth asked whether they should do it sooner.

Ms. Bradley suggested contacting the DMV and said that they don't have to push for a particular party's agenda. Ms. Anderson said that it would be good to get people thinking about it and they would see that November 3rd is coming up.

Ms. Evelyn joined the meeting at 6:20.

Ms. Grudin said that some people have trouble getting to the polls.

Ms. Anderson said that it relies on the 2 major parties and not a non-partisan effort.

Ms. Evelyn said that when she was part of the Democratic Party campaign for the Mayor, there were a number of people who couldn't get to the polls.

Mr. Alan suggested that people get in touch with Ms. Anderson about the project.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO APPROVE THE JUNE 2, 2020 MINUTES**

****MR. STRANITI SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

COMMITTEE & STAFF UPDATES

Budget Committee

Ms. Grudin said she emailed Ms. Church, who said the budget would rollover to 2021. Ms. Church said that, because of COVID, there was no formal request needed for this.

Ms. Grudin detailed the following:

Printing	\$1,756.25
Membership Dues	\$51.00
Professional Service	\$8,090.51
Contractual	\$3,426
Operating	\$8,940.91

Ms. Church said the balance needed is what is left and will go out to the Washington Street Barriers project soon.

Ms. Grudin said that \$22,796 is allocated there. Ms. Grudin said she will sit with Ms. Church to discuss the budget. The bills for social media will come in soon.

Capital Budget

Ms. Church said that this is already in the accounts. They are free to use it.

Ms. Church said they did not get the asphalt art grant, but they still have the \$50,000 matching grant from the City to do art installations throughout the Martin Luther King Jr. corridor. She said that is not necessarily just the street, but it is the neighborhood adjacent to the street on both sides and almost all the way to the Day and Raymond area of South Norwalk. She said they had a substantial enough budget to do something impactful. She said they need a large scale plan that might take \$150,000 instead of \$50,000, and they can work to complete that plan with different sorts of art projects instead of a one-off type of thing. She said to get the legal team involved early and on board so they can continue efficiently.

Communications Committee

Mr. Smyth said they did large boosts for Make Music Day and the Norwalk Parking Garage Art Gallery, which were seen by 30,000 people in Norwalk. He said they were looking for an increase in gallery entry and participation in Make Music Day. Mr. Alan said he took pictures of the gallery. Ms. Rakowsky said she was planning on posting content and asked him to please send those to her.

Mr. Alan said he would take photos of the next installation of traffic barriers, which is happening at 5:30 PM next Wednesday.

Ms. Church said that they were not able to do this on Wall Street because there are no barriers to cover, and there is bus traffic to consider. She said there are 2 more on South Main Street. She said they were hoping to do a ribbon cutting ceremony, to be announced. She said that Josh Morgan will coordinate with the press - News12, Nancy on Norwalk, etc. Mr. Alan said this information will be shared on social media.

Infrastructure Committee

Mr. Alan said they met last week to discuss the MLK Jr. Corridor project. The Infrastructure Committee is administering this. He said they are tapping into Norwalk artists of color for this project. He asked Mr. Roberts and Ms. Evelyn to help in this regard.

Ms. Evelyn said that they talked about the importance of getting the community involved there. She said that they have to find a way to bring people together as a forum. She said she lives up on

Elmwood and asked about the boundaries for the MLK Jr. Corridor project. She said that the area is eclectic, filled with businesses & residents, and the SoNo Library is there.

Ms. Church showed a map of the MLK Jr. Corridor geography, which includes all of South Norwalk. Ms. Evelyn said that it includes an African-American community there that was important in their initial approach.

Mr. Alan said that there is a South Norwalk based neighborhood association whose name escaped him, but they may be a possible collaborator.

Mr. Roberts agreed with Ms. Evelyn. He said that they could do emails with community leaders and could reach out to Ernie, Darlene, and Travis. He said they could reach out to church and use SurveyMonkey as a method of obtaining public opinion, so they could come back together as a team. He said that, due to Coronavirus, they have to make everything digital.

Ms. Evelyn said that they used surveys for Library projects before. Ms. Bradley confirmed and said they had about 2,000 responses to their surveys.

Mr. Smyth said that the Communications Committee could collaborate. He said that SurveyMonkey is easy to use and suggested appointing a subcommittee or working group. Ms. Evelyn said that they may have to come up with specific and different ideas and media to choose from. She said to keep this list small - a handful at the most.

Ms. Bradley said that when they have it together, they can send out the list and there will be other lists, and she said the more lists they have to send it out to, the better.

Mr. Kaspr said that this would be encouraging artists to put up proposals and to first find possible areas for projects, then reaching out and getting the word out.

Ms. Evelyn volunteered to head the group.

Mr. Kaspr offered to help.

Mr. Alan offered to help.

Mr. Roberts offered to help.

Mr. Abriola entered the meeting and offered to help.

Public Art Policy

Mr. Alan said there were problems with the way the Policy was written, so it is held up at the legal level to determine if there is state precedent that would empower the city to act on private property. He said there they may end up with the City determining there is no way to regulate on private property. He said its above their pay grade at this point. He said that Legal has to deal with this and that it affects Zoning.

Mr. Alan suggested that taking murals on private property out of the policy that they've written, because there is so much of the public art policy that is antiquated that they want to get passed

through to the Common Council. He said he didn't know whether they should hold up the policy before Legal can solve this other problem, which could take a long time.

Mr. Straniti agreed.

Mr. Kaspr agreed.

Mr. Alan said that Zoning wanted to regulate it, so it may become an issue later on.

Mr. Smyth said that there are a lot of hateful people in this world, and it is important to recognize hateful action as a possibility. Mr. Alan said that he didn't know if the City needed to be in the middle, between two entities in civil court if there was an issue.

Mr. Kaspr asked if it was possible to rewrite the policy so that it wouldn't be possible to revisit it to avoid an issue down the road.

Ms. Church said that they have no legal authority to say yes or no and, therefore, the Arts Commission can't regulate it because there is no statute for that. She said that Zoning could regulate over certain colors and sizes, but there are extra steps to do before that's possible. They would have to make a village district with design guidelines that disallows certain colors and other regulated actions, but not content. She said it gets really complicated, but at the end of the day the Arts Commission doesn't have the legal authority to do anything but be in an advisory role, and if it was granted authority, it would have to be through a change in zoning code and approved through a different vehicle for them to even be part of the process.

Mr. Alan said that when zoning took murals out of signage, that was contingent on creating new policy with the City. He said that Zoning doesn't want to hinder public art and the Mayor said it is good for a draw for cultural tourism. Ms. Church agreed.

Ms. Church said that even in an advisory role, they don't have the ability for approval or denial. Mr. Abriola said he wasn't sure what the benefit was to do the policy. Ms. Church said the decision to do policy was based on not having anything in place but they didn't do the legal research to support the policy, but when it came up it was found through legal research the authority does not exist in the Arts Commission.

Mr. Abriola agreed.

Mr. Alan said they'll come back with an amended draft.

Ms. Church said there is no need to go back to Legal, but the new draft would need to go to Common Council after Commission approval.

NEW BUSINESS

Washington Street Barriers Art Project

Mr. Abriola didn't have the numbers. He said the original budget called for \$200 per mural. They provided tarps and varnish. He said that only approximately \$500 is needed

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO INCREASE THE BUDGET FOR THE WASHINGTON STREET BARRIERS ART PROJECT BY \$500**

****MR. ROBERTS SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

Wall Street Place Art Space

Mr. Alan said they were now going to the Common Council regarding a 900 sq ft space for the Arts Commission to use with no rent. He said that it is a new condo/mixed use development near the Factory Underground. He said that they proposed this programmable space to compensate for the loss of the Garden Cinemas. They would be giving raw, unfinished commercial space and the Arts Commission would be responsible for CAM (Common Area Maintenance), shared costs, utilities, programming, and build out itself.

Mr. Alan said it was great on paper and that he was intimidated by the \$50,000 potential cost for the project. He said he didn't know what their operating budget would be - possibly \$100,000 a year. He said he can't imagine effectively utilizing this space with the operating budget they have now. He said they'll have to play it by ear. He said it could take 4 years.

Ms. Church said they would have to apply for those funds by capital and operating budget. She said that, after 5 years, they could potentially lease it for longer but by the time the lease term is up the Library renovations should be well underway and could be moved to the new facility on a more permanent basis.

Mr. Alan said that when the Crystal Theatre opened up as part of the Ben Franklin school, they got like a 20 year lease. Ms. Church said this is in a private development which makes it different than a public building. Ms. Church said this will be a topic of conversation over the next 2 years.

Mr. Alan said that for the City to invest in this area as the unofficial arts district is a huge win for the City and the Arts Commission. He said there are windows on both streets on Isaac, across from Garden Cinema, situated on the first floor.

MLK Jr. Corridor Project

Mr. Abriola suggested a walkthrough of the Martin Luther King Jr. Corridor project as organized by Ms. Evelyn. Ms. Evelyn said that it would be a good start and she would organize a walking tour as an initial meeting. She said that she will send an email maybe by next Wednesday.

Mr. Abriola mentioned Julio as a potential curator of the MLK Jr. Corridor project. He suggested adding Jahmaine to the list of potential curators. Ms. Evelyn said that Jahmaine is working out of

Bridgeport, but he is a Norwalk son. She said they will be thinking about their scope and approach, about ideas and curators, and about community leaders.

Ms. Grudin said that she would set up a budget meeting with Mr. Alan and Ms. Church.

ADJOURNMENT

****MS. EVELYN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:11 PM**

****MR. SMYTH SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Anaya Sheils
Telesco Secretarial Services