

**CITY OF NORWALK
ARTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 11, 2020**

ATTENDANCE: Marc Alan (Chair), Melissa Matuska, Peter Smyth, Nori Grudin, Emerson Straniti, Brian Kaspr, Matt O’Callaghan, Robert Abriola, Kadeem Roberts

STAFF/OTHERS: Sabrina Church, Business Development & Tourism; Kay Anderson; Christine Bradley, Norwalk Public Library; Amanda Russo; Xiomara Esquivel

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Marc Alan called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. A quorum was present.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Amanda Russo and Xiomara Esquivel joined to be connected to the MLK Jr. Project. Mr. Alan said that Janet Evelyn leads that project and they will get emails to her.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

****MR. KASPR MOVED TO APPROVE THE JULY 7, 2020 MINUTES**

****MR. STRANITI SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

COMMITTEE & STAFF UPDATES

Budget Committee

Ms. Grudin said that she had a meeting with Peter and Marc about the budget. She said they were still up in the air about the FY 19/20 money rolling over to FY 20/21. The money that they did get for 20/21 is \$9,300. She said it is lower than they had before, and now with COVID, she was expecting less because of what’s going on with everything. She was looking for a firm grasp on what was going on with 19/20 because there were some outstanding things that they were going to do that they weren’t able to. She said that hopefully that money would get allocated back to them.

Mr. Alan said that they were under the impression from the last meeting that all of the money would get rolled over into the next fiscal year, and that seems to have changed. He said that what they have to do now is look at the monies that pertain to open projects that they have already approved.

Ms. Church said it is up to the Finance and Comptroller's Office if they can rollover funds. She said that she can request to rollover anything, but they will most likely deny it if it is not tied to a previously approved project or something that they had plans to do before the end date of the fiscal year that got held up for some reason or another.

Ms. Church said that they were originally under the notion that every budget item would get rolled over because they weren't allowed to finish things because COVID hit. She said they are transitioning into the transfer phase where she has until August 31st to submit to them the reasoning for transferring last year's funds into this year's funds. She said they usually let them know if they rollover or not in September/October. She said her memo will go to them by the 31st and then there is a waiting period to see if they approve them or not. She confirmed that there is about \$9,000 in the account that is spread over the budget line items.

Mr. Alan said that he felt this was a learning experience because, in the beginning of the fiscal year, the Budget Committee got together and talked about budgeting loosely for various projects that they had been discussing previously. He said they allocated the money, but it was contingent on voting approval. He said they were basically taking it one step at a time. As things would come to pass, they would get voting approval. He said he didn't know if that is going to be a sinking point going forward. He felt that they needed to be more aggressive in figuring out what they are going to do with that money, coming up with proposals and getting that voted through, rather than waiting and spacing it out throughout the year.

Ms. Matuska asked for a list of outstanding items because she was trying to wrap her head around what happened. She gave Michelle as the example, who would be paid for marketing. She said she knew they had passed that, but she didn't know if it was something ongoing. She asked for a list of ongoing projects, so they would have an idea of what the \$9,000 would be allocated for.

Ms. Grudin said that it is already preallocated for things like secretarial services (Telesco), membership dues (which they still scratch their heads about), other professional services (which can be allocated for the galleries and Michelle's stuff), other contractual services, and other operating expenses. She said they are set up so that Sabrina and Maritza know where to take the money from when they submit an invoice. She referred to the February (or earlier) minutes where they listed outstanding projects like ArtSpeak, Ms. Evelyn's banners for the NICE Festival. She said they allocated money for the Poet Laureate and the galleries. She said they had a question about Bob, who took over curating the Maritime gallery, and funding the People's Gallery.

Mr. Abriola said that the funding for the Maritime Gallery should not come out of the Arts Commission budget.

Mr. Alan said that at the last budget committee meeting that they had, they came up with a list of open projects, which they asked Sabrina to clarify. With ArtSpeaks, they have basically talked through the project through the communication subcommittee - there has been work done on it, but there has been no approval on it.

Ms. Grudin said the same thing with the hanging system and table that they got because of construction at City Hall two years ago. She said that has been an open project that they voted on. She said the Mayor's Gallery is continuous, and so is the People's Gallery. She said they weren't really sure if that funding can be moved over.

Mr. Alan said he thought the Mayor's Gallery should be rolled over, especially because they know that they are allocating a certain amount of money for that.

Ms. Grudin said the same thing goes for the People's Gallery.

Ms. Church said that was something she thought would rollover, but she would need the amounts, what the projects are, and a description, because she will have to submit a memo with the amount of money they are requesting to rollover for this specific thing, saying that it was or was not approved, whatever that narrative is fine. She said they could give you the whole thing, or they could say they are given you these three things, as an example. She said it is totally in their purview, and as long as they have a good rationale about why it needs to be rolled over and what it is specifically going to be used for and how much, then she will submit it as such.

Ms. Church said this is usually posted sometime in mid-September.

Ms. Matuska spoke to Ms. Bradley about \$1,500 that the Poet Laureate would get from them. She asked if the Poet Laureate could give them information on what he plans to use that \$1,500 for, if he does plan to use it.

Ms. Bradley said that she didn't know, and that amount was probably just set aside. She said that when Laurel Petersen was Poet Laureate, she did a lot of events and she submitted expenses and all against that \$1,500. She said that she has not had a lot of communication with the current Poet Laureate. She said he does a monthly poets' gathering on Zoom. She said that she didn't believe he had any expenses or anticipated any expenses.

Ms. Grudin said that he hadn't sent them anything.

Ms. Bradley said he has not been as active as Laurel was certainly. She said she would think that money could be reallocated to something else.

Ms. Grudin said they said not to have any out-of-pocket expenses as he is paying for membership fees or this and that, but he hasn't come to them and said okay.

Mr. Alan said that he did ask about how he had joined some sort of meet-up thing where he was using it for poetry meetups and either requested to have that reimbursed. He asked Ms. Church if the Poet Laureate submits an invoice.

Ms. Church said he should submit an invoice, but they haven't seen anything. She said that with the budget they have right now, she would not suggest setting anything aside for him. She said that he has not sent in anything for the last year.

Ms. Matuska brought up the Autocast. She said that there was a \$3,000 bill with that one and they had agreed to pick up. She asked if it was Redevelopment that didn't want to pay the \$500.

Mr. Alan said the Historical Society Commission decided to pick up the Autocast bill from them. They fully took it over, so the Arts Commission didn't have to support the cost.

Ms. Church said that she thought the membership fee item in the budget was originally for paying for the Cultural Alliance membership, but they paid for it as a City out of the Business Development & Tourism budget, so the Arts Commission would not have to pay.

Ms. Grudin said that paying Michell - her last invoice was \$625 - that in itself, if you times that by 12, that eats up a very big part of the budget, like \$7,500.

Ms. Church said it eats up the entirety of that specific line item.

Ms. Grudin said they would have to be more cautious of what they are doing, because they only have \$5,000 for other professional services, if they want to consider that. She said they also have to look at what they pay for Telesco and their services with Elizabeth's wonderful work.

Mr. Alan said they voted to increase the social media budget and communications budget, and they will have to look at everything for the next year to see what they have to cut back. He said they have roughly \$5,000 less this year.

Ms. Church said that she could ask for the previous budget for Telesco, figuring one session over the year, so they could ask for the previous budget to cover \$135 over 12 months for the meetings. That is something that may easily roll over, but when it comes to something else they have to ask for, like \$22,000, you have to have some sort of reasoning or rationale. They have to get more specific.

Mr. Alan said they have to have another budget meeting very soon, and they should follow up with that as soon as possible.

Communications Committee

Mr. Smyth said that there was no update, other than what they talked about last time. He did want to say that Michelle has been doing a fantastic job with her posting. He said all props go to her, she really stepped up to the plate and got some nice followers, so he feels like she is representing what they are doing with the banners downtown on Washington Street, as well as a lot of murals. He said that they should send anything worthwhile that they see to her. He spoke about a new

mural that FiveFingaz had recently done on Mike's Deli. He said to continue to send stuff to her and she has been doing a great job.

Infrastructure Committee

Mr. Alan said they are going to be moving forward with a vote for the Traffic Graphic Box project. He said there is any issue they are dealing with now on the approvals that would be needed. Ms. Church said they could talk about it offline. Mr. Alan said they would be voting on the traffic box design for the alley adjacent to Wall Street Theatre. He said that he was originally the curator for it. The box had been knocked over and the insurance paid for the replacement of the box. He said he decided to pass the curation of that to Bob Abriola, and he worked with Leslie to come up with a new design.

Mr. Alan said that Janet is out of town, but they would be hearing more about the MLK Jr. Project next month.

Public Art Policy

Mr. Alan said this is still in a draft formation, so he still didn't have anything to submit for that yet.

Mr. Alan said he would be calling for an Infrastructure Committee meeting sometime in August to review that as well.

Mr. Alan spoke to Matthew O'Callaghan, the new member, saying that they have subcommittees. He said the Communications committee to do with social media, web-related stuff, anything public relations. He said that anything to do with the Infrastructure Committee has to do with galleries and special projects. He encouraged him to get involved in that way.

NEW BUSINESS

Traffic Graphic Box

Mr. Alan said that they were seeking approval for the design for the box in the alley adjacent to the Wall Street Theatre. He said the original box that he had curated was looking for a music and diversity theme, and something of color.

Mr. Abriola said his design was a collaboration with Leslie Cober. He said it is a compilation of music and positive imagery. There is some typography there - "music", "love", "dream it". He said it is really a visual of a positive, uplifting vibe. He said it wasn't one visual to represent all this, but it is really a variety of images together. He said that he and Leslie are combining their different styles - she does a lot of pen & ink work, and he has a little bit of a harder style with harder black lines. He said it is just supposed to show energy and that music has energy in it. He said with music, love it, dream it.

Mr. Alan said that Helen Roman who was not present for the meeting, had raised a concern over one feature of it. The red hearts depicted on the design projection were originally black, and that was an issue she had and they graciously made amendments to that. He said he liked the result.

Mr. Abriola said they may take some creative liberties on site. He said that sometimes people take the Photoshop projection very literally. He said that it would be close to that, but when they are on site they may have to take some creative liberties when it comes to protrusions from the box and where the handle is. He said it might not look exactly like this, and he thinks it will look great when it's done. He said that they will just have to have faith and confidence that it's going to look right when it's done.

Mr. Alan said he liked the colors and that they tied in colors from what was adjacent to it, but still found a unique and original way to do it.

Ms. Grudin asked if this was being done in conjunction with SPAG. Mr. Abriola replied and said that it was just something he was doing with Leslie. He said SPAG has another box that they have submitted a design for. That box will be on the island, and he will be helping with that, too. He said that design is also a very literal depiction of music. He said they were trying to do more whimsical and free montage of elements.

Mr. Alan reminded everybody that they had approved a design for a box on the corner of River Street and Wall Street. He said the only thing that has changed is that box had been taken offline by Eversource and there was an issue of who owned the box, so the other box on the island became available funding wise, and they transitioned SPAG's design to that box, which is already approved.

****MR. STRANITI MOVED TO APPROVE THE DESIGN FOR THE TRAFFIC GRAPHIC BOX LOCATED IN THE ALLEY ADJACENT TO THE WALL STREET THEATRE**

****MR. SMYTH SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES with one abstention (Abriola).**

“Get Out The Vote” Campaign

Mr. Alan said that is the working title. Mr. Kaspr said that it is a title that clearly serves its purpose.

Mr. Alan said that since they met with Kay last month, there have been conversations going on offline about the project and it started shaping up when they took murals out of it. He said they discussed alternate solutions.

Mr. Kaspr gave a quick recap - he said the original idea was to encourage the art community (in any medium) to create artwork to encourage people to vote and to remind them to vote on

November 3rd. He said it has been dialed back. He said that with coronavirus it is difficult to do anything in person. He said that what they have landed on was to do 4 or 5 printed banners on some key locations throughout the City, the Library being one of them. He said the banners would be designed by artists and choosing the signs and having them printed and displayed, using art to encourage people to vote.

Ms. Anderson thanked them and said that this was very collaborative. She said that, given COVID and the hurricane, they really pushed this through and she was impressed.

Mr. Alan asked what the process would be for choosing the artists and if that is something they were looking to the Arts Commission for, or is there another plan for this.

Ms. Anderson said that in the original proposal, they were looking for the Arts Commission to guide that. She said that Mr. Kaspr offered to move that forward and that Mr. Alan said he would be involved, too. She said that, it seemed to her, it makes the most sense for them to do the determination because they have an overview of the art in the City.

Mr. Kaspr said the idea was to put together a small jury, liked comprised of himself, Mr. Alan, and maybe someone outside the Arts Commission to look at the designs and make some decisions. He said that time is not exactly on their side.

Ms. Bradley said that it sounded great and she thought that it would be great if it was to be Mr. Kaspr, Mr. Alan and another artist of their choosing, making the decisions.

Mr. Alan said that he sees this like a project committee being responsible for itself. He said that the one thing they haven't put in their proposal is that they are seeking money from the Arts Commission, so that is the main thing - they need to vote on what they are asking of them. He said that, in reference to Sabrina, they cannot vote to mandate her participation. He said that her participation is up to her and whether that involves her approaching businesses, which he thought wasn't necessarily in her purview.

Ms. Church said that in reality they are just asking her to connect with property owners, which is something she can have Maritza do.

Ms. Bradley said that's essential, because they need permission to put the banners up. She said that she was concerned about the money for this. She said the Library would put up \$1,000 for a piece of it. She said that they were asking the Arts Commission for \$1,000 that will put it together for 4 banners with a \$300-350 honorarium to the artists, which she knew was not very much, but it was more than what they did on Washington Street. She said it will pay for the quote from Minuteman to reproduce the art on the banner. She said she thought they could save the banners, so they could put them out every year and maybe add to them. She said the election is in 12 weeks and she was worried that they didn't have enough money to put them up. She said the Library could do 2 banners.

Ms. Grudin said that if they couldn't do any art gallery or banners for the NICE Festival, could they allocate that money from last year to this. Ms. Church said that they would have to use this year's budget. Ms. Grudin said that this was a worthy cause and she was going to ask about using them every year and talk to the DMV about posting something there, because you can register to vote right there.

Ms. Bradley said that original artwork in service of the public good really makes the City stand out. She said this would be really unique and stand for Norwalk, which is a really artsy community.

Mr. Alan said he felt the concern on the budget. He said they thought they had more than they do now.

Ms. Grudin was wondering if they could do 1 banner for \$500, as opposed to 2. She said that watching John Lewis's funeral and learning what he went through to get people the ability to vote, and along with the Suffragettes and the anniversary of women's right to vote as well. She said it is important that new generations learn about how important it is and how they had to fight for it. She said it's the thing to do and wondered if it was going to be up at the end of the month or in September.

Ms. Bradley said the election is in 12 weeks, so they probably have about a month to do it in.

Mr. Kaspr said he thought there was flexibility here. He said they could probably do one really impactful banner. He said that flexibility would be key for doing something like this.

Ms. Alan said that the original idea was that the Library was going to donate \$1,000. Ms. Bradley said they will still do that. She said she thought it was a great combination of great civic responsibility and looking at what the artistic interpretation would be. She said that they knew more about how much to give for honorariums. She just knew that making a 3' x 8' banner was about \$150 from Minuteman Press and that is how she based her numbers.

Mr. Kaspr said they landed on \$300 for an honorarium to try to encourage people to try to submit artwork. He said that he would submit artwork and forego the honorarium just to try to potentially throw that \$300 back to production or another artist. He said it is just to encourage people to apply.

Ms. Grudin said the Library gets a lot of traffic, but she was trying to think of 3 other locations for the banners.

Ms. Matuska said she thought it would be nice if they had one at the Lockwood Mathews Mansion fence near the highway exit. Mr. Straniti said those are mansion spots and Stepping Stones' signs and they would need to seek approval from the mansion to post there, and he doubted they would approve that, but it might be something to check. He said that it is private and belongs to them.

Ms. Grudin said they'd put one down at the beach. Ms. Bradley asked if there was anywhere in SoNo. Mr. Kaspr said he had been meaning to swing by - he said there are empty storefronts that might be a possibility. He said he also wandered around Norwalk Hospital and the New Canaan into the Silvermine area. He said that as you go under Route 7, there are giant visible fences all along that area by Riverside Drive. He said he was up to suggestions for other locations that were really prominent.

Mr. Alan said that he wanted to say why he was in favor of it. He said they just launched the Mayor's Gallery right before and as COVID was hitting. He said that largely nobody has even seen it yet. City Hall has been closed, so once it reopens, that show is almost new again. He said there was no rush to do another Mayor's Gallery show right away.

Mr. Smyth said there is nothing else they've been really working on until a vaccine is in.

****MR. SMYTH MOVED FOR THE APPROPRIATION OF \$1,000 FOR THE "GET OUT THE VOTE" BANNER PROJECT**

****MS. MATUSKA SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES with one abstention (Kaspr).**

Ms. Grudin asked Ms. Anderson if she was a part of the League of Women Voters. Ms. Anderson replied no, but Ms. Bradley replied that she was. Ms. Grudin said that maybe they could be involved with maybe a small ceremony as the banners go up.

Mr. Kaspr said that if anyone knew of a wall, he would be happy to paint a "Get Out The Vote" mural for free. He said he would cover the coast and if anyone had information on a wall, he would be absolutely happy to do that.

OLD BUSINESS

MLK Jr. Corridor Project

Mr. Alan said that Janet Evelyn is out of town, so he didn't know if any progress had been made.

Mr. Smyth said they have to light a fire under the whole thing because it has to get going. Mr. Alan and Ms. Church agreed.

Ms. Church said if the non-rollover of the budget at this point is any indication, they need to make sure to spend the entirety of the \$50,000 or it is going to go away.

Mr. Smyth said the deadline is 11 months.

Ms. Church said that their fiscal year is July 1-June 30. She said they let them process invoices within a month, unless it is after the close. Anything after that, she would have to get rollover approval for anything outstanding.

Mr. Smyth suggested that Mr. Alan starts an email chain with the folks that are on that list that want to do it and see if Janet can respond. Mr. Kaspr said there was a little momentum, but where they left it was where they would get a couple small walking tours to identify some possible sites. He said they had the boundaries drawn up before.

Mr. Smyth said that they should meet at least before the end of the month. Mr. Alan said that, even though he thought it was the right move to have a special committee on this and to have Janet as the leader of that committee, he sees it as a component of Infrastructure, so they definitely need that momentum from the Arts Commission to push this along.

Mr. Smyth said let's go. Mr. Alan agreed.

“Get Out The Vote” Campaign (cont'd.)

Mr. Alan said that, as far as the “Get Out The Vote” thing, somebody mentioned the women's right to vote, 19th Amendment anniversary on August 26th. He said that one of the things that the State's Office of the Arts is doing is making a statewide happening where they are trying to get state buildings and iconic businesses to be lit up with purple and gold lights to celebrate them. He said that maybe that purple and gold element for the 19th Amendment could be worked into the banner.

Ms. Grudin mentioned the garage near the Yankee Doodle Bridge. She said maybe they could light up the SoNo sign downtown, since they do Christmas colors. Mr. Alan said he hadn't heard about any City entities doing it, but the Wall Street Neighborhood Association is trying to light up some of Wall Street for that. He said it would be great if they could, but with City Hall closed it's tough.

Mr. Smyth said he sees his son post a blizzard of crap on Instagram every day, but the message he was thinking was - “if you're angry you protest, but if you're smart, you vote”. He said that he was trying to move some people from being angry to actually taking some action. He said they feel good to protest, but to actually make change, you have to register and vote. He said that it is not as sexy as going out in the street.

Mr. Alan asked what Mr. Smyth thought about supporting this on social media as well. Mr. Smyth said this was a great idea. Mr. Alan said he liked that idea.

Ms. Anderson asked to comment on this. She said that she didn't think she would make them oppositional. She said she thought if you are angry, you protest, *and* when you're smart, you vote. Mr. Smyth agreed and said that it was all positive. Ms. Anderson said that it was inclusive. Mr. Smyth said that the first step is protest, the second step is vote.

Mr. Alan asked to follow up with Mr. Kaspr and Ms. Anderson offline.

Mr. Smyth invited Mr. O'Callaghan to participate in the Communications Committee. He said they could definitely get involved in social media and they could use a younger person's perspective, working with Michelle. Ms. Grudin said that, even with the voting campaign, he could have his perspective as well.

Mr. O'Callaghan said he wanted to get involved wherever he could.

Ms. Grudin said that by watching John Lewis's funeral and a documentary about Martin Luther King Jr. and seeing the people that worked with him, she asked why they don't have this in school more often, because they learn so much about what they went through to vote. She said they take it for granted now.

ADJOURNMENT

****MR. SMYTH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:00 PM**

****MS. MATUSKA SECONDED**

****MOTION PASSES UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Anaya Sheils
Telesco Secretarial Services