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Power of culture

UNOFFICIAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL AT ITS NEXT MEETING

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-SIXTY FOURTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2024

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Rhonda Anderson
Emily Bramhall
Simone Early
Donna Haghigat (arrived later)
Secretary Yvonne Hao
Cecil Barron Jensen
Diane Asadorian Masters
Allyce Najimy
Ashley Occhino
Ellice Patterson
Mark Snyder
Julie Wake

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Christian Kelly, Sara Glidden, Erik Holmgren, Lisa Simmons, and Lindiana Flores; New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill Executive Director Grace Elton; Mayor Michael McCabe and Peter Miller of Westfield; Stephanie Colon and Kalya Rodriguez of Holyoke; and Doug Orifice and Kristen Kenny of Watertown.

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 12:13PM and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement.

After David read the statement, the Chair welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the meeting. He then invited New England Botanic Garden (NEBG) at Tower Hill Executive Director Grace Elton to say a few words. Grace welcomed the Council and told them about the mission and current exhibitions and projects of NEBG.

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The Chair then let Council Members know Governor Maura Healey had provided a video address for the meeting, and he asked staff to play it. In her message the Governor charged the Council with taking bold action to continue the Agency's work of fostering a creative, equitable, vibrant cultural sector across Massachusetts.

The Chair then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the August 22, 2024 Council Meeting included in their meeting materials and if they had, he would look for a motion to approve them. Mark Snyder moved to approve the minutes and Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that David Kong, Petrina Martin, Iván Espinoza-Madrigal, Donna Haghghat and Anika Lopes were absent, and Secretary Yvonne Hao abstained it was

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the August 22, 2024 Council Meeting in the form presented.

Chair's Report

The Chair thanked the Council for their work together and within their committees; explaining that he recently changed the name of the Grants Committee to the Programs Committee to more closely align the Committee with the Agency's strategic priorities. Grant making will continue to be a significant part of the work of Mass Cultural Council, and approving grants will continue to be the main part of the Committee's work. However, it's becoming clear the Agency can have enormous value even to those who do not receive direct grant funding. This shift in the name to Programs Committee will signal a new outlook and will deepen the engagement of the Committee and its members to become thought partners and advisors. Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis, who previously served as Chair of the Grants Committee, echoed Chair Marc Carroll's remarks and added that this will enable Committee Members to advise on the full depth and breadth of the Agency's work. Julie Wake who serves as Co-Chair of the Programs Committee agreed the change made by the Chair beautifully aligns with the mission of the Committee and will enhance the work and focus of its members.

The Chair then encouraged Council Members to connect with their Board Buddies and said that he would like to see more opportunities for Council Members to network and connect; he believes the collective expertise of the Council is strong and that more connection will foster new ideas and bolster the Agency as it pursues its goals.

He added that having a meeting in person provides an opportunity to connect and conduct business and to explore a Massachusetts cultural organization. He again thanked Grace and her team for hosting the Council at NEBG. The next full Council Meeting in February will be virtual, held via Zoom, and the Council will meet again in person in April for its Council Retreat – this will be held at the Massachusetts State House in Boston.

The Chair stated that Mass Cultural Council is in compliance with the Massachusetts Public Meeting Law which currently allows for some meetings to be held virtually. Should the requirements of the law change, the Council will be updated as soon as possible. At meetings slated to take place in person, virtual participation will be made available upon any request for access accommodations.

That concluded the Chair's report and there were no questions. The Chair then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his report.

Executive Director's Report

Michael began by congratulating Ché Anderson who recently ran the New York City Marathon. The Advancement Committee, of which Ché is Co-Chair, met in mid-October and discussed the Agency's growing Advancement efforts. Offers have been made for two new full-time Advancement staff positions; a public announcement will be made in the coming weeks once offers have been accepted. The most immediate goal of the new Advancement team, which will be led by Deputy Executive Director David Slatery, is to build the infrastructure for the Agency's Advancement work: outlining goals, researching relationship and project management tools, developing internal and external communication strategies, and professional development. Michael then shared a brief list of recent meetings and events he and David participated in with an eye towards pursuing Advancement goals.

Michael shared that Civic Moxie has been engaged as a consultant for the Agency's redesign of its Cultural Districts Initiative. A task force has been formed and includes leaders of both independent and Executive branch state agencies as well as representatives from the private sector.

He then took a moment and introduced Lindiana Flores, a new full-time staff member on the Programs Team. Lindiana's primary focus is supporting Operating Grants for Organizations and the Card to Culture program. She worked previously at the Greater Worcester Community Foundation and the City of Worcester's Cultural Development division. She is also the owner and Executive Director of Raices Latin Dance.

Michael then gave an update on two national conferences at which Mass Cultural Council was invited to present: the Grantmakers in the Arts conference where Michael spoke on a panel about cross-sector policy work and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies where Michael and Art Pharmacy Chief Executive Officer Chris Appleton spoke to a packed room about the Agency's arts-based social prescription work. Both engagements yielded new connections and learning and raised awareness nationally of the work being done in Massachusetts.

Michael let Council Members know that an equity report is included in their meeting materials. Guided by the d/Deaf & Disability Equity Plan, Mass Cultural Council has contracted a screen reader user/expert to test the accessibility of changes made to the creative employment website, Hireculture.org. The Tribal Cultural Council program has launched with the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribal Council as the first Council ready to take applications. Michael anticipates more Tribal Cultural Council's being established in early 2025. Additionally, the Arts & Cultural Accessibility Self-Assessment tool is now available, and UP organizations have been notified that they will complete that part of their participation in the UP program this year. A webinar with Open Door Arts to promote this new tool is scheduled for early December.

All funds for the MITx program have been raised. Content creation will begin in the spring, with filming to begin in the summer and a launch planned for January 2026. Michael then asked Program Manager Erik Holmgren to give a brief update on the Agency's arts-based social prescription work.

Erik shared that social prescription continues to grow. In the first two months of the fiscal year Art Pharmacy received 153 prescriptions. In the last two months that number doubled to approximately 300 prescriptions. In addition, Council Member Petrina Martin helped staff arrange a meeting with the heads of several departments at Boston Medical Center to provide a briefing on social prescription work. Art Pharmacy has been able to secure approval from the Commonwealth to use Opioid Settlement funds for social prescription in Franklin, MA, through a connection with a Local Cultural Council member. Finally, Boston Children's Hospital is currently engaged with Art Pharmacy in some promising discussions.

The Chair asked Erik if the doubling of social prescriptions was expected or came as a surprise; Erik explained that it is a very positive development but is in keeping with the growth staff has seen. There is much enthusiasm for the work.

There were no further questions. The Chair asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her report.

Public Affairs Report

Bethann shared the good news that the Economic Development Bond Bill known as the Mass Leads Act which includes several elements of interest to Mass Cultural Council was passed the previous evening.

Secretary Yvonne Hao, who is a Council Member *and* serves as the Secretary of Economic Development, was present and voiced her excitement and gratitude that this legislation is moving ahead as it will greatly benefit the creative economy including the Cultural Facilities Fund.

A celebration of Operating Grants for Organizations will be held on December 2nd at the Heritage Museums & Gardens and all Council Members are invited to attend.

MASSCreative's annual Advocacy Day at the Massachusetts State House will take place on April 30th – the same day the Council is scheduled to meet and have its retreat. As such, the meeting and retreat will be held at the Massachusetts State House.

There were no questions for Bethann. The Chair asked Senior Director of Business Operations and Chief Financial Officer Catherine Cheng-Anderson for her update.

Business Operations Report

Catherine let Council Members know that she had revised the Agency's Internal Control Plan. The new plan was distributed to staff earlier in November. Stating that since our 2018 Internal Control Plan, there has been significant changes at the agency—new leadership, new staff, new roles, and new procedures/policies. The updated FY2025 Internal Control Plan reflects all these changes, offering a comprehensive roadmap for managing operations, safeguarding finances, and reflects compliance with State Finance Law and Comptroller Policies. Catherine stated this plan is integral to our agency's long-term success, and we are committed to annual updates to ensure it remains relevant and effective.

The agency is four months into the fiscal year, and spending remains on target or slightly below projections across most areas. Spending typically lags in the first half of the year

due to the time required to set up contracts, pay out grants and initiate services/projects. As contracts are finalized and projects advance, we anticipate a steady increase in spending, aligning with our projections for the latter part of the fiscal year.

There were no questions for Catherine. The Chair let Council Members know that there would be a 10-minute break.

Presentation: Creative Sector Inventory

The Chair welcomed Council Members back and asked Senior Director of Program Operations Jen Lawless to introduce the next presentation. Jen introduced Teresa Nelson of Diversity North, who led a cultural asset inventory project for the agency and was there to share the results of that work with the Council. Teresa shared a robust data presentation and analysis of the data. A copy of that presentation is available on request.

Following the presentation there was a brief discussion by the Council. Members asked for clarity on what the term artist meant in the context of the study; Teresa explained that it was a broad term encompassing many art forms. The Council also discussed how the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences are defined, Teresa agreed to follow up with the definition used during the data collection. There was a brief discussion about looking at the data by county; Teresa confirmed that it is possible to explore the data using that metric. Council Members asked if part-time and unpaid workers were included in the data collection and Teresa clarified that workers who identified as an artist as their primary professional identity were included regardless of whether that work was part-time, paid, or unpaid. It was also clarified that arts administrators are considered cultural workers. Finally, the Council discussed how the data might be used. Michael shared that what is clear based on even the initial review of the data is that there is a need in the cultural sector that Mass Cultural Council likely cannot fulfill just through grantmaking; and this is why the Agency is prioritizing advancement work.

That concluded the presentation by Teresa Nelson of Diversity North.

The Chair moved to the next item on the agenda: the designation of new Cultural Districts. Program Manager Lisa Simmons gave a presentation on each of the three districts being considered for designation: the Downtown Westfield Cultural District, Holyoke Puerto Rican Cultural District, and Watertown Cultural District. A copy of the presentation is available on request. After the presentation, Allyce Najimy asked if the staff ever convened the Cultural Districts and Lisa confirmed that this is done monthly via Zoom. There were no further questions.

The Chair asked for a motion to approve the designation of the three new Cultural Districts. Mark Snyder moved to approve the designations; Diane Asadorian Masters seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that David Kong, Anika Lopes, Petrina Martin, and Iván Espinoza-Madrigal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the designation of cultural districts in Westfield, Holyoke and Watertown, Massachusetts in accordance with the memoranda presented to the Council Meeting.

Following the vote, representatives from each of the three newly designated districts spoke briefly to the Council. They expressed their gratitude for the Council's unanimous vote and shared briefly what their plans were for the districts. In attendance were Mayor Michael McCabe of Westfield who was joined by Peter Miller; Stephanie Colon and Kalya Rodriguez of Holyoke; and Doug Orifice and Kristen Kenny of Watertown.

The Chair asked Jen to introduce the final item on the agenda: additional FY25 grant and program recommendations including grants for the Cultural Investment Portfolio and Operating Grants for Organizations; Festivals & Projects; and Creative Projects for Schools. Jen gave a brief overview of all three programs and let the Council know the Programs Committee had voted to recommend the allocations at its last meeting. Programs Committee Co-Chair Julie Wake shared that the Programs Committee had indeed had a thoughtful discussion about the grants and found them to align with the Agency's mission and strategic priorities; they unanimously voted to recommend the grants to the full Council. There were no questions. David briefly reminded the Council of the Conflicts of Interest list included in their materials and asked if there were any updates to it. There were none. The Chair asked for a motion to approve the grant and program recommendations. Mark Snyder moved to approve the recommendations; Ché Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that David Kong, Anika Lopes, Petrina Martin, Emily Bramhall, Ellice Patterson and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent, and that Ashley Occhino abstained it was

RESOLVED: To approve the approach by staff to provide up to \$7,240,000 in unrestricted operating support grants to cultural organizations under the Cultural Investment Portfolio program and new Operating Grants for Organizations as described in the memo provided at the Programs Committee Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve a grant allocation totaling \$1,850,000 to the Festivals and Projects program as presented at the Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: To approve \$1,500,000 in Creative Projects for Schools grants as presented at the Council Meeting

The following Council Members abstained from voting and/or discussing grants pertaining to the organizations listed under their name:

Marc Carroll

- a. Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra
- b. The Rivers School

Jo-Ann Davis

- a. The Care Center
- b. Springfield Museums
- c. MASSCreative

Cecil Barron Jensen

- a. Artists Association of Nantucket
- b. Egan Maritime Institute
- c. Nantucket Cultural District

Che Anderson

- a. Worcester County Mechanics Association (Mechanics Hall)
- b. Worcester Historical Museum
- c. Worcester Art Museum
- d. Institute of Contemporary Art

Donna Haghighat

- a. WAM Theater

Julie Wake

- a. Arts Foundation of Cape Cod

Rhonda Anderson

- a. Ohketeau Cultural Center
- b. New England Foundation for the Arts
- c. Mass Humanities

Ellice Patterson

- a. Abilities Dance

Ashley Occhino

- a. Fall River Arts and Culture Coalition/One South Coast Community Foundation
- b. Southeastern Massachusetts Visitors Bureau
- c. SouthCoast Community Foundation
- d. Society of Arts and Crafts

There were no further comments or questions, and the Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:54pm.