



Power of culture

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

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIFTIETH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM

Council Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Sherry Dong
Sandra Dunn
Simone Early
Karen Hurvitz
Matthew Keator
Susan Leff
Victoria Marsh
Ann Murphy
Allyce Najjimy
Robert Price
Troy Siebels

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Luis Cotto, Erik Holmgren, Käthe Swaback, and Diane Daily; and guests Joshua Anderson and Christie Gibson.

Nina opened the meeting by causing the following to be read into the record.

Please note that this meeting is an open meeting of a public body subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A notice of this meeting together with the

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agenda was posted on Mass Cultural Council's website 48 or more hours ago (excluding weekends and holidays).

This meeting shall be open and accessible to all members of the public except at such times when this body has voted to go into closed executive session under the Open Meeting Law.

Please note that this body has invited staff of Mass Cultural Council to be present at the meeting.

Mass Cultural Council welcomes members of the public to attend its public meetings. Under the Open Meeting Law, however, this is not a public hearing and public testimony will not be taken. Individuals may not address the meeting without permission of the Chair.

Any member of the public may record this meeting provided that they first notify the Chair and must not interfere with the meeting. The Chair will then inform the members of the meeting that they are being recorded.

This meeting is a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified by the Governor's recent emergency declaration. Only Committee members, Council members and invited staff will be able to address the meeting. All other persons will be muted. Please note that anyone attempting to disrupt the meeting may be muted, have their ability to project video images shut off or even removed from the meeting, at the discretion of the Chair.

Draft minutes of the open session of this meeting shall be kept and shall be posted on Mass Cultural Council's website no later than 30 days after the meeting provided that such minutes shall not be considered official until they have been approved by this body in open session. Individuals asserting a violation of the Open Meeting Law may file a complaint with this body within 30 days or with the Attorney General's office thereafter.

As Chair, Nina welcomed all participants to the 150th meeting of the Mass Cultural Council. She then called for a vote on the minutes from the Council's 149th meeting which was held on January 7th. Barbara Schaffer Bacon moved to approve the minutes. Kathleen Castro seconded the motion. Deputy Director David Slatery called the roll. Council Members Robert Price and Simone Early abstained from the vote as they were not yet appointed to the Council when the January 7th meeting took place. Acknowledging that Council Member Lillian Do was not present it was

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Forty-Ninth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council

Nina then took a moment to welcome newly appointed Council Members Simone Early and Robert Price to the Council before beginning her Chair's update: one year ago, Massachusetts shut down due to the Coronavirus pandemic. The months that followed were painful with every area of the cultural sector suffering. Mass Cultural Council staff and Council persevered. Nina expressed thanks to all. Five surveys of the field have been completed and reveal \$588M in losses, we will hear more later in the meeting

about the Agency's recovery efforts. Nina then asked Vice Chair Marc Carroll to deliver his update.

Marc noted that this is the 46th day of Executive Director Michael Bobbitt's first 100 days leading the Agency. During his first six weeks Michael has been getting to know the programs of Mass Cultural Council and the people who make these programs so effective. Marc thanked Council members and staff who are serving on Michael's transition team. Michael's calendar has been full as he has been taking many meetings with staff and legislators in addition to hosting a weeklong statewide listening tour. He will be meeting one-on-one with each Council member in April. Later this month, Michael, along with Nina and Marc will meet with Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito. He is also continuing to meet with philanthropic organizations, artists, and cultural leaders.

Nina thanked Marc for his update, then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael thanked Nina and Marc and noted that it has been a very busy time. He thanked leadership and staff for their support giving special thanks to Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner and Public Engagement Manager Ann Petruccelli Moon. Michael is looking forward to his one-on-one meetings with Council Members so that he can learn about each of them and their priorities. Another transition team meeting is scheduled for May. Michael is looking forward to meeting with Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito and will have a strategy meeting to refine his messaging later this week. He has called on staff for their input, especially with regards to the bond bill. His first 46 days have been full of meetings, reading, and learning. Staff is presently doing a light audit, looking at programs to better understand the Agency's impact and see if we might be stretched too thin to accomplish our goals. Michael is starting to have some vision impulses, but not a full vision just yet.

There were no questions for Michael from Council members. Nina then asked Bethann Steiner to give her Advocacy update.

Bethann echoed Michael in noting that it has been a very busy time. A good deal of work has been focused on legislative outreach and media strategy. On Monday, the Agency published the results of its fifth Covid impact survey and, as expected, numbers are growing and are increasingly dire. This fifth survey was timed deliberately as the Agency wanted new impact numbers to share with Beacon Hill as the one-year mark of the pandemic approaches. After releasing the new data, the Agency received a week of strong media attention including a spread in the *Boston Globe* as well as editorials in the *Globe* and the *Salem News*. Michael has been on the radio, and State House News picked up the story as well. At this point news of our survey data has been published in all regions of the Commonwealth and all coverage mentioned the importance of the cultural sector to the overall economic health of Massachusetts. Michael, David Slatery, and Bethann testified last Tuesday before the Joint Committee on Ways & Means seeking a \$20M allocation for the Agency. As staff makes that request, they are billing the annual line item as a stabilization force for the sector. Bethann reminded Council Members that the Governor's H1 budget proposed a 10.4% reduction to the Agency's line item; she feels staff had a productive conversation with the Ways & Means Committee. Now attention turns to scheduling meetings with legislators on both sides of the aisle to introduce Michael as the Agency's new Executive Director, discuss our

budget ask, and seek support. Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Chair Carole Fiola will be the Agency's champion when the House budget debate begins next month. In terms of relief legislation, Chair Kennedy on the Senate side has filed a bill to establish a cultural recovery plan. This would be a new fund administered by the Agency seeded with dollars from the federal government. In the bill, Chair Kennedy included \$200M for the fund with the requirement that Mass Cultural Council will use the funds to make recovery grants to artists, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit cultural organizations. MASSCreative is playing a huge role in advocating for this, and the bill has 30 co-sponsors so far. A smaller piece of legislation we are focused on is the Local Cultural Council (LCC) membership expansion bill which we are working on with Representative Ken Gordon and Senator Adam Hinds. This bill will allow more people to be appointed to and serve on LCCs. So far feedback has been positive and the bill has 15 co-sponsors. Scheduling meetings is ongoing, we currently have meetings scheduled with Senate President Karen Spilka, House Ways & Means Chairman Aaron Michlewitz, and others. Bethann concluded by thanking Council Members for their support.

Nina thanked Bethann for her report noting that on a weekly basis her inbox pings and it's another fantastic piece of news from Bethann. Nina encouraged all Council Members to read what Bethann sends and to look at the Agency's blog. Jo-Ann Davis agreed with Nina and praised Bethann's communications to the Council.

Nina then asked Deputy Director David Slatery for his financial update.

David noted that we are three quarters of the way through the fiscal year, yet, due to this odd COVID year, we only had our spending plan approved 10 weeks ago; we are just getting started. All Council Members should have received a report on the Gaming Mitigation Fund. The Agency receives 2% of all casino tax revenues and have applied those funds to different programs. Staff recently submitted a long, 13-page report to the legislature on the use of the funds. To date, we have spent \$4.7M of the casino funds and have \$2.25M unspent. David further reported that, through usage of certain grant that were approved but not requested this year, we were able to spend \$1.171M on \$1500 relief grants to 781 individual artists – all artists who applied for grants were given grants. To make up the difference and be in a position to give grants to all artists who applied, Funds were redirected from the STARS residency program – this money typically goes to teaching artists. This year, due to remote school programming, most residencies didn't happen and we were able to reallocate the funds to support artists. Finally, David reported that in June 2019 we were notified by the National Endowment for the Arts' Office of the Inspector General that they were auditing the Council usage of NEA funds over a three-year period. We know that the NEA began auditing all states a year ago, and we were in the second group. We responded and supplied all requested information. An auditor from the NEA visited us in August 2019 with the goal of having a report completed in the fall of 2019. Unfortunately, there was a delay and when they were ready to ask for more information, the pandemic had started causing a further delay and the audit was not complete until a few weeks ago when the formal report was issued; this is why Council Members are just hearing about this audit now. We have been notified that while we complied with the requirements, we had not complied with some reporting obligations. We've fixed all of the issues identified and have implemented necessary changes and will further document those fixes per the audit recommendations. Another issue was that in FY16 and FY18 we used folk arts funds to fund traditional arts fellowship grants, and the auditor found that those were "honorific" programs for which NEA funds may not be used so we are identifying some other eligible

costs for those years so as to avoid refunding \$60,000. Michael submitted our responses to the NEA last Friday, we expect no further publicity. If anyone would like a copy of the report, we can share it with you along with the details of our corrective plan in May. David concluded his report there and was happy to take questions.

Sandra Dunn had a question pertaining to the FY21 budget asking why there was a substantial difference in the line item for consultants and panelists, referencing line 16 in the budget. David explained that this relates to the fact that we didn't spend it all in FY20 and when we say "panelists" most grant program applications are considered by outside, hired panelists. The Agency didn't spend all of the allocation for panelists in FY20 due to certain programs being delayed in light of the pandemic.

There were no further questions for David. Nina asked Michael for his report on the Agency's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access (DEIA) efforts. Michael told Council Members that he recently met with Gwendolyn Van Sant of Multicultural BRIDGE who gave him an update on the Agency's work with BRIDGE thus far. He has asked Gwendolyn to revise her plan for Mass Cultural Council. Michael has also met with the Agency's two internal DEIA-focused working groups. Next month, staff launches its race equity action plan. Michael will give a lecture to the staff and then staff will go off on their own to build ideas. Council Members will have a chance to share their input on the race equity plan.

Nina then invited Mass Cultural Council Program Manager Erik Holmgren and Program Officer Käthe Swaback to begin their presentation to the Council on the Agency's Creative Youth Development programs with a strong focus on the newly established BIPOC Alumni Council. Via an extensive PowerPoint presentation, Erik and Käthe walked Council Members through each Creative Youth Development Program – YouthReach, Ser Hacer, Amplify, and the new BIPOC Alumni Council outlining the guidelines, participation, and extraordinary impact of each. A copy of the full presentation is available upon request.

When Erik and Käthe concluded their presentation, Michael added that in his years running a children's theater in Maryland, he saw that creative youth development was huge. The investment we make now creates the future of the cultural sector; these young people are the artists that will be civically engaged. As Michael is doing his reading as part of his onboarding process, he is noticing what is happening national and internationally in the cultural sector and other sectors. He recently read an article that said members of Generation Z are the smartest humans to ever exist on the planet, mostly because of the access to information they have in their pockets. Investing in them and getting them to be more artfully-minded should be a huge focus of the next 10 to 15 years.

Erik explained further that this is about short-term elevating of voices. We want to bring these young people into our Agency. Long-term it's about bringing them into our field so that they can lead it. We know that substantial barriers exist, and this is a first step. Erik thanked Council Members for their support, noting that 27 years of support for a grant program isn't common.

Nina opened the meeting up to questions from Council Members.

Karen Barry began by saying that every time Erik Holmgren speaks, she gets excited. She loves his energy and vision. Karen thinks the presentation was unbelievable and thanked Erik and Kätthe for it. She is excited to celebrate the work that's been done over the last 27 years and see what can be done to take it to the next level.

Jo-Ann Davis echoed Karen's remarks and congratulated Erik and Kätthe on the foundation they've built for future leadership. She found the stories they shared inspiring. Jo-Ann then inquired as to the age range for the program. Erik stated that the age range is 13 to 24 but noting that in Venezuela where a good deal of creative youth development began with El Sistema the age range is far more broadly. This is something the Agency should continue to think about.

Simone Early asked if young people might eventually be appointed to the Agency's Governing Council. Nina explained that currently members are appointed by the Governor and the 19 seats are representative of each county in the Commonwealth. Nina isn't sure if there is an age requirement for serving on the Council, but it's something that can be looked into. Michael added that staff is seeking feedback on the Agency's race equity plan from the BIPOC Alumni Council members.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon seconded everyone's appreciation of the quality and direction of the work and wanted to remind staff of the slide on demographics that showed 3% of participants were from rural communities. This is something the Agency needs to work on its reach across the state with regards to creative youth development. Michael mentioned that during his listening sessions, this was something that came up multiple times and something that he is focused on. Erik added that staff had not received many applications from rural areas, but the applications they did receive were from programs that work with young people who know a good deal about outreach and inclusivity.

Cecil Barron Jensen asked why the young people in the program are called alumni and what organizations are the feeders of the program. Kätthe explained that the participants are alumni of Agency-funded creative youth development programs.

Robert Price asked if as the Agency creates more forums where young people and adults are commingled, do we feel comfortable that we have the infrastructure relating to codes of conduct, background searches and other standards of operations to make sure we are maintaining safety and decorum. Kätthe clarified that the BIPOC Alumni Council is comprised of young people aged 18 to 24, and Erik offered that this is a concern and a challenge of working with youth. In this particular pilot, everyone is 18 or older, but with other programs like Amplify there is a question of in what ways are we able to be in touch with participants. Is it through an organization, should we always have someone copied on emails, especially when we have programs that work with young people involved with the Department of Youth Services (DYS) – their face cannot be shown, their name cannot be used? We rely on the programs we fund to make sure they have that code of conduct, but we are revising our applications for next year and looking at our policies.

Nina asked if there was any other business. David mentioned that each Council member will soon receive a Council Member Information Form to complete. They are asked to return forms to staff at their earliest convenience. David also noted that the Council's next meeting would take place on May 18th. (The time has since been to an **11:30am start time.**)

Jo-Ann Davis again commended staff and especially the leadership team of Dave, Jenifer Lawless, and Bethann on the hard work done throughout the pandemic. Nina agreed with Jo-Ann and thanked her and as Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:30am.