

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

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-FIFTY EIGHTH MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22, 2023

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Che Anderson
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Cecil Barron Jensen
Jo-Ann Davis
Simone Early
Matthew Keator
Ann Murphy
Allyce Najimy
Mark Snyder

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Charles Baldwin, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, Carolyn Cole, Diane Daily, Lisa Simmons, and Kate McDougall; Meg O'Brien from The Huntington Theatre; MA Poetry Out Loud Champion Jaden Riley; John Bye and Ilse Godfrey, Co-Chairs of the Cummington Cultural District Committee; and Steve Poltorzycki, Chair of the Lexington Council for the Arts.

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:00am and asked Deputy Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement:

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 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.

This meeting is a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified under current law to permit online open meetings. This meeting is being broadcast to the public on a publicly available YouTube or other channel as described in the publicly posted meeting notice. Only Council members, staff and invited participants and guests will be provided access to the Zoom or other videoconferencing platform hosting the meeting. As a safety measure, to prevent disruption of the meeting or non-public communications among the participants, the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council has asked staff to implement the following protocols for participants in on-line meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

- Any "chat" or similar function on the Zoom platform hosting the meeting shall be disabled.
- Other than Council members or participants specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, all Zoom platform participants will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents or project or type images or text.
- All participants in the Zoom platform must enter a waiting room and digitally sign-in before being admitted.
- Any attendee in the Zoom platform who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

This meeting 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 they do not interfere with the meeting. The Chair will then inform the members of the meeting that they are being recorded.

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.

Executive Director Michael Bobbitt then introduced the meeting's Mission Moment, today focused on Poetry Out Loud. The Agency's partner in Poetry Out Loud is the Huntington Theatre; Meg O'Brien from the Huntington gave a brief overview of the program, and then 2023 MA Poetry Out Loud Champion Jaden Riley recited two poems: *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* by Langston Hughes and *April Midnight* by Arthur Symons. Jaden attends the John D. O'Bryant School of Mathematics and Science in Roxbury. Program Manager Diane Daily made a few brief remarks about the program and let Council Members know that she would be retiring in April after more than 20 years with the Agency.

Nina thanked Diane for her many years with Mass Cultural Council. She then asked Council Members if they had had a chance to review the Minutes from their last meeting on January 26, 2023 and, if so, she would look for a motion to

approve them. Barbara Schaffer Bacon moved to approve the minutes, and Che Anderson seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Ann Murphy and Mark Snyder abstained from the vote (but were still present for quorum purposes) as they had not attended the January Meeting and Simone Early was temporarily away for the vote and noting that Troy Siebels, Kathleen Castro, Barbara Krauthamer, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Fifty-Seventh Meeting of Mass Cultural Council.

Nina took a moment to welcome and introduce Mark Snyder, the newest member of the Council, she then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael let the Council know the last two months have been busy, primarily with the release of pandemic monies – notifications, contracting, working with the Comptroller's Office. The fiscal team is working hard, and the rest of the staff is pitching in to help; the Agency is also hosting grant celebrations across the state. Staff is deeply embedded in strategic planning work which will inform planning for next fiscal year. Budget advocacy for FY24 is beginning, Bethann Steiner will share more on that topic.

Nina thanked Michael for his report and noted that attendance at pandemic grant celebrations has been impressive. Vice Chair Marc Carroll attended a celebration in Beverly earlier that week and said it was wonderful. Nina then asked Program Officer Carolyn Cole for her presentation on the two proposed Cultural Districts seeking approval from the Council today.

Carolyn first introduced John Bye and Ilse Godfrey, Co-Chairs of the Cummington Cultural District Committee who joined the meeting, then shared her screen and gave a presentation on the proposed District which, if approved, would become arguably the most rural of all Massachusetts cultural districts. A copy of the presentation is available upon request. Once the presentation was completed, John Bye thanked the Council for their consideration and explained that the town had worked on its proposal for three years. The designation would help the town celebrate its rich history and provide the community with an opportunity to bring residents together, attract visitors, and spur economic growth.

Nina thanked Carolyn and John and stated that if there were no questions, she would look for a motion to approve the proposed designation. Barbara Schaffer moved to approve the designation and Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote all Council Members present were in favor and noting Troy Siebels, Kathleen Castro, Barbara Krauthamer, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED: To approve the designation of a cultural district in Cummington, Massachusetts in accordance with the memoranda presented to the Council Meeting.

Nina congratulated the Cummington representatives, then asked Carolyn for her presentation on the proposed Lexington Cultural District; noting briefly that Lexington is her hometown.

Carolyn introduced Steve Poltorzycki, Chair of the Lexington Council for the Arts who joined the meeting for today's vote, then shared her screen and gave a presentation on the proposed District in Lexington, known for its rich colonial past. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes. At the conclusion of the presentation Steve Poltorzycki thanked the Council for their consideration of the proposed District noting that the town benefits from a mix of historical assets, landmarks, museums and hopes to attract new cultural organizations and businesses if the designation is approved.

Nina thanked Steve and Carolyn and called for a motion to approve the new Cultural District in Lexington. Karen Barry moved to approve the designation and Allyce Najimy seconded the motion. By roll call vote, all present Council members were in favor and noting Troy Siebels, Kathleen Castro, Barbara Krauthamer, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED: To approve the designation of a cultural district in Lexington, Massachusetts in accordance with the memoranda presented to the Council Meeting.

Nina then asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her report on legislative advocacy.

Bethann let Council Members know there is a lot of good news to share. She and Michael are continuing to focus on building partnerships on Beacon Hill, including a strong relationship with the new Healey Driscoll administration; Bethann has heard repeatedly that the Governor and Lieutenant Governor feel strongly about making the arts a priority. When the Governor released her budget on March 1st, she included \$25 million for Mass Cultural Council; this represents an 11% increase for the Agency. Staff reacted with a message of thanks in response and will again share that message on March 31st when testimony is delivered at the House Ways & Means hearing in Gloucester by Deputy Director David Slatery. The Governor also filed a supplemental budget that included \$10 million for the Cultural Facilities Fund. Both bills have a long way to go, staff is letting leadership know the Agency is ready to invest the money equitably across the state. Bethann concluded by thanking Council Members who had attended the Agency's recent pandemic recovery grant celebrations.

Nina thanked Bethann, then asked People & Culture Director Catherine Cheng-Anderson for her Cultural Equity & Access (CEA) update. Catherine let Nina know that Program Officers Cheyenne Cohn-Postell and Charles Baldwin would present today on behalf of the department.

Cheyenne let Council Members know the CEA team has done a good deal of learning, documenting, and operationalizing; and has completed a lion's share of the work included in the Racial Equity Plan. Staff is using this time to reinforce the things they have learned, operationalize the processes that have been created. The team will now expand its focus and create a Native American and Indigenous plan and a Deaf and Disabled plan.

Charles added that the Agency will contract with Art Reach, a Philadelphia non-profit organization devoted to increasing cultural participation among traditionally underrepresented audiences in the disability and low-income sectors, to create its new Deaf and Disabled plan. The Agency will also partner with Open Door Arts (formerly VSA Massachusetts) on a one-year work plan to push a level of accountability for its access practices.

Cheyenne concluded by letting Council Members know that there is a new post on the Agency's Power of Culture blog detailing the processes staff has been operationalizing.

The Chair recognized Karen Barry who stated that she was looking forward to reading the blog post and thanked staff for their efforts; she sincerely appreciates the work of the CEA team.

Nina then asked David for his financial report. David let Council Members know that eight months into the fiscal year the Agency is on track with spending. The fiscal department is remarkably busy processing thousands of contracts and learning a lot. David referred Council Members to the budget spreadsheet in their meeting materials and highlighted that when the Council approved the FY23 spending plan last August, staff anticipated funding 550 projects and festivals; the Agency received 790 applications for Festivals and Projects grants. With that in mind, staff will allocate another \$250-\$260K in available funds so that additional grants can be made. David also let Council Members know that on March 1st the Council submitted its annual report to the legislature on gaming funds and he is happy to circulate the full report to any Council Members who are interested. David noted that the Agency has received \$16.25M in gaming funds since January 2020. Finally, David shared that the Executive Committee met earlier this month and approved out-of-state travel for three members of the leadership team to attend the Grantmakers for Effective Organizations conference in May. There were no questions for David.

Nina then let Council Members know there would be a 10-minute break.

The Council reconvened at 11:05am and turned its attention to the final agenda item: the discussion and approval of the FY24-26 Strategic Plan. Nina explained that work began last June with Strategy Matters, and she thanked Council Members and staff for their help throughout the process. She then asked Vice Chair Marc Carroll to share a brief recap of the March 1st retreat.

Marc explained that Council Members and staff met at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate in Boston for a retreat to discuss the final portion of the strategic plan – goal planning. The retreat was held in a hybrid format with most participants attending in person and some participating virtually, via Zoom. The retreat began with brainstorming and eventually broke into small groups to discuss the topics that will guide the Agency in the coming years. It was a very productive session led by the team from Strategy Matters and Marc is excited to see the Plan presented to the Council for a vote today.

Nina thanked Marc for his summary, and asked Michael to share his report on the process.

Michael explained that the new Strategic Plan sets forth planning for the next three years which will begin tomorrow with a senior staff retreat. Michael proposed two guiding questions at the beginning of the planning process: what is the value of the Agency to people and organizations who do not get funding and what is the Agency uniquely positioned to do as a state arts agency. The Task Force looked at Mass Cultural Council's enabling act and considered how the Agency defines support. Since we only fund a portion of the sector, we need to reflect deeply on those two questions. Council Members will see in the plan the goal of making the Commonwealth a preeminent place for creativity to thrive, a place where the creative sector is valued as essential, animating a thriving cultural ecosystem. These are not just beliefs but intense, deep work aiming for shifts in mindset and systems change that will benefit everyone in the sector. The work might include this sort of systems change, advancing policy with our partners at MassCreative, educating decision-makers, building and deepening relationships with other state agencies, and convening the sector.

Michael continued to explain that to do this work, the Agency has some major tasks to accomplish first. Grant programs must be consolidated as the Agency is over-programmed. Internal processes must be simplified for the benefit of staff and grantees, barriers to entry must be addressed, and we must continue to focus on outreach. The Agency's operations must be aligned with the strategic plan; the operational model is currently complicated. Staff learned a good deal administering the pandemic recovery grant programs, engaging in cross-Agency work, and simplifying grant applications. Sector-wide convenings will be key and internal competencies in research and data collection must be refined. Lastly, the Agency needs to determine what work it will no longer do: duplicative work, work that does not have a significant sector-wide impact, and professional development. There are an incredible number of professional

development opportunities already available, and the Agency should not and cannot effectively compete with them. The focus needs to be on sector-wide convenings, guiding systems change work, consolidating, and realigning. This work will take a couple of years; systems change work will not begin until the latter half of the strategic plan. The plan the Council will see today outlines strategies, but not tactics. Tactics will come later. Strategy Matters will help craft a work plan, and the Council will have the opportunity to weigh in on it; mostly during the annual planning process. Michael then asked if the team from Strategy Matters could share their presentation so Council Members could look at some of the language together. The full presentation is available upon request.

Michael walked Council Members through the proposed new values, vision, and mission statements; Michael is particularly pleased with the revised vision. He then shared key points relating to the Agency's strategy discussing the new guiding principles: investments that advance equity, education and advocacy resulting in transformational change, and elevating and celebrating the sector. Michael also shared what the Agency will no longer do: convenings by grant program, marketing tickets and events, and professional development. The Agency's goals include stewardship, partnerships, and ensuring that internal structures advance the needs of the sector. The Agency plans to increase its use of data and research in support of storytelling.

Michael paused to see if Council Members had questions or feedback. Mark Snyder shared that social media is something that can be enormously useful in increasing the Agency's brand recognition and asked how staff might use social media moving forward. Michael explained that increasing brand awareness is included in the plan, and eventually that goal would be broken down into tasks. Bethann added that the Agency has a vibrant digital and social media practice and that it will continue.

There were no further questions, and Nina asked Katie Stewart Dorfman and Amanda Santos Jewell from Strategy Matters to give an overview of their work steering the strategic planning process for the Agency.

Katie briefly introduced herself and her team and gave a brief overview of the process. Strategy Matters began the process with the goal of creating a plan that would advance the sector to the public with an eye towards equity and the resulting plan sets the Agency on a path to doing just that. Strategy Matters appreciates the efforts of Council Members and staff who participated in the process. The final step in the process will be to look at key indicators and articulate what success will look like for each goal and the overall mission.

That concluded the presentation on the new strategic plan and Nina opened the meeting to discussion and questions from the Council.

Simone Early was part of the Task Force and let her fellow Council Members know that she was impressed with the process and the gathering of information; it was impressive, thorough, and helped the Task Force understand how all elements of the plan would fit together.

Ann Murphy also enjoyed the process and learned a lot. Strategy Matters helped the Task Force identify areas where the Agency needs improvement. She asked when the plan would be shared publicly and what the plan is to do so.

Michael explained that the exact plan is still being defined, but that staff would share the new plan as part of sector-wide convenings in the fall. As an initial step, staff will share a blog post later today if the Council votes to adopt the plan.

Nina added that the Agency is required by the National Endowment for the Arts to conduct a strategic planning process every five years. There were no further questions or discussion, so Nina asked for a motion to adopt the FY24-FY26 strategic plan. Mark Snyder moved to adopt the plan; Allyce Najimy seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting Troy Siebels, Kathleen Castro, Barbara Krauthamer, and Sherry Dong were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve and accept the FY2024-2026 Strategic Plan for the Mass Cultural Council in the form presented to the Council on March 22, 2023

Nina thanked Council Members for their efforts toward creating the new strategic plan, she is excited to bring it forth to the field. There was no further business and Nina, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:39am.