



Power of culture

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

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

TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 11:36 AM

Council Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Che Anderson
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Simone Early
Matthew Keator
Susan Leff
Victoria Marsh
Ann Murphy
Robert Price
Troy Siebels

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members David Slatery, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Dan Blask, Kelly Bennett, Maggie Holtzberg, and Luis Cotto; and guests Senator Nick Collins, Representative Ken Gordon, Boston City Councilor Frank Baker, Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu, Bedford Selectman William Moonan, Bedford Economic Development Director Alyssa Sandoval, NOVA President Annie Le, MassCreative Executive Director Emily Ruddock, Mass Humanities Executive Director Brian Boyles, Vice President of the Vietnamese Community of Massachusetts Khang Nguyen, Legislative Aide to Senator Nick Collins Patrick Forde, Coleman Lynds, Julie Turner, Leo Stella, and Hieu Do.

Prepared on 6/2/21

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 11:36am and Deputy Director David Slatery reminded all present that this was an Open Meeting. Nina welcomed Council Members, staff, and guests to the 151st meeting of the Mass Cultural Council and then called for a vote on the minutes from the Council's 150th meeting which was held on March 16th. Troy Siebels moved to approve the minutes. Victoria Marsh seconded the motion. Deputy Director David Slatery called the roll. Acknowledging that Council Members Sherry Dong, Karen Barry, Karen Hurvitz, Lillian Do, Barbara Schaffer Bacon, Robert Price, Allyce Najimy, and Ann Murphy were not present it was

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the One Hundred Fiftieth Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council

Nina then thanked former Council Member Sandra Dunn of Worcester who recently stepped off the Council in March after serving for six years and current Council Member Victoria Marsh who would step off the Council at the conclusion of today's meeting. Nina also announced that Jo-Ann Davis would be the new Chair of the Grants Committee, replacing Victoria. Nina welcomed to the meeting the newest member of the Council, Che Anderson of Worcester who was sworn in earlier in that day.

Che introduced himself. He is originally from New York City. He has lived in Worcester for 14 years having attended Holy Cross and worked in the Office of Cultural Development in Worcester. He currently works for UMass Medical School and is a huge fan of accessible artwork. He is very excited to have been appointed to the Council by Governor Baker and looks forward to getting to work. Executive Director Michael Bobbitt added that Che was known as Worcester's "Director of Fun" and was given the key to the city.

Nina noted that May 29th marked an important date for the Commonwealth as the state would open completely. Nina feels this is welcome news for the cultural sector. She thanked staff and Council Members who have been wonderful in leading the cultural sector through the pandemic, then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael began by referencing the infographic outlining all he had accomplished in his first 100 days as Executive Director. Michael has been working with Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner and MassCreative Executive Director Emily Ruddock on an advocacy campaign. Michael is also working on an efficiency plan for the Agency which speaks to the new grants management system. There will be some new tweaks to the budget process that staff will present to the Council at its meeting in August. The race equity plan is being built and should be done in June. Staff is also looking at the Agency's human resources and will be adjusting salaries and revising the employee handbook. Michael is talking with staff about their feelings of being siloed in their work and trying to see what he might do to assuage those feelings. Perhaps programs will be consolidated. Michael noted that the Grants Committee would meet on June 15th and review some of those tweaks and consolidations. The staff is also

undertaking a calendaring process, looking at the Agency's grantmaking process through a race equity lens, and beginning a conversation about recruitment in the coming weeks. Staff is also going to develop a new Agency protocol for site visits and is looking at maturing the Local Cultural Council program, UP program, and CultureRx.

Nina thanked Michael for his report and asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her Advocacy report.

Bethann stated that the Agency is enjoying a tremendous amount of support on Beacon Hill in both the House and the Senate. Last month the House finalized its budget and put Mass Cultural Council in a strong position with – including earmarks - \$21M and change as it heads into the Senate budget debate in which we are now in the middle. The Senate Ways & Means Committee released its plan last week and, again, we are thrilled and thankful that we are funded at the \$20M we requested. Amendments have been filed and there is only one seeking to earmark our account; there is not a lot to monitor or be concerned about at this point. The Agency will be subject to Conference Committee due to the earmarks, but at the end of the day, we can be pleased and thankful that \$20M will be recommended to Governor Baker. This is the highest level of state funding to be recommended for the Agency's line item since the 1980s. This is largely due to Michael Bobbitt's many meetings with legislators through which we have secured support for both Chair Kennedy's bill and the Local Cultural Council bill sponsored by Senator Hinds and Representative Gordon. As Michael is meeting with legislators, he is building a long list of invitations to visit every corner of the Commonwealth. This past Friday Michael and Bethann visited Fall River alongside Council Member Kathleen Castro at the invitation of Chair Carole Fiola. They were joined by Chair Rodrigues, Representative Silvia, and Representative Schmid as well as Mayor Coogan of Fall River. In conclusion, Bethann mentioned the recently established Covid-19 impact commission to upon which the Agency has a seat. A report from that commission is due at the end of June.

There were no questions for Bethann. Nina asked Michael for his report on the Agency's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts.

Michael explained to Council Members that staff members who are part of the Race Equity Task Force have met with each other and with participating Council Members and together they are turning the draft plan into goals. Revisions to the draft plan are due to Michael tomorrow. He will then clean them up and put them into the new draft of the plan which will soon be ready to share with the full Council. Michael added that there are two Council Member prospects currently and they are both people of color. The Agency is partnering with the Cultural Equity Learning Cohort (CELC) to see if the program might be tweaked and offered to the field in 2023.

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

David first called Council Members' attention to the Council Member resources listed on page one in their Agency Updates and reminded them that every two years they are required to take the online ethics course. The Agency is three quarters of the way through the fiscal year but only four months past the FY21 budget approval by the Council due to the pandemic. A spreadsheet including the status of the Agency's finances is included in the meeting materials. The Agency is working hard to get money out the door with \$24M distributed thus far and approximately \$4M to go – most of which will go to individual artists which Council Members will hear about shortly. In other matters, the Agency underwent a federal audit by the National Endowment for the Arts Inspector General. A report has been issued and a link to that report is also included in the meeting materials along with a corrective plan. The Agency has now been contacted by the Office of the State Auditor who informed us they will be undertaking an audit of the Agency for the 13-month period ranging from March 1, 2020 through March 31, 2121.

Troy Siebels asked if periodic audits by the state were customary. David responded that the last time the state audited the Agency was immediately following {former Executive Director} Anita Walker's start date, so perhaps appointing a new Executive Director triggered the audit. Karen Barry added that a statutory demand on the Office of the State Auditor requires them to cycle through state agencies, so perhaps there is no reason for concern.

Nina thanked David, then asked Kelly Bennett and Dan Blask for their presentation on the recommended Artist Fellowship grants.

Kelly stated that the Artists department met the challenge of the pandemic. The team adapted, provided relief funds, completed a full panel review midway through 2020 and completed double the work in half the time. Kelly is proud of the department and thanked Operations Director Jen Lawless for her support and leadership. Dan Blask explained that fellowships are the primary way in which the Agency funds artists but noted that earlier in the year \$1.2M was awarded to artists and other individuals through the Covid-19 relief fund for individuals. Still, Artist Fellowships are holding their own and this year the team is presenting \$652,500 in grants to the Council – this is the highest amount since the program's inception in 1975. Dan then shared a slideshow of work by artists being recommended for grants. There are a total of 75 artists being recommended.

Rob Price noted that most of the recommended artists are from higher income parts of the state and asked if the Agency sees as part of its DEI efforts an ongoing recruitment effort for residents of lower income areas. Michael confirmed that this will be part of the Agency's forthcoming race equity plan.

Cecil Barron Jensen agreed recruitment efforts were important moving forward, she has worked to recruit artists on Nantucket.

There were no further questions. Victoria stated that the Grants Committee met on May 11th and resolved to recommend this year's artist fellowship and finalist grants. Troy Siebels moved to approve the recommendations and Susan Leff seconded the motion. David called the roll and noting that Matthew Keator, Allyce Najimy, Lillian Do, Karen Hurvitz, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED To approve the FY21 Artist Fellowship grant awards in the disciplines of Crafts, Dramatic Writing, Film & Video, Music Composition, Photography and Sculpture/Installation/New Genres as reviewed by the Council at its May 18, 2021 meeting.

Nina then asked Michael and Jen Lawless for their presentation on the Supplemental Economic Recovery Grants.

Michael explained that the Agency would soon receive \$844,700 in American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Agency has also accrued to date \$591,000 in Gaming Funds that, under the Gaming Law and the guidelines authorized by the Council in April 2020, can be designated for Organizational Support. Staff is proposing that these two funding streams be combined into two separate distinct programs and used to fund applicants who were not funded when they applied to the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery Grant Program (COERG) which the Agency administered in partnership with the Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development in December 2020. The two separately funded programs will provide approximately \$1.5M in funds to be distributed.

Jen added that of the 42 grants being recommended under the two programs, nine are brand new to Mass Cultural Council and eight of those nine had never received federal funding of any kind previously.

David noted that technically the Council is approving the \$844,000 from the NEA for one program (plus \$700 in expenses) and \$738,000 gaming funds for organizational support. David explained the technical reasons why these funds had to be provided in two separate programs (due to rules about mixing the funding streams). David then asked Council Members to review the list of recommended grantees in the two programs to ensure no unknown conflicts of interest existed.

No new conflicts of interest were noted.

Rob Price asked how the amount of each grant was determined and was concerned gamesmanship was at play. Jen Lawless clarified for Robert that grant amounts were based on demonstrated financial losses originally

determined as part of the COERG application process. There is no gamesmanship at play. The grants are based on how much each organization can prove that they lost due to the pandemic.

Jen, based on demonstrated financial losses. That how much they could ask for was tied to how much they could demonstrate they lost. They can't game up or down. it's based on how much they can prove they lost.

Rob then noted that he would recuse himself from any discussion relating to The Center for Arts in Natick (TCAN) as The School of Rock, where he is employed, has a relationship with TCAN. The minutes reflect the fact that Rob Price took did not participate in the discussion or vote or any proposed grant to TCAN.

Victoria stated that the Grants Committee met and voted to recommend the Supplemental Recovery Grants to the full Council and it was time for a vote. Barbara Schaffer Bacon motioned to approve the proposed grants, Susan Leff seconded the motion. Noting that Matthew Keator, Lillian Do, Karen Hurvitz, Allyce Najimy, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED To approve the Supplemental Economic Recovery Grants-Federal Funds (SERG-FED) and Supplemental Economic Recovery Grants-Massachusetts Funds (SERG-MA) programs described in the memorandum presented to this meeting, including the allocation of \$844,000 NEA ARP funds to the SERG-FED program (and \$700 to expenses) and the allocation of \$738,000 of Organizational Support monies in the Massachusetts Cultural and Performing Arts Mitigation Trust Fund to the SERG-MA program.

Michael then provided a brief report on the Gaming Mitigation Fund. This program is authorized and mandated under the Gaming Law and 75 % of available revenues must be spent on it. Most funds go to organizations impacted by casinos, with some funds going to new programs like the one just discussed. This program was launched last year and was met with some confusion as to what constitutes a touring artist. Staff examined eligibility requirements and will relaunch the program in the fall and while there is nothing to vote on today, staff wanted to provide an update.

David clarified that while there is no list of grantees for Council Members to vote on today, staff is seeking a vote on the process. Troy asked why approval was sought today and David responded that it was so staff could get started working on the program and recruitment. Also, staff did not want to bring this before the Council in August when the agenda would be far more robust with almost all of the Agency's other programs being voted on.

Jo-Ann Davis asked if there is a body that monitors how these grants are administered. David responded that the Agency is required to submit a report to

the legislature by March 1 every year. It is also subject to audit like all public funds.

Karen Barry mentioned that Grants Committee members were asked to think about possible new grantees in their region and submit those names to Program Officer Cheyenne Cohn-Postell. Karen sent Cheyenne six names. Jo-Ann asked that if there are organizations in her region that are eligible for funding it would be helpful to know that so she can assist in recruitment efforts.

Victoria stated that the Grants Committee recommends the approval the Gaming Mitigation program second round as described along with the allocation of gaming moneys to the Gaming Mitigation Fund. Karen Barry moved to approve the recommendations. Troy Siebels seconded the motion. David Slatery called the roll and noting that Matthew Keator, Lillian Do, Karen Hurvitz, Allyce Najimy, and Sherry Dong were absent it was

RESOLVED To approve the 2021 Round of the Gaming Mitigation Program described in the memorandum presented to this meeting and the allocation of \$3,000,000 of Gaming Mitigation monies in the Massachusetts Cultural and Performing Arts Mitigation Trust Fund to the 2021 Round.

Michael asked everyone to give outgoing Grants Committee Chair Victoria Marsh a round of applause in recognition of her service to the Council.

Nina moved onto Cultural District Designations and asked Cultural Districts Program Manager Luis Cotto for his report.

Luis gave a presentation on the proposed Bedford Cultural District. The PowerPoint presentation is available upon request. Luis noted that State Representative Ken Gordon had joined the meeting. Nina invited him to say a few words.

Representative Gordon thanked Council Members for their consideration of the proposed Bedford Cultural District and commended Luis on his presentation. Representative Gordon is a former Chair of the Bedford Local Cultural Council, this was the first position he held in town government. He sees the designation as a wonderful opportunity for the town. Representative Gordon recognized other Bedford representatives who had contributed to the designation process and who were gathered in the meeting and thanked them for their efforts including Selectman Bill Moonan who offered a few further remarks on Bedford history and culture and thanked Bedford Economic Development Director Alyssa Sandoval for her efforts.

Nina then called for a vote on the designation of the Bedford Cultural District. Noting that Cecil Barron Jensen had left the meeting and the aforementioned

absent Council Members were still absent and that though Karen Hurvitz was absent had written to Dave that she was especially in favor of the Bedford designation, it was unanimously

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

Luis Cotto then shared a presentation on the proposed Little Saigon Cultural District. The presentation is available upon request.

Nina noted that Senator Nick Collins had joined the meeting and invited him to speak.

Senator Collins thanked the Council for this opportunity on this exciting day at the end of a long process. The Senator learned a good deal by working in partnership with the City of Boston, the Mayor's Office and most recently the Mass Cultural Council. He recently visited the proposed District with Acting Mayor Kim Janey and it was clear how much this designation will mean to the community with regard to both tourism and infrastructure. The Senator wishes to go on record as wholeheartedly supporting this designation.

Boston City Councilor Frank Baker was also present and thanked Mass Cultural Council for considering this designation which he was happy to speak in support of. Councilor Baker thanked the Networking Organization for Vietnamese Americans (NOVA) and Fields Corner Main Street teams for their efforts to bring the designation before the Council today. Councilor Baker noted that Boston has the largest population of Vietnamese residents in Massachusetts. This district is the heart of the Vietnamese community and he is proud to ask for the Council's support of its designation.

Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu added her support. The Little Saigon District is a dream she heard about from the Vietnamese community several years ago. Councilor Wu then stated that we need to center stories from every part of the community, especially during AAPI Heritage Month. She believes the impacts of the designation will go far beyond the cultural aspects of it. Fields Corner and the Vietnamese community are facing displacement, having this official recognition will help to stabilize the communities. Councilor Wu is so pleased to be a part of the meeting today and urges the Council to vote in favor of the designation.

Michael Bobbitt added that he shares Councilor Wu's enthusiasm. His son is Vietnamese, and they enjoyed a fine dinner in Fields Corner.

Annie Le, President of NOVA is looking forward to all that can be done if the district is successful today. She is also a member of the Boston Local Cultural

Council and thanked Council Members for their consideration of the proposed Little Saigon Cultural District.

Councilor Baker added that State Representative Daniel Hunt helped a good deal with the application process. Karen Barry thanked the Senator and Councilors for coming and advocating for the designation. Nina then called for a vote on the Little Saigon Cultural District. Noting that Cecil Barron Jensen had left the meeting and the afore mentioned absent Council Members were still absent though Karen Hurvitz was absent had written to Dave that she was especially in favor of the Little Saigon designation it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the designation of the Little Saigon cultural district in Boston, Massachusetts in accordance with the memorandum presented to the Council Meeting.

That concluded the meeting agenda. Nina congratulated representatives of the two new Cultural Districts, thanked Michael again for his efforts over his first 100 days as Executive Director, and as Chair adjourned the meeting at 1:27pm.