

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

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

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2023**

**ONLINE MEETING**

**Council Members Present** were

Nina Fialkow, Chair  
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair  
Ché Anderson  
Barbara Schaffer Bacon  
Karen Barry  
Kathleen Castro  
Jo-Ann Davis  
Sherry Dong  
Simone Early  
Matthew Keator  
Barbara Krauthamer  
Allyce Najimy  
Troy Siebels  
Mark Snyder

**Also Present** were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Ann Petruccelli Moon, Carmen Plazas, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, and Charles Baldwin; Mass Humanities Executive Director Brian Boyles; MassCreative Executive Director Emily Ruddock; and Leah Abel, Samuel Bradley, and Olivia Hatten from Circus Up

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:04am and asked Deputy Executive 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.

Nina then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt to introduce the Mission Moment – an opportunity at each Council Meeting to spotlight creative work being done in the Commonwealth. Today's Mission Moment featured Circus Up – a Boston-based nonprofit providing in-school, after-school, and community circus programs for youth and one of Mass Cultural Council's newest grantees. Michael visited Circus Up earlier this spring at the invitation of the organization's Executive Director, Leah Abel who was present in the meeting and joined by her colleagues Samuel Bradley and Olivia Hatten to share more about Circus Up's work with Council Members. Leah, Samuel, and Olivia gave a brief presentation reviewing their organization's mission and programs and asked Council Members if they had any questions.

Nina asked how long Circus Up had been operating and Leah explained that the organizations was founded in 2014 as an LLC and became a nonprofit in late 2017.

Vice Chair Marc Carroll asked where the organization was located and Leah let him

know they operated out of a rented recreational circus school in Jamaica Plain.

Mark Snyder was impressed with the presentation, thinks Circus Up is a wonderful program, and is pleased to learn more about programs funded by the Agency. Leah added that she truly loves working with young people and their families and explained that the work of her staff goes beyond circus arts; staff helps to tutor young people and supports participants and their families in several other ways. Circus arts are just the beginning!

Michael added that during his visit one participant's parent teared up when speaking about how much the program means to them. He thanked Leah for her work and for visiting with the Council today.

Nina then asked if Council Members had reviewed the minutes from their last meeting held on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and if so, she would look for a motion to approve the minutes. Mark moved to approve the minutes and Troy Siebels seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Cecil Barron Jensen and Ann Murphy were absent it was unanimously

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

Nina thanked Michael for bringing Circus Up to the meeting; she greatly appreciates the outreach work staff has done to reach new grant applicants. She then let Council Members know that she had an announcement: after serving for nearly seven years, she will step down as Chair and today will be her final meeting. It has been an honor for her to serve alongside her fellow Council Members and staff and she is pleased to share that Vice Chair Marc Carroll will be elevated to Acting Chair. She and Marc have enjoyed a wonderful working partnership and she looks forward to continuing her support of Marc in his new leadership role. She departs knowing that the creative and cultural sector is in good hands.

Michael expressed that this is bittersweet news. Nina has provided strong support and leadership through major transitions for the Agency: the retirement of its previous Executive Director, search for a new Executive Director, economic challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic. When former Governor Baker appointed Nina in 2016, the Agency's allocation was \$14M; during her tenure there was a dramatic increase in public investment and in FY23 the Agency invested more than \$100M into the creatives and cultural sector. As the FY24 budget is finalized the Agency is in line to receive \$25M – the highest allocation since the late 1980s. Michael asked Senator Paul Mark and Representative Mindy Domb – Chairs of the Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development – to issue a citation recognizing Nina's work as Chair. He read the citation aloud and said that staff would send it to her.

Marc shared that he was saddened to learn that Nina would step down as she has been a wonderful friend and mentor and a champion of arts and culture. He thanked Nina for all that she has done for him, for the Agency, and for the people of Massachusetts. She will be missed.

Karen Barry thanked Nina for her service acknowledging that it was not an easy time to be Chair as the Agency and the world experienced so much change; Nina led with class, dignity and decorum and provided the space for Council Members to have

necessary conversations. Karen is deeply appreciative of this and of Nina's inclusive leadership style. She has appreciated serving with Nina and wishes her the best.

Jo-Ann Davis shared that as Chair of the Grants Committee she learned a great deal from Nina; she defines grace under pressure. Her work as Chair has been exemplary and her open and honest nature throughout the many transitions in recent years taught Jo-Ann more about how to be a good Council Member.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon seconded all previous comments and added that when Nina first arrived, the Council wasn't as engaged as it is today. As Karen stated, Nina created the space necessary for Council Members to have important conversations, to ask questions, and engage more meaningfully with Agency staff. Nina's gentle but strong facilitation helped the entire group to be effective Council Members; Barbara sincerely appreciates serving alongside Nina and wishes her the best.

Kathy Castro noted that Nina experienced a number of things in her life and work outside of the Council during her tenure and that she'd done a wonderful job through it all; she has been a role model and an inspiration. Kathy asked if Nina would continue to serve on the Council even though she would no longer be Chair, and Nina let her know she'd be stepping down as Chair and stepping off the Council, but that she would be open to serving again down the road if the opportunity presents itself.

Matthew Keator, who has served on the Council for the majority of Nina's tenure, thanked Nina – who is the daughter of an Air Force veteran – for her help establishing a space for veterans within the Agency's work.

Troy Siebels added that he appreciated Nina traveling many, many miles to attend so many Agency and cultural sector events across the Commonwealth.

Ché Anderson shared that he attended his first Council Meeting the day he was appointed to the Council; he was nervous, and Nina reached out personally to make sure he was comfortable. Nina has helped Ché personally and professionally and he plans to keep in touch with her.

Mark added that as one of the newest members of the Council he sincerely appreciates Nina making him feel so welcome and comfortable; he will miss Nina and wishes her well.

Dave Slatery shared that when Nina was first appointed in May 2016 she attended her first Council Meeting in Plymouth and quickly learned all about the work of the Agency. She worked closely with senior staff and led very effectively. She supported the staff at the highest level of government, especially during the interim period as the search for a new executive director was underway. Dave sincerely appreciates Nina's kind guidance and steadfast support and will miss her.

Nina thanked Council Members and staff for their kind words and looks forward to staying in touch. She then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael let Council Members know that staff is busy closing out this fiscal year and continuing to process payments for the cultural sector recovery programs and Festivals & Projects. The team is also heavily in planning mode for FY24 incorporating the goals

stated in the Agency's new Strategic Plan. He then shared his screen and gave Council Members a brief overview of how staff is implementing the Strategic Plan. He began by reviewing the Agency's new mission, vision, and values statements; explained the "Why" behind the work; and reviewed the Agency's new four-department structure comprised of Executive, Public Affairs, Programs, and Operations. A full copy of the presentation is available upon request.

Karen Barry asked what was meant in the presentation regarding offboarding the UP program. Michael explained that previously the Agency had the capacity to include approximately 15 organizations in the program. By partnering with an external consultant, it will be able to bring the work of the UP program and the Innovation and Learning Network (ILN) to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of organizations. This is similar to the Cultural Equity Learning Cohort (CELC) recently offered in partnership with Arts Connect International. Charles Baldwin will work with the consultants.

Karen is pleased with this direction and added that the recovery community is covered under the ADA and is a community the Agency should embrace. Charles let Karen know that there are organizations affiliated with UP that are focused on recovery noting that the ADA will cover those in recovery if they are in a recovery program, but not if they are pursuing recovery on their own. Jen added that Festivals & Projects grants specifically call out the recovery community.

Michael hopes that every organization in the Commonwealth can have access to this learning and added that staff is still working to offboard and scale the Social Prescription program; they are working with Arts Pharmacy to do this. Nina asked if Arts Pharmacy is Massachusetts-based. They are not but they do extensive work in the Commonwealth.

Michael concluded his update by noting Council Member Barbara Krauthamer's exciting appointment as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at Emory University in Georgia. This means she will need to resign from the Council, Michael congratulated Barbara and wished her well as this will be her final meeting.

Nina then asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her advocacy update.

Bethann reminded Council Members that at their last meeting the FY24 budget was working its way through the House. The Agency's ask was \$25M – this is the number Governor Healey proposed and the final number proposed by the House Ways & Means Committee, plus 16 funded earmarks. Today is the second day of the Senate budget debate and the Senate Ways & Means Committee has also recommended \$25M for Mass Cultural Council. This has been an easy and very positive budget cycle. The Agency and its partners did not need conduct a robust advocacy campaign; the only message necessary was one of thanks. Mass Cultural Council did file an amendment on the Senate side thanks to Chair Paul Mark. It is a technical correction to the Agency's line item updating the text to reflect the new Strategic Plan. The Chair's amendment garnered 14 bi-partisan co-sponsors; this represents 35% of the chamber. There were more than one thousand amendments filed and four were relative to the Agency's line item – the one Bethann just outlined and three funded earmarks. The final Senate appropriation should be \$25M. The next step is Conference Committee: after the Memorial Day holiday the House Speaker and Senate President will each appoint three members from each chamber to look at the final budgets, discuss and correct any

discrepancies, and create one final FY24 budget to submit to Governor Healey.

Karen applauds Bethann's tremendous effort noting that the Agency might not see such success in the budget process without Bethann's expertise and temperament along with Michael's commitment and the engagement of her fellow Council Members. It is wonderful for legislators to hear "thank you" as opposed to an additional request. A budget like the anticipated FY24 budget is also not possible without demonstrating a return on investment which the Agency has very clearly shown. Karen appreciates the work of Bethann and Michael and will make a concerted effort to thank everyone in her delegation.

Nina agreed with Karen's statement and thanked Bethann for her work and her report. She then asked for the Cultural Equity & Access report.

Program Officer for Access & Inclusion Charles Baldwin reiterated that as noted the team is currently working with two consultants – Open Door Arts and Art-Reach – to gather data pertaining to access and disability from organizations and individuals served by the Agency. Their findings will inform practices internally and externally. This is providing an opportunity to talk about continual improvement around the aspirations behind the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Charles noted the Agency is not an enforcer, but rather an encourager around this work. There is a good deal of ongoing learning for staff and thought around how to use demographic information in grantmaking. The Agency will also engage Erin Genia to craft an Indigenous plan in FY24. Finally, organizations with an UP designation will receive funding to see what kind of access foundation they can build.

Program Officer for Equity & Inclusion Cheyenne Cohn-Postell let Council Members know that staff has established a working group to look at funding priority points to make them more consistent across the Agency's grant programs. The group has been drilling down on values and looking at unconscious bias; conversations have been fulfilling and productive. Recommendations for priority points are forthcoming; Cheyenne noted that they will differ as they are applied to programs that are for organizations versus individuals.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon asked if staff provides any support to cultural organizations that find themselves amid challenges around their work on diversity and inclusion.

Senior Director of Business Operations Catherine Cheng-Anderson explained that customer support is still a top priority for staff. The Agency can also offer the aforementioned CELC program that cultural organizations can engage in at no cost. Catherine has heard from staff that organizations are largely reaching out to their specific contact at the Agency for support as a first step. Senior Director of Operations

Jen Lawless added that staff is fully cognizant they are not mediators or facilitators and cannot mediate a dispute between constituents, but that they can provide guidance and resources. Catherine agreed staff is fortunate to have relationships with constituents that makes them feel comfortable bringing these issues to the Agency, but care must be taken to determine how to address the issues properly; it is a good thing to have a read on how DEI work is being conducted within the sector. Michael explained that part of the strategy of building relationships across other sectors is so the Agency can refer organizations to the right place for assistance in such matters.

There were no further questions; Nina asked for the Finance report.

Dave reiterated that, as Michael mentioned, he has moved to the Executive team to be Michael's deputy. Catherine will direct business operations moving forward and as such will be giving the financial report today and moving forward.

Catherine began by giving Council Members an update on the processing of recovery grant payments. The Operations team has been dedicating six days per week to processing payments for both recovery grants and regular (non-recovery) grant payments. So far, the Agency has distributed 35% of Individual Recovery Grants payments and 73% of Organizational Recovery payments. Despite an unprecedented volume of payments this year, the team continues to be dedicated and mission focused. Catherine will be working with Administration & Finance to extend the payment timeframe past June 30th, allowing for recovery funds to continue to be disbursed over the summer. The Agency will need this small extension to complete the recovery grant payments. She then let Council Members know that the Agency's spending is progressing and on target and as expected, it is catching up in these final months of the fiscal year. The first noteworthy change this quarter is we recognized an opportunity to make an even greater impact with our Festivals & Projects grants by reallocated funds to support an additional 92 initiatives. This adjustment amounts to \$218k. The second noteworthy change this quarter relates to extending our temporary fiscal staffing. The extension will continue to expand our capacity in grants payments. Finally, per the Agency's out-of-state travel policy, the Executive Committee unanimously approved out-of-state travel for Cultural Districts Program Officer Carolyn Cole to attend the Global Cultural Districts Network annual conference in Montreal. These monies are budgeted within our professional development allocation. A complete description of the conference is provided in the Council Meeting book.

There were no questions for Catherine, and Nina moved to the final item on the agenda: a presentation by Mass Humanities Executive Director Brian Boyles.

Brian thanked Nina and congratulated her on her tenure as Chair then let Council Members know he was pleased to be with them today and enjoyed seeing so many of them at grant celebrations in March. He thanked Michael for his leadership and partnership. Over the past four years Mass Humanities has evolved and Brian will today provide Council Members with an update on where the organization is today as well as an update on how it is distributing pandemic recovery funds. Brian shared his screen and gave a presentation on Mass Humanities' mission and leadership and describing to the Council what the humanities are since there is frequently confusion around what they encompass. Mass Humanities is in the process of processing staffing recovery grant applications and will be holding its own series of celebrations when the grants recipients are announced. A copy of Brian's presentation is available upon request.

After the presentation Barbara Schaffer Bacon stated that she attended a recent Mass Humanities event in Turners Falls and local participation in the event was fantastic with the Great Falls Discovery Center feeling very alive. She appreciates hearing more about the work of Mass Humanities and thanked Brian for his presentation. Brian acknowledged that the Discovery Center had put their recent grant to excellent use.

Kathy Castro thanked Brian for his visit to Fall River and for bringing the Reading

Frederick Douglass event to the community. She is also interested in the organization's Clemente Course and would love to see Fall River and Taunton participate in it.

There were no further comments or questions for Brian.

As a final update, Michael thanked Nina and Barbara Krauthamer for their service and wished them well. He also let Council Members know that staff is working on a schedule for FY24 Council Meetings and will make the schedule align better with grant deadlines. Council Meetings will be virtual through the end of FY25.

Nina thanked her fellow Council Members and the Agency staff who she'd gotten to know over the years. She knows Marc will do a spectacular job as Acting Chair. As Chair, she adjourned the meeting at 11:46am.