

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MARCH 2, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:06AM

Committee Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair, Mass Cultural Council
Jo-Ann Davis
Sherry Dong
Troy Siebels

Staff Members Present were

Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Director
Bethann Steiner, Public Affairs Director
Jen Lawless, Operations Director
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Public Engagement Manager

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order and, as no guests were present, dispensed with reading the Open Meeting Law into record. She then asked for the Committee to vote on the minutes from its last meeting on December 10, 2020. Troy Siebels moved to approve the minutes, Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

Chair's Report

Nina began by welcoming Executive Michael Bobbitt who is in his fifth week leading the Agency. Nina noted that it had been nearly a year since the state shutdown. In February 2020 Anita Walker announced her retirement. Soon thereafter the pandemic hit and the Council embarked on a double track of working to support the cultural sector, and also search for a new Executive Director. Nina commended the Committee

Prepared on 3/31/21

on their efforts to weather the difficult year and thanked them for being instrumental in making it a successful one. Nina also noted that Agency staff, especially leadership staff, had been tremendous. Michael Bobbitt is now working on his vision, and taking time to listen to staff as he develops it. Nina then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Executive Director's Report

Michael began by letting the Committee know that his transition plan is going well and that it had been distributed to staff for their feedback earlier that day. Michael has a regularly scheduled monthly meeting with Chair Nina Fialkow, as well as with Torrie Allen of Arts Midwest as his mentor, and has joined the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies' BIPOC group. He is also meeting regularly with Brian Boyles of Mass Humanities and Emily Ruddock of MassCreative.

During his first month Michael met with each Agency department and working group, and his 1:1 meetings with staff began this week. He also met with Keiko Orrall of the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism and is working through a long list of meetings with key partners. Next week senior staff will meet with new Council Members Robert Price and Simone Early for their orientation. Michael will have a second round of meetings with each Agency department in late March.

In April he will meet one-on-one with each Council Member and with major funders. Michael then reviewed his list of deliverables including a race equity plan, budget, and advocacy work. He has received suggestions from Council Members to meet with Mayors across the Commonwealth, and many other meetings. He and senior staff are also focused on consolidating all grant management systems into SmartSimple, and shifting from Microsoft Office to Microsoft 365. Senior leadership is also looking at policies around remote work and the staff handbook is being reviewed. The Agency's strategic planning process needs to begin this year. Michael concluded by telling the Committee that he is working with Nina and Vice Chair Marc Carroll to diversify the Council's governing board.

Nina asked if state employees are still working remotely through June 1st. David Slatery confirmed that Agency staff is following the lead of the Executive Branch and right now slated to work remotely through June 1st. The office has been outfitted with plexiglass in anticipation of staff returning eventually.

Nina also mentioned that she, Marc, and Michael have a meeting with Governor Baker and Lieutenant Governor Polito scheduled and that they will need a meeting to prepare beforehand. Michael added that he was meeting this week with Jordan Maynard, the Governor's Director of Boards and Commissions. She then asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her Advocacy report.

Advocacy Report

Bethann let Committee members know that this is the beginning of the legislative session and there are a number of items to update them on. When Michael arrived, a letter was sent to all 200 legislators as a means of introduction. With that letter, funding reports were also shared so as to remind legislators of investments in their districts. Responses have already been received from some legislators who would like to connect. Now that Committee assignments have been made, staff met with Joint Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development Committee House Chair Carole Fiola and Michael was interviewed by

Senate Chair Kennedy on his TV show, "Beacon Hill Buzz." Bethann has a monthly meeting with the two Committee Chairs' staffs, and she is joined by Emily Ruddock of MassCreative in those meetings.

The Agency's fifth Covid impact survey closed at midnight last night, and staff will work hard over the next couple of days to have that data for use in advocacy work. This is very timely as the Agency will testify before Ways & Means next week. The House and Senate members are very busy. More than 6,000 pieces of legislation were filed by the February 19th deadline. Bethann has reviewed them and tagged those that have relevance to the cultural sector. There are two in particular that staff is excited about. One is a small piece of legislation: an act to expand Local Cultural Council (LCC) opportunities, filed by Representative Ken Gordon and Senator Adam Hinds. This is a quick technical correction. With some LCCs, especially those in rural areas, it can be a challenge to get a quorum if elected officials are not permitted to serve. This bill seeks to change that to allow certain local elected officials (not mayors or the select board), and is something Bethann thinks can be passed fairly easily.

Jo-Ann Davis asked for clarification on LCCs in general. Bethann explained that there are 329 LCCs in Massachusetts. This is the largest grassroots funding program in the nation and ensures that Mass Cultural Council is active in every community.

Bethann then told Committee Members about another, very exciting bill filed by Chair Ed Kennedy: SD 2105 An Act to Rebuild the Commonwealth's Cultural Future. This bill would establish a new fund – the Massachusetts Cultural Economy COVID-19 Recovery Fund – to be managed by the Agency, that would provide \$200M in relief grants to individuals and organizations. The funds would not be from tax dollars or the rainy-day fund, but rather from any future Covid mitigation dollars from the federal government. MASSCreative distributed a press release about the bill yesterday, and an advocacy action alert urging people to email their legislators and urge support of the bill. A blog post is being prepared for the Mass Cultural Council site as well and will serve as a space on our website where updates on the process can be followed.

Nina asked if any other states were doing something like this and inquired as to the timing and how Council members might help. Bethann is not aware of any other states doing anything similar. As soon as the Agency's blog post is live it will be shared with Council members who are encouraged to reach out to their legislators and urge their support. There is no deadline for co-sponsorship and this could be a very long process. Legislators are trying to finalize their priorities this month, most likely by the end of March they will have made their decisions.

The last item in Bethann's advocacy report is the FY22 budget process which kicked off in January when Governor Baker filed his H1 budget which included \$16.3M for Mass Cultural Council. This is a consistent, solid start but does represent a 10.4% reduction to our funding in the last two years. There is an Advocacy Committee meeting currently scheduled for March 11th, however staff learned this morning that the Agency would need to testify before the Joint Committee on Ways & Means one week from today, March 9th. Our plan needs to be adjusted since this is earlier than we anticipated. We will have brand new data for use in the testimony, but will need input from the Advocacy Committee and are suggesting that the Advocacy Committee's meeting be moved to this Friday.

Troy asked for clarification around the hearing and Bethann explained that this is customary. Once the Governor files his budget, the next step is for individual committees on Ways & Means to work jointly together in March and April to hold hearings on the Governor's proposed budget. These are usually done regionally, last year Bethann and Anita Walker when to Roxbury Community College to testify.

Jo-Ann asked for clarification around the Agency's goals at the hearing. Bethann explained that that is the conversation the Advocacy Committee needs to have – to think about whether or not the 10.4% reduction is appropriate or do we want to advocate for level funding or an increase. Bethann advised that the Agency could make a strong case for \$20M as revenue is coming in ahead of projections and a one or two million dollar increase in a fiscal year is doable. Trying to jump higher than that could be eyebrow-raising.

After a brief discussion it was decided to recommend that the Advocacy Committee meet on Friday, March 5th at 11am.

Nina then asked David Slatery for his report on gaming funds.

Legislative Report regarding Gaming Funds

David noted that this lengthy report had been circulated to Committee members in advance of the meeting. It is a requirement of the Gaming Law that we provide a report to the Joint House Ways & Means Committee on the casino tax revenues the agency receives every March 1. As Committee members may recall the Agency filed a report last year, but the pandemic began shortly thereafter and changed everything. David explained that he felt it was necessary to go through all the steps in the report and explain why we changed our plans with regards to the funding. The good news is that even though casinos were closed for several months, we have received \$6.7M over the past 14 months into the Fund established for receipt of the casino tax revenues. Currently, there is just under \$2M in uncommitted funds in the Fund and the amount is going up by a few hundred thousand dollars per month.

After concluding his Gaming report, David mentioned that with new Council Members Robert Price and Simone Early recently being appointed we might think about appointing them to a Council committee noting that the Agency might find out this week if there are additional new Council Members being appointed.

Michael Bobbitt asked if there was a maximum number of Council Members the Agency could have and David explained that there are 19 seats per the statute. There are currently 14 Council Members whose terms have expired, but under law they continue to serve until they are replaced by a new appointee.

David then asked Committee Members to review the agenda for the Council Meeting scheduled for March 16th noting that there were not votes slated to take place at the meeting. All Committee Members were in favor of the draft agenda.

Nina concluded the meeting by thanking Committee Members and staff for their efforts over the previous very challenging year and as Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:48am.