

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

**MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY, MAY 4, 2021

ONLINE MEETING

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 9:34AM

Committee Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Jo-Ann Davis
Victoria Marsh
Troy Seibels

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 at 9:34am. Deputy Director David Slatery dispensed with reading the open meeting law notice as no outside guests were present.

Nina asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes from their last meeting on March 2nd. Troy Siebels moved to approve the minutes, Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion, all were in favor, and voting by roll call vote and noting that member Sherry Dong was absent, the minutes were approved.

Nina then began her Chair's report by thanking Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner and the rest of the staff for their budget advocacy work noting that thus far in the process the Agency has received a very positive response from the legislature. Nina then announced that Committee Member Victoria Marsh, who also serves as Chair of the Grants Committee, had informed her that she would be stepping off the Council after the next Council Meeting in May. Nina thanked Victoria for her service calling her a tremendous Council Member who she was very sad to lose and noting that Victoria has done an incredible job leading the Council through some complex times.

Victoria thanked Nina and expressed that while she was sad her schedule required her to step off the Council, she was excited to make way for someone new.

Nina thanked Victoria for staying through the upcoming Grants Committee meetings and the 151st Meeting of the Mass Cultural Council scheduled for May 18th and then announced that Executive Committee Member Jo-Ann Davis would be the next Chair of the Grants Committee. Jo-Ann thanked Nina and Victoria and said she would do her best to continue Victoria's incredible work. Nina then asked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael shared his transition plan with Committee Members and thanked Bethann and Public Engagement Manager Ann Petruccelli Moon for using the plan as a framework over his first months leading the Agency. Michael explained that all tasks listed in February, March, and April were complete. He explained that he wished to restructure how organizational constituent meetings were scheduled and focus on rural, small, and BIPOC-led organizations first, moving on to large organizations later. Michael's focus has been on onboarding. At this point he has met with nearly all partners, all Agency staff, nearly all Council members, and all working groups. He is working with staff on workflow improvements and efficiencies, and a new grants management system is nearly complete; Michael thanked Operations Director Jen Lawless for her work on the new system. He is working with the entire staff to establish a more inclusive decision-making process and thus far staff has enjoyed having agency in conversations about the impact of Agency programs. More time and bandwidth are needed to address critical and urgent needs pertaining to Covid-19 recovery and race equity. Work has begun on the Agency's new race equity plan, a second meeting is scheduled for Friday, May 7th. Michael is also working on planning and scheduling with staff and working to identify bottlenecks. He is beginning to do a few site visits following all Covid safety precautions; his next visit is to Fall River on May 14th at the invitation of Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development House Chair Carole Fiola. Michael noted he'd met recently with Senate Ways and Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, also of Fall River. Michael recently enjoyed speaking with former Executive Director Anita Walker who sends her best. He concluded by letting Committee Members know

that this afternoon at the Grants Committee meeting they will hear how staff has arrived at some new ideas around some of the Agency's grant programs.

Jo-Ann Davis asked if Michael was planning to bring the staff back into the office on June 1. Michael said he would not be asking staff to return on June 1 noting that Governor Baker had not yet made any announcement regarding telework. Michael hopes to establish a process where staff can come back gradually, as needed. Deputy Director David Slatery added that as of mid-April plexiglass had been installed in the office space.

Michael continued with his report letting Committee Members know staff has received an audit report by the National Endowment for the Arts Inspector General. The report highlighted a few things in need of fixing and those things have been fixed. Staff learned yesterday that there will be another audit, this one from the Office of the State Auditor (OSA). David noted that it had been approximately 14 years since the last OSA audit which occurred shortly after Anita Walker's appointment as Executive Director. Michael concluded his report by letting Committee Members know that staff had done a great job of evaluating their work and making smart consolidations which would not impact service but would reduce administrative work and free up time.

David then highlighted for the Committee that new funds in the amount of \$844,700 from the NEA would be part of a recommendation staff would make to the Grants Committee next week. David noted that historically when decisions are made, they come through the Executive Committee first. Staff does not ask the Grants Committee to approve an allocation of funds but ask for approval of programs. We do not need a formal vote today, but he wanted to make the Committee aware that this recommendation was coming. We will make a recommendation as to how to spend the funds from the NEA combined with accumulated Gaming Mitigation funds. David concluded by reiterating the clarification: Executive Committee makes recommendations as to fund allocations and Grants Committee makes recommendations as to programs.

Nina then asked Bethann Steiner to give her budget and advocacy update.

Bethann let Committee Members know that the budget process was progressing very favorably and thanked Michael and staff for their efforts. She noted that a straight line can be drawn through the deliberate work staff has done since the pandemic hit to where we find ourselves today. Bethann recalled being in the State House on March 12, 2020 for her very last meeting before the building was required to close. The meeting was with Senator Jason Lewis who, incidentally she and Michael just met with this week. Senator Lewis advised Bethann and Anita Walker that he and the rest of the legislature were facing a great unknown and that the best thing to do would be to collect data and position the Agency to tell legislators exactly what the cultural sector needed. As Committee Members are aware, the Agency very deliberately and

very regularly surveyed the cultural sector and each time communicated results and stories to legislators in writing or via a press release. When legislators had actions to take with the economic bond bill, when other bills were filed, and now in the House Ways & Means budget we are seeing the Agency positioned to receive an allocation of \$20M for the first time since 1987. Bethann noted that the Agency didn't need an amendment to make this happen, it was baked into the Ways & Means initial budget. The Agency had the backing of leadership and was included as a talking point in the House of Representatives' executive summary.

A few days after receiving news of the House budget recommendation, the Agency held a convening with House Majority Leader Claire Cronin of Brockton who expressed that the work of the Agency is a proud talking point for the House. Now staff will turn their attention to the Senate, who are usually its champions. Michael and Bethann are meeting with as many senators as possible. Bethann believes they will meet with their 20th senator this week. In each meeting they are making sure to confirm support for the Agency's budget ask and as well as seek support for the Covid recovery bill and the LCC bill. Michael and Bethann have already met with Senate President Karen Spilka and Senate Ways & Means Chair Rodrigues. Bethann believes the Agency can look to a bright future in the Senate but does anticipate the Agency having to come before Conference Committee due to amendments and earmarks. Bethann concluded by noting that there were two commissions created at the end of last year. First, the Covid impact commission, co-chaired by TACD chairs Representative Carole Fiola and Senator Ed Kennedy. The commission meets bi-weekly and Michael has a seat on it. A report will come out in late June or early July. The second commission is to review the state seal and motto, the Agency also has a seat on that commission which is preparing to launch its work soon.

Nina congratulated Bethann on the success thus far in the budget process. Troy Siebels asked what Bethann had heard about the Covid relief bill filed by Senator Kennedy. Bethann explained that staff had been told that those federal monies won't play a role in the current state budget but will be part of separate legislation later this year. The Kennedy bill is a strong rallying point for the sector. Nina asked Bethann if there was an update on MassCreative's work. Bethann responded that she speaks with staff at MassCreative daily to ensure alignment in messaging.

Michael asked Bethann what the next steps were with the budget. Bethann explained that next Tuesday, May 11th the senate budget should come out and that staff will, hopefully, be working to thank senators for their support. If needed an amendment will be filed. Either way, outreach to senators in the form of a thank you or a request for support of an amendment is the next step. Nina asked Bethann to alert Council Members to these next steps so that they could help with communication to legislators and be involved in the process. Bethann will send a note to the Council Members today.

Vice Chair Marc Carroll asked for clarification around what Council Members should send to legislatures. Bethann responded that Council Members could thank House Members for their support now, but stay tuned for news from the Senate next week.

Michael then asked Nina if she would like to update the Committee on potential new Council Members.

Nina first mentioned the Council's newly appointed members, Robert Price and Simone Early who have both shown eagerness to participate. Che Anderson of Worcester has been vetted and we understand that he will soon be officially appointed to the seat left vacant by Sandra Dunn. Edward Green, has been vetted and approved and he will be appointed to a seat representing Suffolk County. He is the current Chair of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Rhonda Anderson has been highly recommended for the Franklin County seat currently held by Lillian Do (who has been inactive for three years). With Victoria stepping off the Council we will need someone in Middlesex County. Nina is eager to have suggestions from Committee Members and staff.

Michael noted that three new members are people of color. Nina mentioned that onboarding five new Council Members virtually would be challenging, but we will make it work.

Michael noted that May Committee and Council meetings are now in full swing. Today at 3pm the Grants Committee will meet very briefly. While no details will be shared as to how exactly grants will be modified, staff will give some brief updates in preparation for the full Grants Committee meeting on May 11th. There will be a full Council Meeting on May 18th and there are four race equity task force meetings scheduled in May. If needed, an additional Grants Committee meeting will be scheduled in June.

Nina asked if there was a transition team meeting scheduled, and Michael confirmed that there was. Nina then clarified that the Grants Committee meeting scheduled for this afternoon is so the full Committee who requested an additional meeting can be convened. Nina and Michael determined it was prudent to keep the meeting on the books for a quick update so that Committee Members feel informed.

Marc asked if anyone had heard an update on plans for reopening the cultural sector. Troy responded that tours are all planning to launch in August or September and that most theaters are looking at post-Labor Day. The Citi Wang Theatre is looking at November, the presenting community is looking at fall. Anecdotally Troy has heard that the producing community is looking at late summer.

There being no more business to discuss, Nina thanked everyone for their time and efforts and as Chair adjourned the meeting at 10:19am.