

Posted 4/1/25



Power of culture

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

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2025

ONLINE MEETING

Committee Members Present were

Marc Carroll, Chair
Jo-Ann Davis, Vice Chair
Ché Anderson
Julie Wake

Staff Members Present were

Michael J. Bobbitt, Executive Director
David Slatery, Deputy Executive Director
Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Senior Director of Business Operations & Chief Financial Officer
Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
Ann Petruccelli Moon, Deputy Chief of Staff
Carmen Plazas, Communications & Community Engagement Manager

Chair Marc Carroll called the meeting to order at 10:02am and asked Deputy Executive Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement. He then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their two previous meetings and if they had he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Julie Wake noted that Theater Gates mentioned on page 2 of the October 16 meeting minutes should be corrected to Theaster Gates. With that edit she moved to approve the minutes, Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Simone Early, Cecil Barron Jensen, and Iván Espinoza-Madrugal were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED: that the Executive Committee approves the minutes of the October 16, 2024 and January 6, 2025 Executive Committee Meetings as amended.

Prepared on 3/28/25

The Chair then gave an update on the executive salary benchmarking project. Yesterday, he and Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis met with Arts Consulting Group to get an update on their work. They will finalize the research by the end of this week. Once their report is complete, the Chair and Vice Chair will meet with Executive Director Michael Bobbitt to review the findings, hopefully next week. The Chair will then call a Special Meeting to update the Committee and make a recommendation. There were no questions for the Chair. He asked Committee Member Julie Wake for her report on the work of the Governor's Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council.

Julie shared that the Cultural Policy Development Council was divided into working groups, each focusing on a key area: economic development; workforce, education, and talent; community support; and infrastructure for creative spaces. Each group developed recommendations, which were then presented at the second meeting in Amherst. After the presentations, the group evaluated, graded, and prioritized the recommendations. Feedback was largely consistent, but it also revealed different areas of focus and sparked deeper conversations—such as discussions on shifting from STEM to STEAM. The next phase involves refining the final recommendations. The Office of Economic Development is currently reviewing the scores and making prioritizations. The final recommendations will be presented to Governor Healey on April 30th during Creative Sector Day at the State House. Michael added that his work group (workforce, education, and talent) sought the input of several individuals outside the cultural sector; Michael also noted that he was pleased to see a move away from programmatic ideas and towards policy ideas within the full council. The Chair thanked Julie and asked Michael to share materials pertaining to the Cultural Policy Development Advisory Council with the Executive Committee. A summary of the efforts will be provided. The Chair then asked Michael for his Executive Director's report.

Michael shared that it is a busy time with a lot of work happening quickly. Staff is still consolidating grant programs, with the most recent major change being the integration of Festivals & Projects and Creative Projects for Schools into a new program called Creative Experiences, which, is set to launch later this year. For the redesign of the Cultural Districts Initiative a consultant, Civic Moxie, has been engaged to support the team. The redesign group is engaging with 40+ individuals from other state agencies to help strengthen the program and extract its full potential. Erik Holmgren and Carolyn Cole have transitioned to the Advancement Team, where they are focused on building infrastructure and scaling the work. As part of this shift, the Artists and Youth teams have been consolidated into one team, with the goal of supporting artists from cradle to grave, a great strategic move. We're also continuing our cross-agency collaborations. Looking ahead, we've started discussions about next year's operations, and the senior team will have a retreat to map out priorities. Recently, we worked with the Governor's team to launch the Poet Laureate program, which was announced on February 3rd. Michael was named chair of the nominating committee and will appoint Brian Boyles of Mass Humanities as a co-chair. Mass Cultural Council will oversee the process, run the application, and narrow it down to two nominees to recommend to the Governor. Jen Lawless, Dan Blask, and the team are working on the process outline, and Dan's team has provided a list of potential committee members for the appointments office. In education policy, since the voters voted to remove the MCAS as a graduation requirement, the Governor has established a K-12 Requirements Council to reassess graduation criteria. We sent a letter requesting to be part of that committee, and

happily Michael's name was forwarded to the appointments office. On the federal funding front, we've confirmed that the final 20% of Mass Cultural Council's funding from the National Endowment for the Arts has been sent to us and we are waiting to be able to confirm receipt. Regarding the cultural asset mapping work, Bethann Steiner, Jen, and their teams are preparing public-facing materials, and the Public Affairs team is planning a statewide tour over the next six months to share this information with key constituent groups. This will generate a lot of attention and engagement.

The Chair asked what the contingency plan would be if federal funding was not available in FY26.

Michael shared that a formal contingency plan has not been discussed yet. CFO Cathy Cheng-Anderson is keeping senior staff updated on her communications regarding federal funding, and the Agency is fully funded for this year with \$1.2M from the NEA. This funding is helpful but represents a small portion (3-4%) of the Agency's overall budget. As conversations with state leaders on Beacon Hill continue, we'll need to flag this potential risk. We could face a shortfall of a million dollars, which may factor in broader budget discussions. However, this is a challenge playing out across state government, and leadership has been clear that the state doesn't have the capacity to backfill all of these potential federal funding gaps. Michael does not believe the Agency needs to request a supplemental budget for this year. With the NEA funding in place for the current year, Mass Cultural Council is in a solid position for now. However, the team will be mindful as plans for FY26 take shape. Cathy clarified that the NEA has approved Mass Cultural Council's final installment, but she is still waiting for the Treasury to send the money. Treasury documents were signed yesterday, and it appears the Agency is covered for FY25.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis asked what the typical timing is for the Agency to receive its NEA funding. Cathy explained that typically the Agency receives the funds in June but requested the funds earlier this year considering ongoing changes. There is a webinar next week that Cathy and Dave will attend where hopefully more will be learned about the future of NEA funding.

The Chair asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her report.

Bethann shared that a new legislative session began on January 1 and 7,000 bills were filed. There are two bills of interest to Mass Cultural Council. The first, working with Senator Paul Mark, aims to amend the Cultural Facilities Fund statute which currently states that municipal facilities must be a certain number of years old and a certain size to be eligible for funding. This is a barrier to many facilities; the bill will seek to change that language. On the House side, there's an ongoing conversation about making a clear statement in support of STEM to STEAM. The proposal involves a technical correction to state statutes—updating three instances where "STEM" is referenced to instead say "STEAM." This change doesn't require funding but serves as an important symbolic step that could pave the way for more impactful conversations about the cultural sector. House and Senate committee assignments have not yet been finalized. Today's rules debate will determine how both chambers operate, after which committee chairs, vice chairs, and members will be appointed. The Committee on Ways and Means is operating under special circumstances, so the budget-building process is continuing. Budget meetings with House and Senate budget chairs are scheduled for early March. Ways and Means will hold a hearing on the Governor's budget, and the Agency will be

invited to testify. The date is not yet determined. The Agency initially requested \$28 million for FY26. The Governor's budget came in slightly below that at just over \$26 million, which is about \$150K higher than our current budget—essentially level funding. Bethann is looking forward to discussions on how we can secure additional resources. The cultural asset inventory provides important data that can be used during those conversations. Bethann noted that there will be a series of public events this spring centered on sharing what the Agency learned from the inventory project. There is also a celebration of Cultural District Investment grants tomorrow at the Merrimack Repertory Theater in Lowell—all are welcome to attend.

There were no questions for Bethann. The Chair moved to the final item on the agenda: approval of the agenda for the February 26 Council Meeting.

Dave shared that item 9b would come off the agenda. An update on the Cultural Districts Initiative redesign will be on the agenda for the Programs Committee Meeting, not the Council Meeting. The Chair asked if a brief update on that project could be included at the Council Meeting; Michael will include this in his update.

The Chair asked to hear more about the guest speaker, Cory Shea. Michael explained that Cory Shea, Director of Arts, Culture, and the Creative Economy for the Town of Franklin would speak about the town receiving state approval to use a portion of its opioid settlement funds to pilot an arts prescriptions program. Cory will tell the Council a bit more about the decision to pursue this important work and what steps have been taken thus far.

The Vice Chair asked if encouraging Council Members to attend Creative Sector Day at the State House on April 30 would be part of the agenda. The Chair will include this event in his report.

There were no further questions. Ché Anderson moved to approve the agenda as amended. Julie Wake seconded the motion. By roll call vote and noting that Simone Early, Cecil Barron Jensen, and Iván Espinoza-Madriral were absent it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the Executive Committee approves the agenda for the February 26 Council Meeting as amended.

The Chair thanked Committee Members for their participation in the meeting and adjourned the meeting at 10:33am.