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Power of culture

Unofficial Draft Subject to Approval by the Council at its next meeting

**Minutes of the Meeting of Mass Cultural Council's
Executive Committee
Tuesday, April 14, 2026**

Online Meeting

Council Members Present:

- Ché Anderson, Chair
- Jo-Ann W. Davis, Vice Chair
- Simone Early
- Julie Wake

Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Present:

- David Slatery, Acting Executive Director and Deputy Director
- Cathy Cheng-Anderson, Chief Financial Officer
- Jen Lawless, Senior Director of Program Operations
- Bethann Steiner, Senior Director of Public Affairs
- Ann Petruccelli Moon, Acting Chief of Staff
- Christian Kelly, Public Relations & Events Manager

Chair Ché Anderson called the meeting to order at 10:04am and asked Acting Chief of Staff Ann Petruccelli Moon to read the Open Meeting Law statement. He then asked if Committee Members had reviewed the minutes of their February 11, 2026 meeting. If they had, he would entertain a motion and a second to approve them. Julie Wake moved to approve the minutes; Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that Iván Espinoza-Madriral and Cecil Barron Jensen were absent, the motion passed unanimously.

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the February 11, 2026 meeting in the form presented.

This was Chair Ché Anderson's first meeting as Chair of the Mass Cultural Council, and he began by noting what an honor it was to serve in the role. He

expressed that he was truly excited to get started—energized, and even a bit jittery—but very grateful for the opportunity.

He shared that in the short time he had been in the position, he had been consistently impressed by the caliber of the Agency's staff. He noted that the staff is exceptional, and that the work being done across the Agency is of the highest quality. He emphasized that this is a reflection of both the leadership team and the Council. He observed that there is clear momentum and stated that he was eager to continue building on it, while also recognizing that there is important work ahead.

He noted that one of the key areas top of mind for many Council Members was the Executive Director search and indicated that he would focus the discussion there and provide a brief update.

He shared that, the previous week, he and Acting Executive Director Dave Slatery met with Lieutenant Governor Driscoll to discuss the search process and the Administration's perspective. He described the conversation as very constructive and noted that the Administration expressed strong enthusiasm for continued partnership and the opportunities ahead.

As part of that discussion, the structure of the search was reviewed. As the Council began forming a search task force, there had initially been a preference to keep it composed entirely of Council members. Ché shared his view that there may be value in expanding that structure to include external perspectives—potentially a task force that is primarily Council Members, but with some representation from individuals in the cultural sector and adjacent fields. He indicated that he welcomed the Council's thoughts on that approach.

He further noted that during the meeting with the Lieutenant Governor they discussed whether to engage a search firm or to manage the process internally. He stated that the Administration raised thoughtful questions on this point and that he believed it was important for the Council to consider it carefully. He brought this question to the Committee for consideration so members could weigh the benefits of each approach.

Before opening the discussion, he also noted that the Council is operating within a public meeting context. He stated that there are important considerations related to the Open Meeting Law as it applies to search processes, and that Dave would outline those parameters in more detail.

He then opened the floor, noting that he wanted to ensure there was ample time for Council members to share their perspectives before he shared his, particularly on the composition of the task force and the question of engaging a search firm.

Simone Early expressed curiosity about how external members of the search committee would be selected. She also noted that a search firm had been engaged during the last search through with former Executive Director Michael Bobbitt was hired and shared her view that engaging a search firm could lend

additional credibility and clarity to the role. She added that she was not opposed to including external participants on the search committee.

Julie Wake indicated agreement with Simone, expressing support for incorporating a variety of perspectives on the search committee and noting that this is generally beneficial. Regarding the use of a search firm, she stated that the decision may depend on staff capacity. She also emphasized that, from an equity standpoint, there are advantages to using a firm, while acknowledging that cost is an important consideration and that there are both pros and cons.

Vice Chair Jo-Ann Davis shared her openness to including external community members on the search committee. She raised a question about the process for selecting those individuals. Drawing on her human resources and legal background, she stated that she has generally found it best to engage an external search firm for senior-level positions, as it lends credibility and professionalism and helps ensure an arm's-length process. She acknowledged the associated costs but noted that these can often be negotiated and are worthwhile. She added that conducting a thorough and comprehensive search internally would be a significant undertaking and could place an undue burden on staff. She supports securing an external firm to assist with the search.

Dave then offered to review the legalities associated with the Open Meeting Law as it pertains to an executive search.

The Council has conducted two executive director searches in the past 20 years, and while there is precedent to draw from, it is not the only available approach. Beginning with the enabling act, the Chair of the Council serves as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Council. That has been interpreted to mean that the Chair holds certain special authorities in relation to the Executive Director search process. Because the Executive Director reports to the Council Chair, the Chair has the ability to lead and develop the search process and may choose to engage individuals—Council members or non-Council members—to advise on its structure and progress. In both the 2020 search and the preliminary conversations regarding securing a search firm earlier this year, the search task force was not treated as a public body under the Open Meeting Law. This was based on the understanding that it functioned as a group appointed by the Chair to assist the Chair in the search process. These groups may include Council Members and non-Council members, and as they are operating in this preliminary advisory capacity, their meetings have not been subject to Open Meeting Law requirements. However, once the process advances to the point of a formal search firm being engaged or a stage at which candidates are being actively considered for hiring, Open Meeting Law considerations do come into play. At the early stage, preliminary screening and review of resumes and applications may be conducted privately in executive session by a duly-appointed search committee or task force, provided that it does not constitute a quorum of the Council. That group may review materials and narrow candidates. Once recommendations are brought forward to the full Council, Open Meeting Law requirements are triggered. This is a general overview of the process. Ultimately, under the enabling act, the Executive

Director is selected through agreement between the Chair and a majority of the Council. Both are required in order to appoint or remove an Executive Director—the Chair and a majority of the Council must concur.

Ché asked if there were any further questions; there were none.

He then spoke to a point raised by several members regarding the development of the search committee. He emphasized that he wants the process to be collaborative and encouraged members to share ideas for individuals from across the Commonwealth who may be well suited to serve. He noted that he would welcome those suggestions over the next week or so and invited members to connect with him directly. He added that, as the Council looks ahead through 2028 and its Strategic Plan, there are ambitious goals to meet and exceed, and that strong partnership will be key to that work. He expressed his desire to begin the search process sooner rather than later, while also acknowledging and appreciating the strong work of current staff. He stated that it is the Council's responsibility to begin this work and suggested that the group move from discussion to a more defined process over the next few weeks, with the goal of having a clear plan in place within the next month to six weeks, absent any major complications. He concluded by again expressing appreciation for the work being done by the staff, particularly by Dave, whom he then turned the meeting over to for an Acting Executive Director's report.

Dave reported that since the Council last met in February, a great deal had taken place across the Agency.

First, the appointment of Ché as the Council's new Chair. In addition, Joyce Linehan of Dorchester has been appointed as a new Council Member. Dave also expressed gratitude to former Chair Marc Carroll for his service.

Efforts have been made to explore the possibility of an Arts and Culture subcommittee within the Governor's Competitiveness Council. The Lieutenant Governor has been supportive of this concept.

Dave expressed appreciation to Council Members who participated in Creative Sector Day at the State House in early March. There have also been multiple recent grant celebrations in communities including Marblehead, New Bedford, and Holyoke, and a celebration of Card to Culture at the Boston Children's Museum, all of which were well attended. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with strong appreciation for the Council's grantmaking and continued support from elected officials.

Staff also participated in the Governor's recent Travel and Tourism Conference in Danvers. At that event, Special Projects Manager for Advancement Carolyn Cole and Communities Initiative Program Manager Lisa Simmons led a panel discussion focused on collaboration between the creative sector and private sector partners. A new collaboration between the restaurant and lodging industries and the cultural sector, facilitating connections with visual artists whose work enhances restaurant and hotel spaces, was highlighted. That work has been led by Digital Communications Manager Dawn Heinen.

Over the course of the conference, multiple breakout sessions focused on arts and culture. Dave noted that, compared to the previous year, there was significantly greater attention being paid to the role of the arts within the broader tourism and economic development sectors.

The previous Friday, the Chair, Dave, and Manager of Strategic Partnerships & Advancement Erik Holmgren attended a conference at UMass Amherst focused on arts in health. The Agency's Social Prescription work launched six years earlier; this conference explored how the arts could positively influence health outcomes. The event brought together participants from the arts sector, public health professionals, and academic researchers. Erik moderated a panel that included MA Commissioner of Public Health Robbie Goldstein, and presenters shared data on the impact of the arts on health outcomes.

Another conference, this one run by Mass Cultural Council, is scheduled for next Friday, April 17 at Worcester State University. This follows the previous "Degrees of Change" conference which took place last October at Boston University and which explored introducing concepts of business acumen into arts study at colleges and universities, including business and civics coursework. The upcoming conference at Worcester State University is intended to continue that work.

Looking ahead, the Council Meeting and Retreat is scheduled for May 19 at the Paramount Center's Black Box Theater. Additional grant celebrations are planned in Worcester County and Berkshire County in May.

In June, Mass Housing will convene a large conference for property managers, with a focus on arts and culture. The Agency is serving as a content partner in that effort. Also in the housing space, there has been significant progress on a new grant program offered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC): a \$4.9 million program integrating arts and culture into Local Housing Authorities. The Agency has been working with the EOHLC on this effort for the past two years. A Notice of Funding Availability has been issued, with grants ranging from \$80,000 to \$490,000.

On the Programs front, more than 200 applications have been received for YouthReach, and staff are beginning to review them. Recommendations for the Cultural Facilities Fund were expected to be brought forward to the MassDevelopment Board in mid-May following review by the advisory committee. The Creative Experiences Grants remains open through April 30.

The Agency also recently hired two new full-time staff members: Kortney Adams, joining the Arts and Youth team, and Lauren Bjella, joining the Communities Initiative. These hires filled existing positions and do not represent new additions to staff.

The MITx arts and entrepreneurship course is now live and available for enrollment.

The Agency has long had a statutory presence on the STEM Committee and is in the process of launching and leading a STEAM subcommittee, which was

expected to hold its first meeting in June. There was significant interest in this work.

Dave concluded his report with appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Acting Executive Director and enthusiasm for continued collaboration going forward.

Ché asked Committee Members if they had questions for Dave. Julie asked for additional information about the MassHousing event, noting that it sounded like an exciting opportunity and inquiring about the timing of the related program. Dave responded that the conference was scheduled for June 16 in Norwood and is a MassHousing event for property managers, with an expected attendance of approximately 300 to 400 participants. He added that the Agency is providing content for the conference, while MassHousing is responsible for administration and logistics. Julie also asked whether there were updated participation numbers for the MITx program. Dave indicated that he did not yet have updated figures but would follow up. He noted that the Council had worked with MITx on the program's development, that a preliminary version had been tested with staff, and that the course officially launched on March 30.

Ché then asked Senior Director of Public Affairs Bethann Steiner for her Legislative and Public Affairs update.

Bethann began with an update on the state budget process, noting that the Agency did very well in the Governor's H2 budget proposal, which included a 5% increase. She thanked Julie Wake for joining her and Senior Director of Programs Jen Lawless at the House Ways & Means hearing in Barnstable where the group testified in support of the Governor's budget proposal for Mass Cultural Council. Since the release of H2 and the hearing, several positive and productive meetings with leaders on Beacon Hill have taken place.

Bethann noted that the House Ways and Means budget proposal is expected tomorrow. The Agency is looking for funding at or above the Governor's level of \$27.35 million and hopes to see that figure reflected in the House proposal. She indicated that, if necessary, the Agency is prepared to move quickly on amendments, working in coordination with the Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Committee and MASSCreative to secure sponsors.

She also mentioned the Agency has proposed a \$25,000 funded earmark for the Massachusetts Poet Laureate and noted that a sponsor had been identified to advance it through the amendment process if needed. In addition, she shared that there may be an opportunity to pursue support for STEM to STEAM legislation as an outside section of the House budget. The House budget debate is anticipated to take place during the week of April 27. She noted that updates would be forthcoming and asked Committee Members to be prepared to reach out to their legislators if amendments were needed.

Turning to the Senate, Bethann reported a very positive meeting with Senate Ways and Means Chair Michael Rodrigues, who views the Agency as a strong and effective partner. She noted that the Senate budget is expected in May.

She also provided an update on a technical amendment to the Cultural Facilities Fund (CFF) statute, which would simplify eligibility requirements to ensure that all cultural facilities, including those owned by municipalities or tribal entities, are eligible. She noted that this effort is being advanced in collaboration with Tourism, Arts, and Cultural Development Senate Chairman Paul Mark and may be introduced as an amendment.

The Legislature is approaching the end of the second year of the formal session, which typically concludes on July 31. As such, an economic development bond bill is expected from the Governor. In that context, the Council recently joined MASSCreative in submitting a letter encouraging support for the arts and cultural sector in that bond bill.

Bethann then transitioned to public affairs and events, expressing appreciation to Public Relations and Events Manager Christian Kelly and the team for organizing successful events across the state. She thanked Committee Members who had attended recent grant celebrations in Marblehead, New Bedford, Holyoke, and at the Children's Museum.

She noted that five additional events are upcoming. In May, a celebration will be held in Worcester County at the Fitchburg Art Museum on May 8; she noted that a Council member has not yet been confirmed for that event and invited participation. Another event is scheduled for May 15 in the Berkshires at the Norman Rockwell Museum, with participation from Council Members Tom Bernard, Donna Haghghat, and Rhonda Anderson.

On June 15 the Agency will host grant celebration events on Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard. Council Members Cecil Barron Jensen of Nantucket and Emily Bramhall of Martha's Vineyard are involved in the planning of the events.

A virtual, statewide celebration will take place towards the end of the fiscal year, around June 25, in recognition of feedback from groups that rely heavily on virtual engagement. Dave added that the timing aligning with the close of the fiscal year provides an opportunity to celebrate the Council's work across the Commonwealth over the past 12 months.

Ché assured Bethann there would be someone from the Council to attend the grant celebration in Fitchburg. There were no questions from the rest of the Committee and Ché moved to the final agenda item: reviewing the draft agenda for the May 19 Council Meeting which was included in the Committee's meeting materials.

Jo-Ann asked for clarity around the meeting timing, noting that it appeared the Council would only meet for one hour. Dave asked Ann to clarify, and she stated that the Council, joined by the Agency's staff, would participate in a session with Brittany Butler of the Harvard Kennedy School in the morning. Then, they'd take a brief break for lunch and hold their business meeting at 1:00 pm. Dave added that this structure had been decided in February and acknowledged that things had shifted since then, so additional thoughts were, of course, welcome.

Ché asked that the agenda be updated to reflect that there would be an update on the Executive Director search but no vote on an RFR for a search firm at that time.

Dave noted that the only other substantive item would be the out-of-state travel policy. He reminded Committee Members that a summary of the proposed revisions to the policy had been presented in February and, as no comments had been received, staff could proceed with drafting a formal policy with the Committee's approval. He outlined the proposed approach in which the Council would approve a budget line item for staff travel within the annual spending plan. Under this framework, the Executive Director would approve staff travel, while their own travel would require separate approval by the Council if it exceeded a certain threshold. He noted that specific limits had not yet been defined and proposed bringing forward a draft policy for review. He added that, at present, anticipated travel was minimal, citing the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) annual meeting in October as a likely example. He indicated that, if there was agreement, a draft policy could be prepared and presented at the May meeting.

Julie asked what the Executive Director search update in May would include and whether there would be any timelines or deadlines to help Council members plan accordingly.

Ché responded that, in an ideal scenario, by the May meeting the Council would have finalized the search task force and determined whether to engage a search firm or pursue an alternative approach.

Returning to the travel policy, Ché expressed agreement with the general approach outlined, noting that routine conference travel should not require repeated Council review if it falls within an approved budget line. He stated that it was appropriate for the Executive Director to approve staff travel, while the Executive Director's own travel should receive additional oversight. He also noted the importance of including a reporting mechanism so that travel activity is shared with the full Council and indicated that he would like the policy to come before the full Council for a vote in May.

Dave clarified that the anticipated votes at the May meeting would then include approval of the meeting minutes and the out-of-state travel policy, while the Executive Director search would be an update only.

Jo-Ann agreed with Julie and emphasized that it would be helpful to have greater clarity by the May meeting, including a proposed timeline, identification of task force members, and potential milestones such as the release of an RFP.

Simone asked how task force members would be selected. Ché responded that he would consider recommendations from Council members, as well as input gathered through conversations with staff and partner agencies. He noted that while the Council is well-positioned to lead the process, expanding participation could strengthen partnerships and ensure a comprehensive search. He emphasized the importance of exploring all opportunities to identify strong leadership candidates.

Julie suggested that the selection of external members could be approached strategically, identifying individuals whose participation might also strengthen future cross-sector partnerships, such as representatives from housing or other aligned fields.

Jo-Ann asked whether Council Members should submit names in advance of the May meeting. Ché confirmed that this would be helpful, and proposed members submit recommendations by April 24, with the goal of presenting a proposed task force at the May 19 meeting.

Dave added two administrative notes. First, he noted that Ché would be using a dedicated Mass Cultural Council email address for his communications. Second, he explained that because the Chair is authorized to lead the search process, he may solicit input from individual Council Members without triggering Open Meeting Law requirements, as these are not actions of a public body.

Finally, Simone suggested that it would be helpful to have a clear description of the role and responsibilities of search task force members before making recommendations. Ché agreed and stated that he would circulate additional details within a few days.

There were no further questions or comments on the agenda and Ché asked for a motion and a second to approve it as amended. Jo-Ann moved to approve the agenda as amended; Julie seconded the motion. By roll call vote, noting that Iván Espinoza-Madrigal and Cecil Barron Jensen were absent the motion was unanimously approved.

RESOLVED: to approve the agenda for the May 19 Council Meeting as amended.

The end of the agenda had been reached and Ché, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:00 am.