



**Public Arts Commission
North Adams, Massachusetts**

Meeting Minutes

August 23, 2018

The North Adams Public Arts Commission held a public meeting on August 23, 2018 at the North Adams Public Library, 74 Church Street, North Adams.

Members Present: Julia Dixon, Chairperson
 Eric Kerns, Vice Chairperson
 William Blackmer, Secretary
 Cynthia Quiñones
 Bryan Sapienza

Absent: Derek Parker

Also Present: Tammy Daniels
 Eric Buddington
 Vincent Melito
 Margo Melito
 Joseph Smith
 Rebecca Cohen
 Christina King
 Richard Tavelli
 Bert Lamb
 Suzy Helme
 and other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dixon called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Quiñones moved to accept the Public Arts Commission minutes from its July 11, 2018 public meeting. Dixon seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed.

NEW BUSINESS: ORDINANCE REVISIONS DISCUSSION

Discussion of Public Arts Commission ordinance revisions that were proposed by Mayor Thomas Bernard and submitted to the City Council at its August 14th meeting. Changes were made across the entire ordinance and are both grammatical and structural. Two major revisions change the approval authority from the commission to the mayor, and the contracting authority from the commission to the mayor. These revisions would change the commission's structure to an advisory body to the mayor. There are other city boards and commissions that have contract-making authority, limited by the city charter. Additionally, the city charter requires contracts "involving" \$2,000 or more to be signed by the mayor.

Commissioners discussed the implications of these changes and questioned the mayor's intentions for the ordinance changes, which was not made entirely clear. Public attendees including Vincent Melito and Joseph Smith expressed a desire to keep the ordinance as is, with seven people as the authority on art as opposed to one.

Dixon informed public attendees that if they have any further comments regarding this matter, they can email or drop them off to the city clerk prior to noon on Monday, August 27, the date of the joint General Government Committee and Public Arts Commission public meeting.

NEW BUSINESS: CREATION OF COMMISSION STATEMENT ON ORDINANCE REVISIONS FOR GENERAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Dixon advised members to craft and vote on a statement to be read at the upcoming General Government Committee meeting on Monday, August 27 which reflects the position of the majority of the members of the Public Arts Commission. Quiñones made a motion to retain the contracting and approval authority of the Public Arts Commission. Dixon seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed. Kerns requested that commissioners who attend the General Government Committee meeting also seek clarification about what "approval" means as well as contracts involving \$2,000 or more.

NEW BUSINESS: HARMONIC BRIDGE DISCUSSION INCLUDING BRIEF RECAP, MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION, AND COMMUNITY PETITION/SURVEY

Dixon provided a brief background on the works installed on the pillars under the Marshall Street overpass. Following the synopsis, Christina King clarified that, during a meeting of the artists at MASS MoCA in December 2017, restoration was in fact discussed and the Harmonic Bridge artist was completely against it. Additionally, Mayor Bernard had suggested the two groups of artists work together on a new project for an unrelated property. There has been no further communication between the two groups of artists since that December meeting.

Dixon explained this item was added to the agenda regarding recent clarification of the ordinance that the commission does have contracting authority, which means the commission could make a decision on creating a contract for something that is currently on the pillars. Kerns questioned the commission's purview over any artwork created prior to the existence of the commission.

Public comments included Vincent Melito informing the commission that he circulated a petition with about 180 signatures that he gathered at the Downtown Celebration requesting the mayor or Public Arts Commission approve a restoration test on the pillars. Dixon requested the specific number of

signatures as well as the petition language, the latter which was provided to the commissioners. After a review of this document, Kerns believed the petition was biased and misleading. Richard Tavelli inquired about the bridge's ownership. Joseph Smith suggested the commission draft a short-term contract for mural restoration that artists King and Bill Oberst are reportedly amicable to. Dixon suggested that potential solutions be put on a future agenda for further discussion. Sapienza urged the commission to help resolve the issue as there has been no resolution and this controversy continues to upset many members of the community.

Dixon made a motion for the Public Arts Commission to facilitate and host some type of public forum about this issue in order to educate as well as solicit opinions and feedback from the public. Quiñones seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Dixon proposed the creation of a commission subcommittee to plan this event and suggested this subcommittee update the full commission about its progress at a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS: AMERICANS FOR THE ARTS' CREATIVE CONVERSATIONS PROGRAM

Dixon provided an overview of the Americans for the Arts' (AFTA) Creative Conversations program occurring in October for National Arts and Humanities Month. AFTA promotes independent events throughout the country that are related to the Creative Conversations topic which, this year, is: "What is your power to create change in/through the arts?" The ordinance changes have brought to the surface the question of power surrounding public art in North Adams.

Dixon suggested the Public Arts Commission host a public conversation about this topic. Commissioners inquired about the benefits of working with AFTA, and agreed that conversations about art and community are important and can be successful given the right facilitator and timing. It was agreed that Dixon reach out to the program representative and ask for more information. If the commission does not participate in the Creative Conversations program, it was agreed that the commission think about establishing its own conversation/event series.

PROPOSAL: HOOSIC RIVER REVIVAL'S FLAG PROJECT

Bert Lamb from the Hoosic River Revival (HRR) board described the Hoosic River Revival flag project. The proposal involves three 6-foot by 4-foot canvas flags to be displayed individually or in various configurations at various locations along the Hoosic River. Locations being considered include the chain link fence along the flood control chutes at Canal Street across from NAPA Auto Parts, Union Street across from Aubuchon Hardware, the southeast corner of River and Marshall Streets, and suspended from the Marshall Street overpass. Planning to move the flags to various sites every three weeks for more exposure.

Questions and concerns from commission members pertained to installation/security, whether flags are longer than the fences they will be attached to, and more specifics on the timeline and locations where they will be displayed. Kerns suggested HRR hang them at MASS MoCA during the FreshGrass Music Festival. Commissioners were supportive of the proposal and encouraged Bert Lamp reapply as more specifics are confirmed. Sapienza expressed concern over the flag's content which, as it indicates infrastructure problems, may present a negative connotation of North Adams. Kerns agreed on the point and commissioners discussed "artful advocacy" related to the Hoosic River Revival's mission.

OLD BUSINESS: FINAL ARTIST CONTRACT REVIEW

Postponed to future agenda.

OLD BUSINESS: MONTHLY MEETING DATE DISCUSSION

Postponed to future agenda.

PUBLIC ATTENDEE CONCERNS

None

MEMBER CONCERNS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Blackmer inquired into the three pending contracts for the most recent proposals that were approved by the commission. Dixon reported that they are have yet to be signed by the mayor. Two contracts with MCLA's Berkshire Cultural Resource Center are at a standstill as the mayor did not accept their liability insurance waiver. The contract with the North Adams Public Schools has not yet been signed as the mayor had a question about insurance.

Kerns and Sapienza commented on the need to structure the pillar art forum in such a way as to not devolve into something unproductive. Suzy Helme suggested the Public Arts Commission contact Amber Besaw of the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition and ask her about best practices.

SET NEXT MEETING TIME AND DATE

Next meeting date to be determined.

ADJOURNMENT

With no other business to discuss, Blackmer moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:39 p.m. Sapienza seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Respectfully submitted,

William Blackmer, Secretary