



**Public Arts Commission
North Adams, Massachusetts**

Meeting Minutes

June 7, 2017

The North Adams Public Arts Commission held a public meeting on June 7, 2017 at the Eclipse Mill Gallery at the Eclipse Mill Artist Lofts, 243 Union Street #102, North Adams.

Members Present: Julia Dixon, Chairperson
Erica Manville, Vice Chairperson
Cynthia Quiñones, Secretary
William C. Blackmer, Jr.
Gail Kolis Sellers

Absent: Nancy Ziter
Eric Kerns

Also Present: City Councilor Nancy Bullett
City Councilor Eric Buddington
Phil Sellers
Bill Kolis
Vin Jensen
Stephanie Borns
Tammy Daniels

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Dixon called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Blackmer moved to accept the Public Arts Commission minutes from its May 10, 2017 public meeting. Sellers seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed.

HARMONIC BRIDGE/ART ABOUT TOWN PILLARS DISCUSSION

In light of MASS MoCA's decision to restore the Harmonic Bridge installation by painting over the Art About Town community mural projects located under the Veterans Memorial Bridge on Marshall St., the Public Arts Commission held a discussion to consider both what had occurred, and what potential next steps might be taken by the commission and community to avoid future miscommunications and harm.

Gail Sellers described the phone call she received from Joe Thompson on May 10 indicating the museum's intentions. During the call, Thompson told Sellers that he had seen the murals being painted in 2012, and knew the students were painting over the gray columns intended to be a part of the Harmonic Bridge installation, but decided to say nothing at the time, believing the mural installation would be temporary. He also saw the second round of murals being added in 2013 and did not object at the time to their creation and placement. Sellers warned Thompson about the pushback he would receive from the community, yet in mid-May, MASS MoCA went ahead with their plans to restore the Harmonic Bridge installation by painting over the pillars.

Manville noted that the bridge itself is state property, though Dixon pointed out that is the city's responsibility to maintain the bridge. Dixon also asked whether or not a contract had been drafted at the time of the Harmonic Bridge's installation, underscoring the necessity for contracts in the creation of all future public art in the city.

All of the commissioners noted that they had individually heard from community members about their frustration, sadness, and outrage over the destruction of the art created by and for the local community.

Sellers proposed that the commission hold a public forum dedicated to further discussion of this issue as soon as possible. She volunteered to reach out to Christina King and Bill Oberst, the artists responsible for the community mural projects to gauge their interest and availability.

Manville suggested that the commission would benefit from having an assigned liaison to MASS MoCA, in order to improve communication regarding this and all future public art projects proposed by the museum. She volunteered to be the liaison, given her already well-established relationships with the museum administrators and educators. She volunteered to check their availability in terms of setting up a public forum. The commission also agreed it would be prudent to ask MASS MoCA to identify a specific liaison to communicate with the Public Arts Commission and attend meetings as a member of the public.

City Councilor Nancy Bullett noted the commission's role as a recommending body (as opposed to one empowered to assign punishments to those who have broken contracts or otherwise defaced public art), encouraged the creation of a liaison position with the museum, and recommended increasing communication with the public, in general.

Bill Kolis recommended that the commission use other existing public arts commissions as templates for their by-laws, contracts, etc. He also noted the importance of considering Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA) laws, which Dixon noted the commission has been aware of since its first discussions in December 2015.

Vin Jensen pointed out that this particular issue has many layers, as there are multiple artists whose works were violated. He also noted that, were an individual to paint over a public art exhibit without permission, it would be treated as vandalism. He asked whether or not MASS MoCA had complied with the arts commission guidelines, and Dixon noted that they had not.

City Councilor Eric Buddington acknowledged the importance of considering both the legal and moral authority vested in the arts commission by the city.

Phil Sellers commented that the whole experience felt like an important part of a learning curve for the commission and the city, and expressed regret that the administration at MASS MoCA seem to feel they have a right to paint over anyone else's work when it suits them.

City councilor Bullett noted that this is an opportune time to formalize a reporting mechanism within the commission—a process for reporting instances such as this, when a person or entity does not follow the guidelines set forth by the public arts commission. Dixon noted that MASS MoCA did not submit completed applications for public art, as is required by the arts commission guidelines.

CHRISTINA KING PROPOSAL REVIEW

Time and weather restraints have led to this project's postponement.

REVISED APPLICATION REVIEW

This item has been postponed to a future meeting.

CONTRACTS/AGREEMENTS DISCUSSION

Dixon noted that the commission had decided to hold off on creating a template for artist contracts until they were needed. Observing that the time has come, Dixon and Quiñones agreed to draft a contract template to run by the city solicitor and will report back to the commission at a future meeting.

PUBLIC ATTENDEES CONCERNS

Stephanie Borns asked to whom she should complain about the content of the Jenny Holzer exhibit, noting that she feels the violence described in the text is inappropriate in their current location across the street from a residential neighborhood in which many children live. Dixon referred Borns to Larry Smallwood, the curator of the project, noting that the museum did not submit a completed application for the project.

MEMBER CONCERNS/FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Future agenda items will include an update on the public forum regarding the Harmonic Bridge/Art About Town pillars project, an update from Manville regarding commission communication with MASS MoCA, a review of the revised application, a review of the contract template, and other items to be determined.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Public Arts Commission will be held at 5:30p.m. on Thursday, June 29, 2017, at the Eclipse Mill.

ADJOURNMENT

With no other business to discuss, Manville moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:58p.m. Blackmer seconded. All voted in favor. None opposed.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia Quiñones, Secretary