

## **Minutes of the BRC on Arts and Non-Profits, April 12, 2021**

Barbara called the meeting to order at 12:01.

Committee members attending: Russ Grazier, Barbara Massar, Robin Albert, Larry Yerdon, Courtney Perkins, Beth Falconer, Tina Sawtelle, Bill Humphreys, Renee Giffroy, Kathy Somssich and Nihco Gallo by phone. Also attending: Stephanie Seacord, Nancy Carmer.

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Larry, seconded by Beth and unanimously approved.

Russ is looking now for the overarching themes from the findings of the survey to use as next steps.

Barbara was struck by how much the respondents were not aware of what is happening and she feels that a goal of this committee should be to educate the community.

Kathy plans to announce local cultural events on Seacoast Currents on Portsmouth Community Radio. She will not need the information fed to her, but will garner it from the appropriate websites.

Robin reminded the committee of the Safe Space Sticker program, which provided stickers to be placed in front windows to assure the public that safety guidelines will be followed at that venue.

Tina: An education component emphasizing safety awareness is needed to get the information out to the public. Collaboration between producing venues is one of the themes to come out of the survey with emphasis on:

1. Juneteenth Celebrations
2. Portsmouth 400 events
3. Diversity, Equity, and Training initiatives.

Tina suggested that a central website should provide links to the individual venues' websites. We discussed inviting the Chamber to discuss the events calendar and destination marketing they are doing (GoPortsmouthNH.com) which is supported by some funding from the City and from participating attractions, restaurants, retail, hotels.

Beth: There should be a portal for safety protocols shared by the organizations. This portal should reach tourists to encourage use of the Foundry Garage and make tourists aware of corridors into town and tickets booths along the way.

Barbara asked whether the Clipper Fund had any money left in it for Safe Space stickers or a creative walkway into town.

Russ stated that according to the survey, 20% of the respondents want to return now without masks and social distancing; 20% are waiting for a 50% vaccination rate with no safety protocols; 60% are waiting for a 75% vaccination rate. That indicates that 100% of the respondents are ready to return to the venues when full vaccination has been reached. This is a positive statement regarding the community's readiness to return.

Courtney stressed that finding a uniform message should be in place for the Fall (September – December) to bring audiences back indoors.

Robin: It's confusing to audiences when one venue requires masks and another doesn't.

Beth: We need to communicate a unified message following CDC and State guidelines, allowing for each individual venue to adjust according to staffing and monitoring capabilities. The message should emphasize that the organizations' first priority is the safety of its audience and staff, quickly followed by the season's offerings and artistic plans.

Barbara suggested an overview with general rules and then specific guidelines for each individual venue.

Courtney added that two clear phases with different expectations for the Summer and Fall should be taken into consideration.

Russ suggested we use the "Seacoast Safety Pledge" to encourage audiences to return.  
<https://www.visitseacoastnh.com/seacoast-safe-pledge/>

Barbara cautioned the venues about being too Portsmouth-centric. Many artists responding to the survey don't live here or have moved out of Portsmouth due to the high cost of housing.

Russ suggested expanding the survey to show quarterly changes and a trajectory of where we're going. The survey reflects an overall theme of support for collaboration between organizations and an excitement about looking beyond the pandemic to the future of the arts in Portsmouth.

Kathy, noting the respondents' desire for creative and rehearsal space, wondered if empty store fronts could be used for rehearsal space or display space for visual arts.

Russ: strong enrollment at PMAC is a sign that the community is feeling more confident. Renee: There is an increase in people asking about the First Friday Art Around Town. Larry: Strawberry Banke Summer camps are sold out. There is no hesitation on the part of parents to sign up.

Tina: The two phases will project how the guidelines will look and will push the conversation toward the future.

Barbara: The committee can soon start to meet every other week.

Mayor Becksted joined the meeting to express gratitude to the committee and his hope that the committee will become a united voice for Arts and Culture in Portsmouth. He added that the Clipper Strong Fund still exists, but is dormant in order not to compete with federal and state grants. It can, however, still be used and there are still funds in the Artspeak account. Portsmouth will receive further federal funds and the Mayor encouraged the committee to request funds for any specific needs.

Russ would like the committee to come up with a message to the City Council regarding the findings of the survey.

Laura Brown encouraged everyone to look at the PortsmouthNH website and determine what works and what doesn't.

Andrew Bagley suggested the committee request funds from the City to create an attractive corridor from the Foundry Garage into town.

Russ adjourned the meeting at 1pm.

Submitted by Kathleen Somssich

