

July 26, 2021 Minutes – Mayor’s BRC on Arts and Nonprofits

Russ called the meeting to order at 12:00 noon.

Members in attendance: Russ Grazier, Renee Giffroy, Larry Yerdon, Courtney Perkins, Robin Albert, Kathy Somssich, Jason Goodrich, Martha Fuller Clark. Beth Falconer and Barbara Massar, remotely.

Also attending: Economic Development Manager Nancy Carmer, Mayor Rick Becksted, Ben Vancamp (Chamber Collaborative), Jeff McMenemy (Herald), Director of Parking Ben Fletcher.

Motion to approve last meeting’s minutes was made by Larry, seconded by Courtney and approved unanimously.

Nancy provided an overview of Art-Speak, focusing on its accomplishments and its present status. It was created as a result of the city’s 2002 cultural plan. It started as a 13 member commission in 2002 and was given \$25K from the city to kick it off and pay for its 501(c)(3) application. Arts organizations such as PMAC, The Loft and 3S Artspace have been launched in the years since the cultural plan went into effect. Art-Speak launched an artists directory, the Overnight Art temporary public art exhibit (twice) and symposia on developing public art and other topics important to local artists. It took on responsibility for the AFTA study which quantified the economic value of the arts to the city. It developed art acquisition guidelines, the % for Art ordinance, a marketing effort (A Little Bit Huge), the Street Canvas website and a map of public art (and art in public). It was dismantled in August of 2018, having spent \$48.3K of \$100,000 committed by the city in 2018, and leaving a balance of \$51.7K.

Russ: There are discussions to be had regarding the funds that are left and if they can be used by this committee to market arts organizations in Portsmouth.

Nancy reported that the next AFTA study has been postponed until 2022. Contracts are available now and the city is willing to fund the study. A major component of the study is audience intercept surveys, which will require organization and volunteers. AFTA holds training workshops on data gathering, which is done with in-person surveys. Russ and Barbara will meet to discuss what this committee can do to implement these surveys. It was suggested that UNH interns can help. AFTA gives presentations on how nonprofits can use the data. Barbara inquired if we have access to previous files of the survey and Nancy will look into Art-Speak files to see who participated. Robin is willing to co-chair this effort.

Sen. MFC reminded us that a Summary Report of this committee’s work will be expected at the end of this city council’s term.

Ben Fletcher, Director of Parking for Portsmouth, reported that while the city is excited about public art, guidelines set by the Federal Highway Administration limit the color and appearance of crosswalks. Changing the color and appearance of crosswalks can alter communication with drivers and impact the safety of crosswalks. Other communities that have implemented crosswalk art are letting the crosswalks return to their original form. The city is hesitant to support crosswalk art, but is open to alternative sidewalk art. Mayor Becksted suggested we consider areas such as Prescott Park, the waterfront and schools for sidewalk art.

Sen. MFC suggested we link the sidewalk art with arts organizations to create interest in the various organizations and that due to numerous complexities, such as process, cost, location, input from neighborhoods, and design parameters, we delay the project until Fall/Winter.

Jason suggested that we reach out to neighborhoods in our community, who often feel left out, and offer to bring art to them. Barbara emphasized the need to involve the neighborhoods so they know we are speaking with them and not to them and that we should find out what they want. Approaching the Neighborhood Steering Committee would be a potential start.

Russ acknowledged the efforts of Kathleen Cavallaro who raised \$10K from many, many donors for the committee to use for a public art project. This committee does not have a process for accepting funds, but we will work to find the best way to participate in the spirit of inclusion and get back to her. Russ expressed the committee's gratitude to the many donors who contributed.

Nancy reminded the committee of the Public Art Trust which came out of Art-Speak and could accept a restricted gift.

Jason suggested we look into accessing the \$51.7K and additional ARPA funds to explore a pilot marketing plan in collaboration with the Chamber Collaborative to increase arts tourism. Robin suggested hiring a consultant and requesting an RFP for potential marketing partners.

Beth supports the use of those funds for marketing, but inquired about where the funds for the public art would come from. She mentioned the 1% arts allocation and supports a sustainable funding effort for the arts organizations.

Russ stated that \$51K is not enough to fund a marketing program, but instead a pilot effort. He mentioned ARPA funds and reiterated the committee's purpose to help the city to know what the city can do to help the arts. He expressed the need to involve our own community in our arts organizations, not just tourists. Top priorities are marketing the arts and nonprofits, and supporting individual artists. It's important to talk to the city about accessing those funds.

Sen. MFC mentioned that the committee should have an update from the city's Health Dept. regarding the impact of the variant Delta virus and she questions whether audiences will be willing to go inside in the Fall/Winter.

In the Public Comment session, Laura Brown invited the members of the committee to the official opening of the Ruth Blay mural on Court Street tonight at 6pm.

Mayor Becksted offered his thanks to this committee and realizes the need for funding for the committee's projects. He stated that the city council is receptive to requests from this committee and encourages the committee to ask the council for funding and provide a breakdown of what the funds are for. He is in the process of asking businesses for \$25K for this committee. He would like to see this committee become a permanent committee, not just a Blue Ribbon and will talk to City Attorney Bob Sullivan regarding this change.

Russ adjourned the meeting at 1:06pm.

Submitted by Kathleen Somssich