

Minutes – September 19, 2022 -- Portsmouth Arts and Nonprofits Committee

Russ called the meeting to order at 12:02 PM.

Members in attendance: Russ Grazier, Robin Albert, Courtney Perkins, Jason Goodrich, Genevieve Aichele, Renee Giffroy, Ben Van Camp. Remotely: Barbara Massar, Beth Falconer, Tina Sawtelle, Councilor Kate Cook. Not present: Nihco Gallo, Larry Yerdon, JerriAnne Boggis

Non-members in attendance: Stephanie Seacord (recording secretary)

Quorum not present so August minutes held for approval at October meeting.

AFTA Update: “We’re doing SO much better.”

- 334 surveys received electronically and 100 on paper of 800 goal by April 30, 2023/ .

Still most effective to have AFTA ‘ambassadors’ – i.e. Arts Committee members – at events to solicit surveys from audience members. Russ encouraged committee members to find some time to volunteer for another organization. Not only does that free up its own director for the multiple demands on performance day but it gives you a chance to network with members of the Portsmouth arts community. The word about the arts needs to get out in the community.

Paper and QR code used – neither alone is more effective than the other. Good collection results when people are standing in line. Immediacy or the moment is lost. Robin is happy to provide “AFTA Survey coaching.”

Committee is still waiting for information from AFTA on the financial reporting that takes place in Jan. Continues to understand that the reporting will be less time-consuming for smaller organizations this time.

ARPA Request:

Councilor Cook reported that the September 12 City Council Work Session gave the Council and community a good first look at the potential allocations for the remaining \$5 million. The Arts Committee was the first with their request (Dec 2021) but City needs to address \$17 million in current requests with the City Council weighing in on the spending decisions. The Arts ask is well positioned as it’s less than \$1 million. No timeframe on the decision-making. Requirement is allocation by December 2024 and spent by Dec 2026.

Citizen Response Task Force (social services) started its work in August and asked for an end-of-year deadline. Barbara noted her concern that more delay increases the gap between the July 2022 end of the GoOut Marketing campaign pilot and next steps. “Another quarter without marketing leaves me very concerned for the health of this sector.”

Councilor Cook said she would be speaking with the Mayor and do more lobbying for some earlier decisions. She said the fact that Barbara spoke as the Arts Committee advocate at the work session was very helpful.

Re: financial impact on the Arts sector, Russ then reported the results of a recent NH State Council on the Arts survey (full survey included with the minutes):

Total earned income in 2022 = 78% of 2019. Performing arts sector earned income = 74% of 2019.

Still trying to catch up with the 2020 gap: 60% decrease. The situation is dire. The impact of the loss compounds. The community should know that their occasional full house experience (eg Indigo Girls at PPAF) is anecdotal. We are still severely impacted over the totality of the season. We need to help audiences rebuild their confidence in being inside. If we don’t have a significant recovery within the next 3 years we’ll be in significant danger of manifesting the impact in dire results. We have to worry about how long it’s taking to decide on the potential funding.

Tina noted that about 20% of the Telluride audience was missing. Some live shows were homeruns but people were much more selective. The holiday show is worrying as people are holding out on their ticket decisions. Presenting the show is a huge financial risk but we have to take the risk to reassure the audience. We’re not able to bring staffing levels

back until we fill the house, so people are wearing more hats which means even more of a work load – without reducing our expectations to deliver on our missions, including collaborations. We're in a holding pattern, under-resourced.

Barb NHSCA also noted appreciation to donors but still down from 2020 and 2021. "We're back doing things but we're not ok." We count on donors and sponsors. We can't continue at 60-70% of prior income.

The problem is we're so used to doing things on a shoestring we adjust, but there's only so much we can do and continue. There's nothing else to cut back on.

Genevieve: The impact is not just the lost revenue. As COVID-19 continues to circulate, it impacts performers. Had to cancel two sold-out shows. Takes more than audience confidence to get people in seats.

Renee: There's also the impact of the market and inflation. Difficult decisions like buying food, gas and electricity mean more selective purchase of tickets.

Beth: Which brings us back to the importance of the marketing objectives and ARPA funding. We have to work harder and attract new audiences, not just bring people back. Habits have changed (cf. Colleen Dilenschneider data) so we have to go broader and deeper with the storytelling in our outreach. There's real urgency. The pilot campaign was not enough.

Cultural Plan

Councilor Cook mentioned the formation of the Cultural Plan Subcommittee at the City Council meeting. Information and link to the application form are posted on the City website (<https://www.cityofportsmouth.com/city/arts-nonprofits-committee-cultural-plan-subcommittee>). Suggest a letter to the editor and press release that can be shared by Committee members with their organizations.

Russ and Barbara have approached committee members about leadership positions in the subcommittee. Suggestion that it might be better to gather the group and answer the leadership question organically. Very important that the process be transparent and involve the community, bringing in all stakeholders.

A few questions arose now answered with FAQs on the webpage and in the City Newsletter.

Portsmouth residence required? Need a strong connection to Portsmouth arts and nonprofits but not residence (Cllr Cook noted this is a subcommittee of this committee which also does not require residence.)

Barb noted we should be clear on expectations, time commitment. Russ suggested the committee draft a bulleted list of responsibilities and goals to share.

Beth asked about the idea of hiring a paid consultant to define and facilitate the process. Russ and Sean Clancy have discussed how to manage the process and produce the document. The City has funds, but he's not clear on the scale of the commitment. A consultant would help develop the materials and leverage the past experience with the first Cultural Plan. Cllr Cook noted the scope of the Climate Action Plan consultant – completing all the work – is \$100k.

Renee: What is the start date? Originally this fall with a document by Dec 2023. Obstacles to completion include lingering COVID-19 and the Portsmouth NH 400. Russ: the idea was to book-end this group, completing the plan with the sunset of the Committee and Council terms in Dec 2023.

Beth: Important for this group to bring the voice and facilitate the plan but also important that it's seen not as just a plan from our organizations but for all nonprofits and supporting the arts in the future. An outside consultant would help that perception and an advocate for spending objectivity.

Ben: UNH Cooperative Extension services, like the UMass consultant on the previous plan, are on Sean's radar.

Barb and Russ will do more work to move the subcommittee ahead. One of the big decisions for the Arts Committee is whether to recommend another ArtSpeak. We bump up against so many things that are not this committee's job.

Russ and Barbara met to strategize for an organizational subcommittee meeting in September. Reported that Councilor Cook inquired and a subcommittee of this Committee is ok, though Sean suggested there might be an advantage one way or the other in the semantic distinction between "subcommittee" and "task force" when it comes to whether the members must be recommended by the Mayor and approved by the Council. Using the existing Board/Committee application form still makes sense rather than inventing a new one.

GoOut Marketing Campaign

Marketing Subcommittee is working with the final report to prepare recommendations such as what was learned from the targeted media channels. How do we continue to reach the older, more affluent audiences that support our organizations but also attract young audiences, long-term. We can't give up on the outreach.

Meeting adjourned at 12:55 pm. Next meeting, Monday October 17 at 12 noon.