

**CITY OF NORWALK
ARTS & CULTURE COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES – OCTOBER 7, 2025
VIA ZOOM VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**

ATTENDEES: Brian Kaspr (Chair), Robert Abriola, Marc Alan, Naomi Clark, Nori Grudin, Kevin Huffman, Danny Loftus George, Melissa Matuska, Steven Rust, Janay Sylvester.

STAFF: Sabrina Godeski

OTHERS: Heather Dunn

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Kaspr at 6:00 PM

II. ROLL CALL

Roll call was conducted by Mr. Kaspr, confirming a quorum. Mr. Abriola joined at 6:06 PM. Danny Loftus Goerge & Steven Rust joined at 6:16 PM. Heather Dunn joined at 6:23 PM.

III. ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

A. Special Meeting: September 10, 2025

****MS. CLARK MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 10, 2025 SPECIAL MEETING.**

****MR. ALAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED WITH ONE (1) ABSTENTION (MR. ABRIOLA).**

IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Diane Lauricella, residing at 21 Little Fox Lane:

Expressed support for the Commission's work on a draft public partnership policy, noting it was not yet ready for approval. She referenced the West Avenue mural project, advocating for private business sponsorships to fund murals, sculptures, events, and trainings without quid pro quo, provided the partner's mission aligns with the Commission's and city's. She criticized the draft as overly bureaucratic and wordy, suggesting it discourages simple donations by requiring excessive involvement from the Commission. Ms. Lauricella proposed a simpler donation stream, citing the West Avenue and Ely Avenue murals as examples where private funding could have helped without Commission takeover. She also noted the absence of residency requirements in the Ely mural voting process in the minutes and requested its addition to the agenda, invoking Robert's Rules of Order for commissioners to propose a vote.

Ms. Romney Donald, residing in District A:

Echoed Ms. Lauricella's request to add the Ely Avenue mural to the agenda. She connected his comments to the Partnership Request Application, emphasizing the need for verified Norwalk resident feedback, especially from neighborhoods directly impacted like Ely Avenue, which has a historical Black and Brown population. Ms. Donald stressed the importance of preserving history and representation, particularly for her young Black artist child, arguing that local artists' work inspires and connects the community. She urged sensitivity in public art processes to avoid silencing affected voices.

Mr. Steve Ferguson, residing at 7 Roosevelt Street in Norwalk:

Acknowledged the sensitivity of the Ely Mural topic, respecting the Commission's efforts. He criticized the voting process as inaccurate, suggesting it should better reflect local residents and proposing a redo with careful oversight.

Ileana, representing Unidos Norwalk:

Addressed the Ely Mural Project, not on the agenda. She thanked Ms. Diane and Mr. Romney for raising the issue, emphasizing its significance beyond a mural, focusing on fairness, transparency, and equity. She highlighted the exclusion of local artist Five Fingers without investigation and the lack of residency verification in the public survey, urging future processes to verify residency and prioritize community participation to reflect the diversity, history, and pride of neighborhoods like Ella Avenue.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Approve the allocation of \$1,270 from the Arts and Cultural Commission budget for the Halloween Nightfair Glow-in-the-Dark Art Installation and related activity

Mr. Kaspr proposed allocating \$1,270 for a children's glow-in-the-dark art installation at the Halloween Nightfair on Main Street in Sono, using black lights, paint, and markers. He noted his unlikelihood to attend and stressed the need for two commission members to assist Ms. Godeski and Ms. Anna. Ms. Clark confirmed the date as October 25, 2025, from 2:00 PM to 10:00 PM (vendors until 6:00 PM), and Ms. Godeski suggested promoting the Commission with a booth or brochures, offering volunteers. Ms. Clark agreed to attend most of the day, and Mr. Kaspr appointed her to lead, encouraging others to help.

Ms. Dunn, a volunteer leader with the Red Cross in Connecticut supported the Halloween Nightfair Glow-in-the-Dark Art Installation idea. She inquired about having a Red Cross table for outreach, particularly targeting children during the Halloween event which Mr. Kaspr approved.

**** MR. ABRIOLA MOVED TO APPROVE THE ALLOCATION OF \$1,270 FROM THE ARTS AND CULTURAL COMMISSION BUDGET FOR THE HALLOWEEN NIGHTFAIR GLOW-N-THE-DARK ART INSTALLATION AND RELATED ACTIVITY.**

**** MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION. ****

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

B. Approve the Partnership Request Application and Guidelines

Mr. Kaspr introduced the draft Partnership Request Application and Guidelines, clarifying it was not a donation form but a process for organizations to apply for Commission support, inspired by a Thrown Stone Theater request. He noted it needed revision and encouraged input.

Mr. Loftus George offered to review and organize edits, leveraging his contract law background. Mr. Kaspr tabled the item. Ms. Godeski agreed to share it via Google Doc for feedback by October 20, 2025, with final edits due by October 30, 2025. Mr. Rust inquired if it was reviewed by Thrown Stone, and Ms. Godeski confirmed it was not.

****MR. LOFTUS GEORGE MOTIONED TO TABLE THE DISCUSSION FOR NEXT MEETING.**

****MR. ALAN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

VI. OLD BUSINESS

A. Authorize the sponsorship for Thrown Stone Theater in an amount not to exceed \$2,600

Mr. Kaspr initiated the discussion on authorizing a sponsorship for Thrown Stone Theater not exceeding \$2,600, expressing initial concerns about the content of the proposed event and its potential public reception. He drew parallels to previous mural controversies, highlighting the need for careful consideration. Ms. Grudin supported the idea of sponsoring existing nonprofit arts projects rather than initiating new ones, suggesting alternatives such as poetry readings, musical performances, or theatrical plays.

Ms. Matuska reinforced the Commission's responsibility to vet art, citing examples from Washington Avenue events where Mr. Alan and others had carefully selected and approved artists to align with city values. She acknowledged art's subjectivity but stressed the Commission's governmental role, urging due diligence to ensure funded art reflects appropriate standards. Mr. Kaspr responded by affirming Thrown Stone's reputation as a reputable organization with publicly demonstrated values, framing the sponsorship as a collaborative effort that leverages this trust.

Mr. Alan expressed confidence in Thrown Stone's curation, particularly trusting Jonathan Winn's judgment in selecting a suitable event. He saw no necessity to review specific plays, viewing the partnership as a collaborative trust-based endeavor, and supported moving forward without additional scrutiny. Ms. Clark reflected on the Commission's adoption of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policy and the structured guidelines for the Eli Avenue mural process. She suggested making this information accessible online to counter misinformation and proposed ongoing discussions about how the Commission supports art, beyond the current vote.

**** MR. ALAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE SPONSORSHIP FOR THROWN STONE THEATER IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED \$2,600.**

**** MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** ABSTENTIONS MS. MATUSKA AND MR. LOFTUS GEORGE.**

****THE MOTION CARRIED 7-2.**

VII. ADJOURNMENT

**** MS. MATUSKA MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** MS. CLARK SECONDED THE MOTION.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned around 7:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Courtney Baldwin
Recording Secretary