

**CITY OF NORWALK
ARTS & CULTURAL COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
VIA TELECONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 16, 2023**

ATTENDANCE: Brian Kaspr, Chair; Danny George, Marc Alan, Steven Rust,
Nori Grudin, Naomi Clark, Melissa Matuska, *Robert Abriola(6:11)*

STAFF: Sabrina Godeski, Staff

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Kaspr called the meeting to order at 6:01p.m.

ROLL CALL

Mr. Kaspr acknowledged those in attendance as above noted. There was a quorum present. Names shown in italics did not respond when the roll was called.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no one present for Public Comment.

APPROVAL FOR MINUTES OF OCTOBER 03, 2023

Sabrina Godeski requested amendment on the wording on page 4 from the “fines” to read correctly to the “vines”.

****MR. ALAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF OCTOBER 03,2023 AS AMENDED WITH CORRECTION NOTED.**

****SECONDED BY MR. RUST**

****MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY**

NEW BUSINESS

A. BUDGET REVIEW

With Mr. Abriola not in attendance during this part of the meeting, Ms. Godeski spoke briefly on the matter.

She mentioned nothing has been changed except for the secretarial services.

Ms. Godeski wanted to make a note that the contract has been drafted for the “You are not alone” project, and they are just waiting on the Mayor’s approval. From the capital account, the \$19,000.00 for this budget will be used to complete the project and the remainder of the funds will come from the budget set up for the second year, also closing out that account for \$44,000.00. Leaving about \$250,000.00 left in the account.

They will be working next month on the contract approval for the mural on Monroe Street. The project cost is \$50,000.00, leaving \$200,000.00 in the capital account. The remainder would cover the West Avenue Wall project. Currently still in its planning stage.

Capital and operating accounts are said to be in good standing.

For next year's budget, Ms. Godeski requested the same amount for both operating and capital accounts, \$250,000.00. She is also going to request funding for the public art inventory which would be \$166,000.00 to execute.

Mr. Alan asked if these numbers were based on quotes.

Ms. Godeski responded that she contacted archivists for state and federal galleries and collections. For the pieces to get archived and valued, the first cost would be \$56,000 to store the inventory and the second cost would be \$90,000.00 for the valuation.

Ms. Grudin asked if the archiving would be a city-wide cost, since the historical society would want to know their value.

Ms. Godeski responded the quote does include every piece of art within the city.

Ms. Grudin mentions that would help with the credit rating.

Ms. Godeski agreed and further explained the archiving and evaluation would allow them to know the value and assets they have.

Robert Abriola arrived onto the teleconference at 6:11pm

B. EVENT UPDATE

Mr. Kaspr mentions Ave Jacobs is not in attendance so they will not be going over the event updates. He mentioned there were a lot of events mentioned at the last meeting and the next step was for plans to be drafted to see how things would be accomplished.

I. MURAL FESTIVAL UPDATES

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Mr. Kaspr pinned this discussion as they are looking to roll it into the capital budget. They are currently working on the statement to include into the request for budget from the mayor.

C. ART TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

This was proposed by Naomi Clark and will be pinned to sort out the concerns brought up with the public schools and BOE. Chairman Kaspr mentioned with this proposal they need to figure out if they should do it with the public school and BOE or independently.

D. EQUITY STATEMENT DISCUSSION

Mr. Kaspr introduced the proposal that Marc Alan would be speaking more on. This would be a guiding light for the Arts and Cultural Commission. Mr. Kaspr has introduced Mr. Alan with Erika K. Wesley, the chairman from the Fairfield Cultural Alliance who has experience writing equity statements.

Mr. Alan explained he has been in communication with Ms. Wesley and they are planning to meet sometime next week. He went on to speak about a meeting that took place with Latoya Fernandez, Diversity Equity and Inclusion Director of Norwalk in regards to the Equity statements.

Mr. Alan believes working with Ms. Wesley and Ms. Fernandez will allow them to see the city of Norwalk from an arts and D.E.I perspective and close any equity gaps, not just creating an equity statement.

Mr. Kaspr also invited anyone to join in this matter if they are interested.

Mr. Abriola shared he would be interested in working with Mr. Alan on the statement.

Ms. Naomi Clark mentioned her last name was spelled incorrectly in the agenda for November 14, 2023, having an extra letter at the end of her last name.

Mr. Kaspr also mentioned his name was spelled incorrectly in the agenda for November 14, 2023, having the letter e included in his last name.

Ms. Naomi Clark agreed the joint statement would bring the commission up to date.

VI. OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Alan requested for updates on the Vines project.

Chairman Mr. Kaspr responded that the Monroe Street project is getting prioritized first as the vines project has a longer lead time. From the last meeting, the Vines project was standing on the options if Ernesto and Sunny work the current existing artwork or ask for them to be removed. Ernesto and Sunny opted for them to be removed. The removal of the artworks would be in the hands of Redevelopment as they commissioned the piece and later the conversation would be where would the artwork go within the City so it isn't sitting in storage.

Mr. Kaspr explained the next step would be to get final artwork from Ernesto and Sunny. The only placeholder was for them to use the old tagline as the text piece of the artwork, but needs to be reworked as the city tagline was removed. Ms. Godeski is to run the question to the city and marketing team to figure out what will go in place of the old tagline. The piece is 100 feet long and the text was a major piece so that needs to get sorted out.

Mr. Rust had a question on maintenance as the vines project vegetation grew on the artwork. He asked who would maintain these areas?

Chairman Mr. Kaspr agreed that is a great question. He believes they should ask Ernesto as mentioned in his original application that he does work with foliage. He knows the responsibility of maintenance doesn't fall to this Commission but to the Department of Public Works.

Ms. Nori Grudin brought up the idea of asking the BOE to add it into the Brien McMahon High School as they have an international studies program as the vines were set up in multiple languages to say welcome.

Mr. Kaspr agreed that is a great idea and they just need to find a big enough space for the art piece.

Ms. Godeski suggested they can ask Oksana to include it on fence work of Ellie Ave.

Mr. Alan mentioned this is an interesting case due to the way art is designed and how we keep it from not getting decommissioned. As redevelopment commissioned this piece, this artwork is a part of the public art collection. There are a lot of people who don't like the vines project, also known as the "spaghetti on that wall", but there are also people who liked the project.

Mr. Alan likes the art work and would hate to see it get taken down, destroyed or even out in storage. He would like to see it moved.

Mr. Kaspr responded that the Arts and Cultural Commission is stronger than before the art piece was installed and they should be the ones to make the decision of where the art goes or heavily advise what happens with it. He mentioned this should be a lesson to be learned, that a lot of people don't know what the artwork is, without the text you really don't know what it is; and for those who don't like the artwork really don't understand the concept and why it was created.

Mr. Kaspr ended with we should set the bar with this piece of artwork and decommissioning pieces. It shouldn't be that if just enough people shout at city hall then the mural gets taken down.

Ms. Nori Grudin said this is something she was questioning from a philosophical standpoint. She explained they want artists to come into city to help beautify the city and people may not like it, ask to take it down or paint over it. Looking at it from the artist standpoint, decommissioning pieces can have artists questioning doing business with the city.

Mr. Abriola asked a question on the cost of the project.

Ms. Clark read from an article she pulled up that the project cost \$100,000.

Mr. Kaspr shared that this is an asset, if the city was a person who collected art, they would have it appraised and insured as it is an asset.

Ms. Clark mentioned she doesn't think taking down the artwork is the right thing to do. She agreed with it staying up or being showcased differently as she wasn't aware there were words on it but even with that she did like the piece of art.

Mr. Abriola asked if the artwork can be broken up as it needs a lot of space.

Ms. Clark ran with the idea and suggested the artwork be in a continuous line broken up on a set of buildings.

Mr. Alan brought up the idea of the art walk like the one in Bridgeport. He believes the connectivity and mobility of the city is improving and the idea is for that area to be an art friendly space as the art park is across the street. He admitted driving by the artwork makes it hard to make out exactly what the piece is but if someone is walking by they can see every part of it.

Mr. Kaspr mentioned the point Mr. Abriola makes a point of them asking the artist if it is possible to break up the artwork.

Mr. Alan mentioned VERA, the federal guideline for the protection of visual artist rights act. If you are commissioned to create art, the paying owners must send a notice of decommission or

take the art down. He explains what happens is the artist would commission work as work for hire and waive VERA rights as the owning entity, they deserve the rights to decommission the work. Mr. Alan asked if there was anything like that in the contracts?

Ms. Clark mentioned it was in conjunction with the national endowment for the Arts and Redevelopment Agency, they were given \$100,000 for the project, and the artist to work with public housing authority, the South Norwalk Community Center, and another group to come up with the words of the project. It took over a year working with many residents to put together.

Ms. Clark suggested they promote the art piece, possibly getting a feature on a newspaper. They can set the narrative to the artwork.

Mr. Alan asked about the issues with the Department of Transportation.

Mr. Kaspr replied they got the okay to move forward with both projects. The idea is for the Monroe Street project to get started in May and the next project, Ernesto and Sunny; hoping for both projects to be completed by next fall.

Mr. Alan mentioned the underpass, opposite from the Norwalk Art Space. Could that be a possible location?

Mr. Kaspr responded with all locations being possible. That one in particular was switched to West Ave because of the possibility of the Bloomberg grant that the fence work took over. He would like to see every Route 7 and underpass painted. He mentions this should set the tone and ideally we can do 1 to 2 projects a year, based on size.

Mr. Abriola made a point that he is a muralist so he's keen on what's going on. He suggested that they can focus on other parts of the arts, like literature, music, and acting.

Mr. Kaspr agreed with the idea, they can start with small events with dance, music and festivals to build the hype. They recently changed the mural festival name to public art festival to include music and more can be included.

Mr. Abriola suggested they have a monthly meeting on updates in each area. Every person can bring up what's going on in their space.

Mr. Kaspr mentioned they can create a database, newsletter to update everyone as not many people tune into council meetings.

Mr. Alan brought up before the walk bridge was taken down, he went on a tour with someone from the historical commission and they spoke about taking some assets from the bridge to be used for new commissions.

Ms. Matuska responded that they were told no due to the condition and those items being condemned.

Mr. Alan responded they submitted a list of pieces they wanted but they got a response to be determined.

Mr. Rust spoke on the walk bridge having many opportunities to be salvaged, he believes there should be efforts made.

Mr. Rust acknowledges Mr. George and Mr. Alan for the production "spring awakening".

Ms. Matuska mentioned they should market the current programs and events better. They need an avenue to boost the audience and get more people involved. She said if there is a way the city can put something out on their social media. If they could do a marketing campaign to learn about events, what events to promote and increase attendance in the council meetings.

Ms. Clark brought up the city Instagram, if the council can compile the events coming up, she'd be willing to help share the event to get published.

Mr. Alan responded that there is no Instagram page anymore.

Ms. Godeski mentioned they integrated everything with Visit Norwalk and promote via newsletter, Instagram, Facebook and the city's social media shared the big events.

Ms. Matuska mentioned she didn't see the events listed then asked if we can add onto the city landing page.

Ms. Clark mentioned she felt like the general city page is somewhere where people go for municipal news, not upcoming events. She believes we need something dedicated to the arts and culture to promote.

Ms. Matuska suggested if they can add onto their landing page from the city website to receive information on upcoming events.

Ms. Godeski said they can do that as they have something similar on the Visit Norwalk site to submit upcoming events from the tourism sector. If they find any events on social media they can forward it to the visit Norwalk page and they will promote it.

Mr. Rust asked, doesn't it matter on the target demographic? If they can have those interested in the arts in particular then it would be really powerful.

Mr. Alan agreed with Mr. Rust, they need to find the right audience because if not, "it's like a tree in the forest" but the other part of the problem is the council members sharing and promoting the events.

Ms. Matuska went onto the city website calendar and she asked if they can add a filter of upcoming events pertaining to arts.

Ms. Godeski said they cannot add another filter on the city site and that's why they created the Visit Norwalk site because the city's main site doesn't have too many features and capabilities.

Ms. Matuska asked if they can sponsor the visit Norwalk better on the city site?

Ms. Godeski responded they can ask I.T if they can add a link into the city site for visit Norwalk.

Ms. Grudin suggested if they can have a magazine and share monthly events, interviews, and grand openings. Maybe they can share something like that

Mr. George mentioned his goal is to focus on the arts, education and the youth. Maybe they can offer free or discounted tickets to students? They are the future. This can be an incentive to go to school, enjoy the arts, and possibly have the students discipline in the arts.

Ms. Clark said she would help contacting the BOE with Danny.

Mr. Alan spoke on the communication and the visit Norwalk site. He believes it's just a new system that needs more time.

Mr. Kaspr supported everything being said, and mentioned they should be working together, getting together after meetings is what will bring things to life.

Ms. Matuska mentioned the Donovan mural. She asked if there were any updates?

Ms. Godeski responded that the condo committee hasn't set a meeting date for the matter.

Mr. Alan suggested an idea, is it possible for them to advance on the moveable panels since they have the mobility with the art piece if the condo association decided to have it removed.

Ms. Godeski responded that it is possible but they were hesitant about the panels because the condo association didn't want to secure the panels onto the building.

Mr. Alan said he thinks the association doesn't want to deal with the lead paint on the building.

Ms. Godeski agreed and mentioned the restoration fees of removing the paint and resurfacing the bricks.

DANNY GEORGE LEFT THE CALL FOR A 7PM APPOINTMENT

Ms. Matuska asked if they knew who originally paid the artist for the mural.

Ms. Godeski responded that a bank and Avrick family who donated money and possibly split the cost originally, and they are going through the storefront improvement program to assist him with city dollars. Possibly \$16,000 can be granted to him.

Mr. Alan believes the condo association is focused on remediation.

Ms. Grudin mentioned visual blight, the possibility of someone not liking the artwork.

Mr. Alan mentioned there's a lot of issues with remediating the artwork and who does that job fall on.

Ms. Godeski responds they will need a legislative complaint.

There was no further business.

ADJOURNMENT

**** MR. ALAN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

**** MS. MATUSALÉN SECONDED THE MOTION.**

**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vianca Rivera,
Telesco Secretarial Services

Arts & Cultural Commission
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