

Minutes to the Meeting of the Newton Cultural Council

Monday, January 6, 2020

8:30 to 10:30 AM

Newton City Hall, Room 204

NCC members in attendance:

Amelia LeClair, Chair
Christopher Pitts, Co-chair
Paula Gannon, Director, Office of Cultural Development
Kathleen Wright, Treasurer
Lakshmi Narayan
Emily O'Neil
Grey Held
Jen Kaplan

Guests:

Gloria Gavis
Susan Silberberg
Jini Fairley

The Meeting was called to order by Amelia LeClair at 8:30 AM. Agenda items were pursued in order.

A) Debriefing of the Newton Cultural Council (NCC) on the December 2019 report on the Mayor's project for Community Design for Arts and Culture (CDAC) by Gloria Gavis, Create Newton chair, and Susan Silberberg, Civic Moxie project consultant.

- 1) The four key recommendations were to
 - a) Align organizations into a more efficient structure that coordinates and administers art and culture activities.
 - b) Promote art and culture in Newton village centers.
 - c) Enhance creative culture within Newton City Hall by breaking down interdepartmental barriers.
 - d) Create a single platform upon which to provide a calendar of activities as well as access to new spaces for rehearsal, programming, and performances (e.g., Newton Cultural Council, Newton Cultural Pride, and Newton Cultural Alliance joined as one organization with one voice.)
- 2) The focus of this meeting was to communicate expectations for the new structure, which seeks to harness a huge amount of existing cultural activity in a way that sustains its impact and potentiates future growth in the funding pie.
 - a) Continue business as usual through June 30, 2020.
 - b) Newton Community Pride will sunset civic programming, which will transfer to the new cultural agency
 - c) Newton Cultural Council will continue to be structured by state statute and regulations and have additional resources through City Hall funding match.
 - d) New agency will have a Board of Directors meeting every 6 weeks, providing a
 - i) Sustainable model for governance,

- ii) New opportunity for additional grants as well as enhanced ability to intend themes and objectives, and
 - iii) Possibility of merging of the Newton Cultural Council as a subgroup within the larger Board of Directors.
- 3) Question and answer period for NCC attendees
 - a) Emily O'Neil cited the importance of the business community and inquired about their inclusion in the process. Gavris and Silberberg provided details of extensive outreach to businesses and their expressed need for a centralized agency that created more opportunities for business sponsorship without cannibalizing existing relationships.
 - b) Chris Pitts raised the issue of roles changing with the new agency structure and was assured that that everyone would have a clear job and the right tools to do that job.
 - c) Paula Gannon thanked the CDAC committee for finding the needs within the community and creating sense out of that exploration.
 - d) Kathleen Wright inquired about the sharing of community input to inform the NCC in its priorities. Plans were made to share the data immediately.
- 4) Announcement of future public events to share CDAC results
 - a) January 14th at the Showcase Theatre Superlux at The Street in Chestnut Hill
 - b) February 5th In the Mayor's Office

B) Consideration of an extension for 2019 grantee Chuck Furlong to retain his grant while postponing his event, House of Ax, to a date in February 2020 due to an issue with his venue.

The NCC had a quorum and voted to grant the extension for the House of Ax performance (proposed, seconded, and unanimously approved).

C) Protocols for ensuring ADA compliance and promoting diversity in programming and attendance

- 1) Jini Fairley, ADA Coordinator for the City of Newton, joined the meeting at 9:15 AM. She provided an overview of the goals for equal access for persons with disabilities and examples of situations that illustrated the need to plan for reasonable accommodation and how to assess for compliance.
 - a) All events funded by the NCC must be accessible to individuals with disabilities (e.g., width of passages, no "step-ups," adequate bathroom stalls, protected from weather if all others given indoor access), OR have a plan B that gives reasonable accommodation (i.e., create access at venue or move the event).
 - b) Onus for compliance is with grantees, not the NCC, but the NCC must communicate requirements and fund accordingly.
 - c) Only exclusion is the event at which no one has access, which removes special requirements. Outdoor events still need adequate sidewalks - grass is not accessible.

- d) All new construction requires ADA compliance. Existing structures remain problematical.
 - i) City of Newton has sites that are non-compliant and ongoing efforts to modify sites with priorities based on general demand by citizens to use venues.
 - ii) Mass-Culture efforts are led by UP-inclusive design program director Charles Baldwin.
 - iii) Many other properties, such as churches, report their accessibility to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

- 2) Concern was expressed by several NCC members about access to paid performances and events. Methods for reaching individuals with low incomes and offering free tickets or reduced-price admission were discussed. Approval letters for grants were suggested as a way to seek voluntary action by grantees. Food pantries were suggested as a potential place for reaching more people who would benefit from improved access to events. The NCC plans to explore voluntary participation of grantees who wished to allocate a limited number of reduced or free tickets.

D) Discussions on the final two agenda items was postponed due to time limitations (proposed, seconded, and unanimously approved). A meeting will be scheduled within two months via Doodle Poll to address the rigor of our own adjudication process and the meaning and funding implications for arts excellence.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 AM.

The minutes are respectfully submitted for approval by Kathleen Wright, standing in for Rich Frost, Secretary, Newton Cultural Council.