

UNOFFICIAL DRAFT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL BY THE COUNCIL AT ITS NEXT MEETING

**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED-FIFTY THIRD MEETING
OF
MASS CULTURAL COUNCIL**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 2022

ONLINE MEETING

Council Members Present were

Nina Fialkow, Chair
Marc Carroll, Vice Chair
Barbara Schaffer Bacon
Karen Barry
Kathleen Castro
Jo-Ann Davis
Sherry Dong
Simone Early
Karen Hurvitz (lost connection midway through meeting)
Matthew Keator
Allyce Najimy
Troy Siebels
Cecil Barron Jensen

Also Present were Mass Cultural Council Staff Members Michael J. Bobbitt, David Slatery, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, Jen Lawless, Bethann Steiner, Kelly Bennett, Dan Blask, Maggie Holtzberg, Cheyenne Cohn-Postell, Sara Glidden, Tom Luongo, Ann Petruccelli Moon, and Carmen Plazas; and poet Krysten Hill.

Chair Nina Fialkow called the meeting to order at 10:02am and asked Deputy Director David Slatery to read the Open Meeting Law statement:

Please note that this meeting is an open meeting of a public body subject to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law. A notice of this meeting together with the agenda was posted on Mass Cultural Council's website 48 or more hours ago (excluding weekends and holidays).

This meeting shall be open and accessible to all members of the public except at such times when this body has voted to go into closed executive session under the Open

Meeting Law.

This meeting is a virtual meeting held under the Open Meeting Law as modified under current law to permit online open meetings. This meeting is being broadcast to the public on a publicly available YouTube or other channel as described in the publicly posted meeting notice. Only Council members, staff and invited participants and guests will be provided access to the Zoom or other videoconferencing platform hosting the meeting. As a safety measure, to prevent disruption of the meeting or non-public communications among the participants, the Chair, Vice Chair and Executive Committee of Mass Cultural Council has asked staff to implement the following protocols for participants in on-line meetings of Mass Cultural Council or its committees:

- Any "chat" or similar function on the Zoom platform hosting the meeting shall be disabled.
- Other than Council members or participants specifically recognized by the Chair of the meeting, all Zoom platform participants will be muted and have no ability to share media or documents or project or type images or text.
- All participants in the Zoom platform must enter a waiting room and digitally sign-in before being admitted.
- Any attendee in the Zoom platform who nonetheless causes a disruption will be summarily removed from the meeting at the discretion of the Chair.

This meeting is not a public hearing and public testimony will not be taken. Individuals may not address the meeting without permission of the Chair.

Any member of the public may record this meeting provided they do not interfere with the meeting. The Chair will then inform the members of the meeting that they are being recorded.

Draft minutes of the open session of this meeting shall be kept and shall be posted on Mass Cultural Council's website no later than 30 days after the meeting provided that such minutes shall not be considered official until they have been approved by this body in open session. Individuals asserting a violation of the Open Meeting Law may file a complaint with this body within 30 days or with the Attorney General's office thereafter.

Nina then recognized Council Member Karen Hurvitz who had requested a moment to speak about Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Karen thanked Executive Director Michael Bobbitt for agreeing with her regarding the importance of the day and offering her the opportunity to say a few words. Karen stated that today is a day to remember the six million Jews who were murdered because of a systemic racist plan devised to exterminate them between 1933 and 1945. January 27th was designated by the United Nations as Holocaust Remembrance Day as this was the day in 1945 when the infamous Nazi slave labor camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated by the Soviet army. Karen stated that it is important to remember the victims who do not even have graves, and it is insufficient but important to mourn. Karen stated that it is also important for young people to learn about genocide and Governor Baker last month signed a bill into law requiring middle and high schools in Massachusetts to include instruction on the history of genocide in their curriculum. She then asked her fellow Council Members to join her in a moment of silence in observation of Holocaust Remembrance Day.

After a moment of silence, Nina thanked Karen and welcomed all to the 153rd meeting of the Mass Cultural Council. She thanked Michael Bobbitt for his leadership over the past year, as he had recently marked one year as the Agency's Executive Director, and thanked Agency staff for continuing to support the cultural sector with wisdom and kindness. Nina let Council Members know that the Executive Committee met recently to discuss the Executive Director's vacation time and confirm that his vacation accrual rate had been affirmed at five weeks per year upon his hiring; that information is now in writing and is identical to the accrual rate of former Executive Director, Anita Walker had when she retired. Nina also let Council Members know that two Members had stepped off the Council since the last meeting in September: Robert Price and Susan Leff. Nina then introduced Program Officer Dan Blask.

Dan let Council Members know that Krysten Hill, a 2020 Mass Cultural Council Artist Fellow in poetry, was joining the meeting today to read some of her poetry. Krysten is the author of *How Her Spirit Got Out* and the recipient of the 2017 Jean Pedrick Chapbook Prize. Dan expressed his gratitude to Krysten not only for coming to today's meeting to share her work, but also for unveiling a new way of seeing the world through her poetry. Krysten thanked Dan and the Council Members for inviting her to the meeting and read two of her poems aloud: "Damn I Need a Minute" and "I Thought I Had My Mama's Green Thumb."

Nina thanked Krysten. She then asked Council Members if they had reviewed the minutes of the August Council Meeting and September Special Council Meeting and asked for a motion to approve both sets of minutes. Sherry Dong moved to approve the minutes; Jo-Ann Davis seconded the motion. By roll call vote, and noting that Lillian Do, Ann Murphy, and Che Anderson were absent, all were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: that the Council approves the minutes of the 152nd Council Meeting held August 24, 2021 and the September 21, 2021 Special Council Meeting in the form presented to the Council at its January 27, 2022 Meeting.

Nina then asked Michael Bobbitt for his Executive Director's report.

Michael thanked Nina, Krysten, and Karen. He mentioned that he continues to send a monthly update to the Council outlining his work and hopes this monthly communication is helpful. His current priorities include finding operational efficiencies, the new Grants Management System – Michael thanked Jen Lawless, Scott Hufford, and Evelyn Nellum for their efforts, and continuing to roll out FY22 grants. Michael is also focused on building out HR operations and mentioned that the Agency had recently hired a new Director of People & Culture, Catherine Cheng-Anderson, who would give a presentation later in the meeting. The Agency is also working to improve its fiscal compliance and hired Tom Luongo as its Fiscal Operations & Compliance Officer in the fall. Michael and the staff are continuing to pursue the Agency's new racial equity plan and recently had deep conversations led by Program Managers Erik Holmgren and Sara Glidden around its service agenda, which staff would seek to refine in FY23. Additionally, staff is focused on the Agency's ARPA allocation from the recent Immediate Covid Relief Act signed into law in late 2021 and held a public input session on January 24th which Michael co-chaired with Council Member Jo-Ann Davis. Written comments from the public pertaining to the Agency's ARPA plans are being accepted through February 7th. Staff is working to present a spending plan to the Council for such funds in alignment with the spending plan for FY23.

Nina thanked Michael for his update, and Michael and Jo-Ann for co-chairing the public input session. She then asked Public Affairs Director Bethann Steiner for her Advocacy update.

Bethann echoed Michael's mention of the January 24th public input session to seek feedback and ideas pertaining to how the Agency should spend its \$60.1M Covid Relief allocation (sometimes also called ARPA funds because the act distributed federal ARPA funds although the Council's allocation comes from state funds) to support artists and cultural organizations in pandemic recovery. There were 253 participants in the session at its high point and everyone who raised their hand during the session was able to participate meaningfully. The average amount of time participants stayed in the session was 90 minutes. Staff is actively promoting the fact that written comments are being accepted through February 7th. Bethann then moved onto the state budget with a lot of good news to share. For the first time in eight years Mass Cultural Council is starting the state budget process not trying to get back to where it was in the previous fiscal year. The Governor released his budget proposal and included \$20.4M for Mass Cultural Council which represents the largest allocation the Baker-Polito Administration has ever proposed for arts and culture, and a 1.9% increase to Agency operations. Bethann looked at the history of funding proposed by the administration and noted that their first budget in FY16 included \$11.7M for Mass Cultural Council, proposed in FY22 (last year) \$16.3M and staff had to work with the legislature to get back to level funding. Starting out at \$20.4M which is a 25.1% increase from the Administration's last proposal is extremely positive and says a good deal about the Agency's efforts to tell the story of the cultural sector. The budget will go to the House and Senate. The Joint Committee on Ways & Means will host a hearing and Mass Cultural Council will testify at it. The Advocacy Committee meets February 15th to discuss and decide what the Agency's request should be. This is a nice start to the budget cycle.

Council Member Karen Barry commended Bethann on her efforts and stated that she wanted to thank the Baker-Polito Administration for its continued support. Karen feels the Agency is moving with great momentum and since the Administration is coming to an end, she would feel remiss if the Council did not recognize Charlie Baker and Karen Polito for the commitment they have made. Jo-Ann Davis seconded Karen's statements about Bethann and the Baker-Polito Administration.

Bethann let Council Members know that when the Agency responded to the Governor's proposal staff made sure to note their deep appreciation. Nina added the Michael has made extraordinary efforts to meet members of the cultural sector and legislators in their own communities. She then asked Michael and Catherine Cheng-Anderson for their report on Cultural Equity & Access.

Michael began by introducing the Cultural Equity & Access Initiatives team which is led by Catherine and includes Access & Inclusion Officer Charles Baldwin and Equity & Inclusion Officer Cheyenne Cohn-Postell.

Michael then asked Catherine to provide her report to the Council. Catherine greeted the Council, wished them a happy lunar new year and expressed her appreciation at having joined Mass Cultural Council three months earlier as its first ever Director of People & Culture and thanked leadership team and staff for making her feel welcome. She wished to report on her activities in the newly-constituted People Operations Unit

and also present. Along with Michael, on the internal and external progress on the Council's recently-approved Racial Equity Plan.

Catherine indicated she had rolled out the Commonwealth's Vaccine Mandate (Executive Order #585) at the agency in December which mandated a COVID-19 vaccination as a condition of employment (while offering the opportunity to request religious or medical exemption) all in alignment with the Executive Branch's policies. Although the deadline for reporting was not until January 28th, Catherine was able to report that the staff was 100% vaccinated and she thanked them for submitting attestations and vaccine cards early.

Catherine also explained she was auditing and evaluating the Agency's existing Human Resources policies, procedures, and practices including internal and external recruitment, employee retention, job design, compensation, employee benefits, employee leave, performance management, employee relations, training, and professional development. Additionally she was looking into the agency's compliance with state and federal laws and policies. These audits will help prioritize areas to better support employees, achieve the agency's goals, and advance the racial equity agenda.

Catherine reported she was also modernizing HR functions with streamlined processes and systems. One of her goals was to limit the intake and access of personal identifiable information (otherwise known as PII) and she had been modernizing HR forms and utilizing the Commonwealth's paperless self-service systems.

In addition Catherine reported on her efforts improve decision making and streamline HR processes such through deploying automated workflow software to ensure that employee requests are acknowledged, and supervisors are reviewing and approving requests in a timely manner. As an example, she mentioned developing an automated process for staff to obtain professional development funding. Catherine explained I enjoys this role as a very process-oriented person, who loves leveraging technology to increase efficiencies.

Coming up next Catherine reported that she was targeting for April 2022 as the time the Mass Cultural Council will deploy its hybrid work model. It is anticipated the staff will continue to telework and be expected to work in the office for a set number of days per month. The staff has worked remotely since March 2020; and while missing seeing each other in person, programs and services have continued to be administered with professionalism and efficiency. Currently the senior staff are working to develop a policy that strikes a balance between the benefits from working remotely while also leveraging the range of valuable collaboration opportunities when working together in physical proximity. As we further develop our policies, we will work closely with the union representing approximately half of the staff and will solicit all employees for feedback. Catherine cautioned that with many unknowns related to the pandemic, the April 2022 timeframe may change as the agency are committed to the safety of our colleagues and families.

Additionally, in July 2022 Catherine indicated that the agency is planning to deploy manager and staff evaluations. She stated that she would be focused on developing and deploying plenty of performance management training and implementation

procedures over the next few months to ensure a consistent and smooth performance management delivery.

Catherine paused and asked if Council Members had any questions about the work being done in her unit before she and Michael moved onto the portion of their presentation focused on the Racial Equity plan.

Nina asked if there was any official guidance from the Executive Branch as to how many days staff might be required to be present in the office. Catherine stated that she is working with staff to determine how many days will be required. The Administration requires one to two days per month but leaves it to the discretion of independent agencies to decide how many days to require of their staff.

Jo-Ann stated that Catherine has done a great job in the short amount of time since she joined the staff. Jo-Ann is thrilled that Catherine is bringing her expertise particularly regarding technology and data, and her organizational skills to the Agency.

Karen Barry asked if Catherine was interfacing with the Human Resources Division (HRD) or Red Book in terms of state employees or if she was working outside of HRD and Red Book. Catherine responded that she uses Red Book and HRD as her spine in terms of policy development. Anything Mass Cultural Council can do as an independent agency Catherine will typically maintain alignment with HRD, Red Book, and the collective bargaining agreement.

At this point, Catherine turned to her presentation regarding efforts around the Racial Equity Plan. The agency's goal is to recruit, hire, develop, and promote diverse talent and to achieve our internal racial equity goals, Catherine has been reviewing and updating our job postings and I've editing them to include inclusive and neutral language and to remove any bias language. Also each job posting includes Mass Cultural Council's equity statement and a link to the racial equity plan.

Furthermore, to expand on the Council's racial equity goals, job postings have been updated to only list the necessary requirements needed for the job. This demonstrates our flexibility in the job requirements and gives latitude to candidates with transferable skills.

Also Equal Employer Opportunity (EEO) and Affirmative Action statements describing a **commitment to transparent, non-discriminatory employment practices**. Catherine has been identified as the contact person for candidates with questions regarding commitments and for candidates to request for ADA Reasonable Accommodations.

Catherine explained that she had been working to standardize the recruitment process so that it operationalizes anti-racism values intended to train and guide hiring teams in **deploying an equitable hiring process and candidate experience**, developing a an objective interview assessment that looks for a candidate **"values fit" rather than a "culture fit"** which is intended to evaluate the candidate's ability to do the job in an impartial manner and deployed mandatory training materials to hiring teams intended

to define and identify unconscious biases and identify how the biases may impact decision-making when recruiting qualified candidates.

In addition, she explained that the agency had acquired new online software to intake employment applications and automate the hiring process with the idea that, over time, it will provide data to make actionable insights to improve our hiring process and attract a diverse candidate pool.

Catherine concluded by reiterating that it is the goal of the Agency to recruit, hire, develop, and promote diverse talent at Mass Cultural Council. She let Council Members know if they had any questions for her regarding the work that has been done for internal racial equity goals, they should feel free to ask them at this time. There were no questions.

Michael stated that since the Racial Equity Plan launched there have been no negative responses. He has done several media interviews and given many presentations including one to the Joint Committee on Racial Equity, Civil Rights, and Inclusion and another to Philanthropy MA. The Agency has hired four BIPOC Outreach Coordinators: Tran Vu, Erika Slocumb, Erin Genia, and Ana Masacote. Erin Genia recently arranged a meeting between Michael and Jim Peters, Executive Director of the Commission on Indian Affairs. Ana Masacote is working hard on panelist recruitment and getting more people into the new Grants Management System. Michael then asked Operations Director Jen Lawless to speak about demographics.

Jen explained that this is very much a work in progress but a couple of weeks ago she pulled a snapshot of individuals the Agency has data for in the system including applicants, grantees, vendors, panelists, anyone who might interact with Mass Cultural Council and shared a table outlining the information via PowerPoint. That PowerPoint presentation is attached to these minutes. There are currently 3,252 individual records in the system, and there is not demographic information for all entries yet. Michael reminded Council Members that the Agency was not collecting demographic information prior to the launch of the new GMS. Jen added the previously information was in multiple systems and each one was different. The Agency has never had this volume of information centralized.

Michael stated that next up would be an internal pay equity assessment reviewing manager and union salaries, and a full review of all grantmaking processes through an equity and customer service lens. The Agency has invested in translation services and is beginning to use real-time language interpretation called Kudo. Staff is also hard at work building the base level anti-racism training with Cultural Equity Learning Cohort (CELC) for the cultural sector; the hope is that training will be available next year.

Karen Barry asked if providing demographic information was optional or required and if, thus far, people have been receptive to the idea.

Jen responded that providing demographic information is optional however, when users register, they are required to indicate either a response or a desire to skip the question.

Nina then asked Jen to continue and give her full Operations report.

Jen reiterated that the Agency has all information in one Grants Management System (GMS) for the first time. This has been a big lift internally for staff and they have done an excellent job and exhibited a positive attitude throughout the process. The feedback from applicants, grantees, and reviewers is that the system is clear visually, very simple, and applicants love having one spot for all applications. Staff is still running FY22 grant programs. 329 Local Cultural Council cycles were run with the new GMS along with 32 of the Agency's own programs and four programs for FY23 are already set up. There are three cycles still open in the system and one about to open, so staff is in the thick of it. A good deal of data was brought over from the legacy system. More than 13K applications have come in since the fall and things have largely gone smoothly. So much of this is due to the commitment of the team to customer service. At the end of the grantmaking cycle staff will do a report and a breakdown of geographic and demographic information.

Karen Barry thanked Jen for her help earlier in the week finding information about grants to organizations and individuals in Brockton and then asked if as the new system is integrated if the page including a search by district feature return to the Agency's website. If so, will it include who LCCs chose for awards? Jen responded that LCC funding lists are in progress and that a connection needs to be built between this new system and the old system. Eventually, everything that is typically on that page will again appear on that page.

Cecil Barron Jensen congratulated and thanked Jen and the staff for the enormous amount of work on the GMS and stated that she is sure the system will be incredibly useful for analytics and gaining an understanding the Agency's impact.

There were no further comments or questions for Jen. Nina asked David for his Financial update.

David let Council Members know that a midyear update is included on page 61 of their meeting materials. This year the Agency is back to a more normal cycle of spending after a delayed and compressed cycle the year prior due to the pandemic. Most spending happens later in the year based on the grant cycles, and the Agency is currently where it should be. Council Members may notice that there is a new format for the presentation of financial material. Input from the Budget Task Force led staff to hire Tom Luongo as the Agency's Fiscal Information & Compliance Officer. Tom is working to present the Agency's financial reports in a stronger, more easily read format. If Council Members have feedback on the new format, they should let David know.

There are two things to note in the report: after the spending plan was approved, statewide increases on union and manager salaries were approved. Also, the STARS grant program was heavily impacted by the pandemic and although we allocated \$1.265M for the program, \$1.158 was applied for and so \$106K was reallocated to

programs in the budget. There are also two programs funded by the Klarman and Linde foundations for teaching artists. Those are now reflected in the financial report.

The Agency is continuing to collect gaming funds and projects a healthy return. Thus far expectations have been exceeded and the Agency has received \$2.44M in casino tax revenues. This is 30% ahead of where staff expected the Agency to be, and this translates into more money being available to meet need.

Finally, David reminded Council Members that the Agency had undergone a state audit in the last 8 months. The auditors spend a good deal of time talking with staff and were focused on the \$10M in federal CARES Act funds from the Baker-Polito Administration that the Agency distributed via the Cultural Organization Economic Recovery grant program (COERG) at the end of 2020 as well as the two individual artists relief programs that were run in 2020 and 2021. The audit is now complete and an exit meeting in mid-December. The results were overall very positive although auditors noted a few items such as they felt staff could have done more to verify residency and loss in the artist relief programs and questioned the \$39K in funds leftover from COERG that went into artist relief. Staff took that note and has updated internal control processes – including hiring Tom. Staff is also taking cybersecurity training. David noted that both Nina and Vice Chair Marc Carroll along with himself and Michael Bobbitt were present for the exit interview with the state auditor.

Marc Carroll stated that he felt the exit interview was positive as audits go. David asked if Council Members had any questions, and they did not. Nina then asked Grants Committee Chair Jo-Ann Davis for her report on FY22 Artist Fellowships.

Jo-Ann stated that the Grants Committee met on January 13th to review proposed artist fellowship and finalist awards in choreography, poetry, and Traditional arts and voted to recommend them to the full Council. She then asked Program Officers Dan Blask and Kelly Bennett and Program Manager Maggie Holtzberg to review the recommendations for the Council.

Dan introduced himself and stated that since 1975 the Commonwealth has awarded fellowships to individual artists. Thanks to the support of the Council, the Agency's support for artists will reach a new peak with the awards about to be shared and the ones staff will bring to the Council in May. The Agency is positioned to 150 fellowship grants in FY22, doubling last year's total. Never has the Council awarded this many artists with such a high amount of funding. Dan expressed that he has true gratitude to the Council for this. Artist fellowship grants are \$15K and finalist awards are \$5K. The program is currently comprised of twelve categories, three of which have recommendations for consideration today: choreography, poetry, and traditional arts. Dan and his colleague Kelly Bennett convened panels that reviewed applications and as part of the Agency's Racial Equity Plan and with the direct support of Michael Bobbitt worked to have more equitable representation on them. Dan was pleased to note that approximately 70% of panelists and readers for this latest round of panels were BIPOC. Dan is pleased and proud of the group of artists the panelists are recommending, and staff would love to share a sampling of their work right now. Dan then shared a PowerPoint presentation

including slides of work by recommended artists and he along with Kelly Bennett and Maggie Holtzberg walked Council Members through the recommendations. At the end of the presentation Dan again expressed his appreciation to the Council for supporting artists and asked if they had any comments or questions.

Barbara Schaffer Bacon stated that it is wonderful to see the range of work included in the recommendations and that she is thrilled about Finalist awards increasing to \$5K as it is a far more meaningful recognition.

Kathleen Castro echoed Barbara's comments and commended Dan, Kelly, and Maggie on a job well done adding that Dan would be doing a workshop for artists in Bristol County next month.

Jo-Ann thanked Dan, Kelly, and Maggie and stated that it was time for the Council to vote. Jo-Ann is asking for approval of the recommended FY22 grant awards in poetry, choreography, and traditional arts as they have been presented today. Karen Barry moved to approve the recommendations; Kathleen seconded the motion. By roll call vote, and noting that Lillian Do, Ann Murphy, Che Anderson and Karen Hurvitz were absent, all were in favor, and it was

RESOLVED: To approve the FY22 Artist Fellowship grant awards in the disciplines of Poetry, Choreography and Traditional Arts as presented to the Council at its January 27, 2022 meeting.

[Karen Hurvitz contacted staff after the meeting and let them know she had had connection problems and if she had been able to be present would have voted for the grants.]

Jo-Ann then let Council Members know the Grants Committee had also reviewed recommendations for the Gaming Mitigation program and the Executive Committee had also reviewed a request for an increase to that funding. She then asked Program Manager Sara Glidden to further explain.

Sara began by stating that she was stepping in to support Cheyenne Cohn-Postell who is doing a wonderful job administering the Gaming Mitigation program but who is out sick today. Cheyenne created systems to help applicants through the process and worked to revise the definition of "touring artist" as it pertains to the program. It is important to note that applications were based on calendar year 2019 data since 2020 was so heavily disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff received 39 applications and all 39 were eligible. Three applicants were new to the program, and 12 grantees from the first round of the program did not return to apply for this second round. Staff will follow up with those 12 grantees to learn more about why they did not reapply. The goal once staff looked at the applications was to maintain level funding for the applicants, hence the request for the additional allocation of \$675K that Jo-Ann previously mentioned.

There were no questions and Jo-Ann stated that it was time for a vote to approve the

allocation of an additional \$675K and to approve the grant recommendations for this round of the Gaming Mitigation Program.

Sherry Dong moved to approve the allocation and grant recommendations. Barbara seconded the motion. By roll call vote, and noting that Lillian Do, Ann Murphy, Karen Hurvitz and Che Anderson were absent, and that Troy Siebels had recused himself from the vote, all were in favor, and it was unanimously

RESOLVED: To approve the allocation of an additional \$675,000 in monies to the next round of the Gaming Mitigation Program and approve grants under the Gaming Mitigation Program to the 39 organizations described in the memorandum presented to this meeting.

[Karen Hurvitz contacted staff after the meeting and let them know she had had connection problems and if she had been able to be present would have voted for the grants.]

Nina thanked Jo-Ann and moved to the final item on the agenda: a discussion of preparations for a new strategic plan for the Agency. Nina asked Michael to lead the discussion.

Michael reminded Council Members that they had voted to extend the 2018-2022 plan for one more year as there was a good deal left to be accomplished in the plan. Next fiscal year the Agency will begin the design phase for its next strategic plan. This means that Nina, as Chair, will appoint a task force comprised of Council Members to support the yearlong process. The task force will help to distribute an RFP that will be drafted by staff to strategic planning professionals and will help staff vet candidates. The goal will be to have a kickoff launch with the strategic planning consultant next fall. Council Members will be contacted by Nina if she will be inviting them to serve on the task force.

Barbara asked if we are looking at calendar years or fiscal years and Michael responded that we are looking at fiscal years. Late winter/spring the task force will be assembled and will review the RFP and interview prospective candidates.

Nina noted that while some of the Council participated in crafting the current strategic plan, it might be helpful to circulate the plan to the full Council as a reminder. She added that while she will be appointing a task force, she will welcome input from all Council Members.

David reminded Council Members that while strategic planning is something all organizations do; the Agency is required to do this as part of the terms of its federal grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The Agency has already reported to NEA that the current plan would be extended. That concluded the discussion on strategic planning.

Kathleen Castro stated that she missed holding Council Meetings in person but greatly enjoyed hearing from Krysten Hill at the beginning of today's meeting and would love to

hear from artists at future meetings. Michael responded that it is the hope to have a "mission moment" at all meetings going forward.

Nina agreed that it was uplifting to hear from Krysten and looks forward to making this a regular part of Council Meetings moving forward.

Jo-Ann asked if there were dates available for the next set of meetings and David stated that the dates had been determined previously and staff knows that meetings will remain virtual through at least April. Staff will circulate a list of the meeting dates again in the weeks ahead

Karen Barry asked if it would be possible to receive meeting materials a bit earlier so that the Council could have more time to review their packets before the meeting and Michael responded that staff would aim to get Council Members their meeting books one week prior to each Council Meeting.

That brought the Council to the end of its Meeting agenda and Nina, as Chair, adjourned the meeting at 11:34am.