



**CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

January 8, 2020, 6:00pm
Savannah Cultural Arts Center
201 Montgomery Street

Present:

Commissioners:

- Darren Bagley-Heath
- Barbara Essig
- Linda J. Evans
- Andrea Hall-Houston
- Patrick Kelsey
- Jan Kramer
- Kareem McMichael
- Kristopher Monroe
- Anne Allen Westbrook

City Staff:

- CJ Bogle, Contract Coordinator, Cultural Resources
- Llana Samuel, Marketing Coordinator, Cultural Resources
- Taffanye Young, Chief, Community Services
- Veleeta McDonald, Special Projects Coordinator, Community Services
- Treva Fitzgerald, Administrative Assistant, Cultural Resources

Members of the Public:

- none

Absent:

Commissioners:

- Eddie Edenfield
- Janice James
- Linda Wilder-Bryan

I. Determination of Quorum/Approval of Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Linda J. Evans, Interim Chair. Quorum was determined by Evans since current membership stands at 12 and with 8 Commissioners in attendance at the start of the meeting, a quorum is met.

II. Announcements

Commissioner Evans requested completed Conflict of Interest statements be submitted. During the announcements, Commissioner Patrick Kelsey made a motion to move "Section 4" (Cultural Program Assessment reports) to the end of the meeting,

stating that he would rather spend time talking about sub-committees and administration of the investment process instead of wasting time spending an hour talking about the funded organizations. Motion was not seconded. Another motion was made by Commissioner Essig “to stick to the agenda” set by Commissioner Evans and Commissioner Monroe seconded. The meeting resumed.

III. Cultural Program Assessment and Reports

Deep Center

Commissioner Evans called for reports on the Young Author Project and Block by Block. No Commissioners reported attending since the last meeting.

At this point in the meeting, Commissioner Jan Kramer made a point of order that November Meeting Minutes still needed to be approved. Commissioner Evans apologized for the oversight and requested a review the Minutes which were previously sent out via email. Commissioner Kramer moved to approve the November 8th, 2019 Minutes and was seconded by Commissioner Kelsey. Minutes were unanimously approved. Evans stated the announcements will take place at the end of the meeting.

King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation

Commissioner Evans called for reports on the “Genealogy Heritage Writer’s Group.” Commissioner Kramer stated she attended the December 19th event, which this was the final BILLS (Beach Institute Lecture & Learn) lecture, and she was pleased the room was packed to capacity. Kramer stated that Lillian Grant-Baptiste, the lecturer, is a dynamo and an entertaining person, and her lecture was educational and informative. Kramer noted that the event did not have the best sound system, but she (Grant-Baptiste) was able to have her voice carry. Kramer stated it was a great presentation and she received several promotional emails about it. King-Tisdell acknowledged the City’s support. Commissioner Evans asked if this is an event that the City should continue to support. Kramer said no, that she did not, due to chronic problems with poor attendance, the space, problems with the sound equipment, late starts and insufficient marketing. Commissioner McMichael remarked that he did not see any social media advertising for the Genealogy program and that parking is also an issue. McMichael raised the question should we (the Commission) continue to fund them based on the issues? Kramer stated that the lecture topics are excellent and suggested (King-Tisdell) attend workshops and partner with other organizations. Essig remarked that giving advanced notice (for events) would be helpful. Commissioner Andrea Hall-Houston stated marketing could be improved, but it would be a shame and a disservice to not fund it because of the impact on the community. Commissioner Evans stated that King-Tisdell did not apply for 2020 funding and perhaps during the upcoming year they could revamp and consider the Commission’s recommendations and suggestions. Evans then recognized Chief Taffanye Young who stated that the City has good programs and other departments and staff to work with King-Tisdell, such as Director Lucina Spracher’s Municipal Archives. Chief Young stated that if they applied for 2021, she recommends that they take some of their programming out to the neighborhood community centers.

Savannah Ballet Theatre

Commissioner Evans called for evaluation reports of the Savannah Ballet's performance of The Nutcracker on December 8th. Commissioner Kramer was unable to attend. Commissioner Essig attended and was completely 'blown away' with The Nutcracker performance. Essig stated that she was impressed with the number of young people incorporated into the ballet, the diversity of the ballet, the live music, incorporation of technology and the presence of a female conductor. Commissioner Essig was not sure if the house was packed, but she attended the final evening performance on December 14th.

Commissioner Darren Bagley-Heath attended the matinee on Sunday, December 15th and was disappointed in the attendance for a Sunday afternoon performance. Commissioner Bagley-Heath stated the entire balcony was empty and found it sad because of the high quality of the performance. Bagley-Heath estimated (approximately) 750 people attended, but was impressed with Senior Students from Savannah Arts Academy and with an African-American lead dancer. Commissioner Bagley-Heath stated that the performance was fabulous. He commented on the diversity and different body shapes and that not all performers were "pencil thin, little girls." Bagley-Heath stated it was "very liberating" and that his neighbors were with him and commented on the great performance. The ticket cost was \$25.00, which he thought was a very good value, but Bagley-Heath speculated that the lack of attendance may be due to the saturation of so many different Nutcrackers performing. There was a total of three other performances during that same time frame. Commissioner Bagley-Heath was also thrilled with the snow machine. Commissioner Evans remarked that Savannah Ballet's involvement with the City started as a Weave-A-Dream program. Commissioner Evans asked if Savannah Ballet should continue to be funded. Commissioner Bagley-Heath suggested that we wait to see what they do this year with the additional performances of The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. Commissioner Evans stated that the Nutcracker is their biggest money maker, but Savannah Ballet is planning to do out-reach through-out 2020, taking their productions and artistic performances for children into community settings.

Commissioner Kelsey attended the Saturday matinee and was seated in the balcony. Kelsey noted attendance was good and that everyone leaving loved the blowing snow in the lobby. Commissioner Hall-Houston also attended the Saturday matinee and said it was filled to capacity, but although it was a great show, she felt that it was too cold in the building. Commissioner Kelsey thought the ending was fresh and a surprise. Kelsey added that Savannah Ballet's 2020 Funding request was cut by the City. Commissioner Bagley-Heath asked if that was because of the former City Council. Kelsey stated City Council was unwilling to increase or prorate grants. Commissioner Evans asked if Savannah Ballet received more (for 2020) than the year before. Commissioner Kelsey stated he wasn't sure, but it would be interesting to know. Commissioner Evans stated that the Commission will continue to support the Savannah Ballet.

Savannah Music Festival

Commissioner Evans wasn't able to attend the Music Explorers Program, but passed out the curriculum guide from the Teacher Training event. Commissioner Essig stated she

attended the December 12th afternoon program and was overwhelmingly surprised by the children's engagement in the program. Essig stated she walked in and felt the energy in the theater. Essig felt it was well organized and the children knew the curriculum and the songs. She appreciated the level of exposure to music for the kids and would love to see this program go to America's Got Talent. Essig noted the children were dancing in the aisles. Commissioner Evans confirmed the K-2 age range. Essig wanted to understand how the kids at that age understood the music genres: Hip-Hop, Folk, and others. Commissioner Evans stated that Hip-Hop is new for this semester and that SMF changes it (musical genres) every semester. Commissioner Anne Allen Westbrook attended and loved it. Commissioner Kelsey stated he went for the 1pm performance and saw an Alderman-Elect dancing.

Telfair Museum of Art – “I Have Marks to Make”

Commissioner Evans attended the December 8th program, exhibition and reception at the Jepson. She stated that IHMTM is a community-based art program and exhibition that has been going on for 25 years. The art exhibition showed diversity in age, background, and abilities. Commissioner Evans stated that the Telfair's philosophy is empowerment through art-making can heal and transform lives. Commissioner Evans continued to state that many participants have experienced strokes, combat injuries, brain injuries, emotional trauma and are going through rehab. Evans estimated that 75 people were in the auditorium for the 2 p.m. program and even more were walking around the galleries. The City's support was acknowledged in many forms: print, verbally and digital projection. Evans estimated that over 14,000 people each year are involved with this program. Evans stated that the staff consists of a Program Manager, Coordinator, and 10 instructors who take art-making activities into the community. This marked the first year of a partnership with The Front Porch, a relatively new collaborative organization that provides one-stop services for at-risk youths who are involved in the juvenile justice system. The Telfair's program gives these kids a way to express themselves through art. Commissioner Evans stated that the Telfair passes out surveys and has given the City credit for its support for the last 25 years.

Weave-a-Dream Report

Whale Week

Commissioner Evans asked if anyone attended any Whale Week events and mentioned that review of Weave-A-Dream (WAD) events also counts to the 6 required reports for the year. Mr. Bogle stated the final reports (from Whale Week) came in on that day (January 8th, 2020).

Commissioner Westbrook reported that she attended the Savannah Arts Academy Whale migration film. The migration happens every year from Georgia to Maine and the migration and the economic impacts (of the whales) is the focus of the film. Commissioner Westbrook stated it was well done and was held at a good location for the kids to be engaged.

Commissioner Evans asked that at some point the Commissioners will need to revisit the WAD applications. Evans stated she would like to get input from past recipients and make adjustments to streamline the application process in order to make it less

confusing for applicants. She also recommended that it should be tied in with Neighborly to try to make the experience more user-friendly.

CJ Bogle is holding four WAD drop-in workshop sessions taking place over the next few weeks. Mr. Bogle has a schedule of those dates and will share them with the Commission.

Commissioners were reminded that applications for WAD grants can begin January 1st through early November with all activities concluding by December 31st. WAD has a rolling deadline as long as the proposal is submitted a minimum of 7 weeks before the start of the program. Mr. Bogle clarified that the last date for submission occurs at the beginning of November.

Commissioner Evans is waiting on information regarding the actual amount of available WAD funds, specifically if funds from the previous year(s) have rolled over, and what has been officially allocated for 2020.

Subcommittee Updates

Commissioner Evans pointed out that all three subcommittees have lost members due to resignations and terms ending.

Youth Advisory Sub-committee: Commissioners Bagley-Heath and Hall-Houston have both agreed to remain on the subcommittee. Bagley-Heath commented that the lack of a Director for the Cultural Resources Department has impacted subcommittee meetings. He stated that former Director Lissette Garcia-Arrogante had ideas, but never met with the committee and that it is currently in a "stall" pattern.

Public Art Sub-committee has lost members, but Commissioner Kristopher Monroe has agreed remain.

City Priorities Sub-committee: Commissioner Kelsey will retain his membership on the sub-committee.

Commissioner Kelsey stated people still haven't applied for open Commission positions and the City is not promoting it well. He also questions how things are being evaluated now that the City is going to have a Master Plan. Commissioner Evans asked everyone to hold tight in anticipation of new leadership for the department and for the City and as soon as new Commissioners are appointed, new subcommittee members. Ideally, everyone on the Commission should be on a sub-committee. Commissioner Kelsey added that then they (the Commissioners) can fulfill their roles.

Commissioner Kelsey moved to form a sub-committee to assist the City's with evaluating artist's needs for the investment application process. Kelsey stated he wants to focus on the application as soon as possible. Evans requested that he chair that subcommittee and he agreed. Evans will join the subcommittee. Chief Young agreed to work with Commissioners on revising the application processes and added that she will work with the subcommittee to have the application ready by the second quarter.

Chair Report

Commissioner Evans stated there is a lot of work to do. The Investment application needs to be revised along with the Weave-a-Dream application and its policies. She will ask CJ to get feedback and input from past grant recipients. She stated that the Commission Bylaws are due for a review, and would like to have Commission elections as soon as possible. She reminded everyone 2019 had been an interesting but stressful year with no Executive Director or Contract Coordinator for a large portion of the year, the resignation of the Commission Chair, and finally, loss of another Executive Director. But throughout the leadership vacuums and staff changes, everyone has worked well to keep the arts organizations supported and the Weave-a-Dream Initiative rolling along without a hitch. Commissioner Monroe questioned whether the maximum funding for WAD could be above the current \$3,000. Commissioner Evans asked how much WAD funding is available and asked Chief Young to find out if it is possible to offer higher grants in 2020.

Commissioner Bagley-Heath commented that you don't always have to give each group the full amount each year and that it could be less.

With WAD now having a higher profile and possibly a higher grant amount there may be more interesting proposals, and with Mr. Bogle offering the drop-in workshops, we can expect to broaden the reach of program.

In terms of elections, Commissioner Evans stated that the Commission needs a Chair and Vice Chair. Vice Chair will also Chair the Weave-A-Dream program. Commissioner Evans stated she would like elections to take place at the next meeting (March 11th) and that the Commissioners can nominate someone or self-nominate by February 28, allowing nominees a week to confirm their interest. Evans remarked that that there will be a secret ballot used. Commissioner Kelsey questioned how votes are counted and points out that there is nothing in the by-laws. Commissioner Evans stated whoever has the highest number of votes will be Chair and second highest number will become Vice-Chair. Evans commented that if the Chair is unavailable for a meeting, Vice Chair will assume the Chair's position & responsibilities.

Commissioner Monroe inquired about the term length for Vice-Chair. Commissioner Evans responded, one year. She added that perhaps if the Commission can stick to the bylaws and have elections in November as required, things would be back on schedule. Commissioner Bagley-Heath suggests rewriting the bylaws.

Commissioner Evans will be making new program review assignments for 2020 and asked Commissioners to let her know if they had any preferences, otherwise they would be random.

Commissioner Evans then wished to include in the minutes (because it was overlooked in the December 2019 meeting) an expression of appreciation and thanks to Former Commissioners Alix Laincy and Lisa Clark for their 6 years of service on the Commission as well as a thank you to the Commissioners who had to resign before their terms

expired: Commissioners Tanet Taharka-Myers, Debra Zumstein, Sue Ruby and Past-Chair Coco Papy.

Commissioner Bagley-Heath thanked Commissioner Evans and Commissioner Papy for all their hard work. Commissioner Kelsey seconded that.

Director's Report

Chief Young stated the new Mayor, Van Johnson, is undertaking a Master Plan and Chief Young would like to see if Cultural Arts can be included in the long-range planning rather than being a separate plan. She stated that the former Council decided to delay some major decisions during the last quarter of the year so the new Council would be able to make those decisions, and the new Council is now faced with major decisions in addition to having a significant learning curve. Chief Young stated some items were being pushed back because the new Council will need to attend meetings in Atlanta including Savannah-Chatham Day, but will be back on target for the 2nd quarter.

Chief Young shared news with the Commissioners about the incoming Executive Director, Stuart Miller, who will be starting February 3rd. Chief Young went over his resume and his credentials with the Commissioners.

Chief Young stated this year, she wanted to work with the Commissioners to update the current Cultural and Arts Investment process. Commissioner Bagley-Heath has questioned that there are certain programs that we fund every year and wants to know if that should continue. Young suggested that the proposal scoring be reviewed and codified and she has some ideas for equitable scoring changes. She also suggested that we consider instituting funding limits over a certain time period for funding the same project of the arts organizations, to allow more programs to benefit from City investment. Bagley-Heath observed how organizations such as Savannah Music Festival receive funds every year, but programming largely stays the same. Chief Young remarked that some organizations do well with their scores because they know how to write the best applications. Chief Young recommended we review that part of the process as well and stated she wants feedback from Commissioners. Young proposed meeting three times to discuss the program. She also stated that City Council doesn't get involved in this level of the process (revamping the application process/grant program) and this is more at her level. She further asked Commissioners to let her know of any additional issues.

Contract Coordinator Update

Commissioner Evans then turned to the Contract Coordinator's Report. Commissioner Evans stated it was wonderful to have Mr. CJ Bogle in place as Contract Coordinator. Mr. Bogle stated that most of what he had to share had already been previously discussed by Chief Young during the meeting. Mr. Bogle stated that he has scheduled 4 drop-in WAD workshop sessions and will be meeting with some WAD recipients on Saturday, January 11th to receive some feedback. Mr. Bogle mentioned a few upcoming events including the contract meeting with Savannah Black Heritage Festival on January 15th and that all organizations need to have their documentation submitted

by the end of January. They have until February 28th to complete their contract meetings.

Commissioner Evans encouraged others to attend contract meetings adding that they are very informative and instructive for Commissioners to attend. Evans stated that Mr. Bogle walks the organizations through the process.

General Discussion

Commissioner Evans brought up the phone issues in the Cultural Arts Center building. Evans had concerns that it hasn't yet been addressed. Marketing Coordinator, Llana Samuel, explained it has been addressed many times. Ms. Samuel, Ms. Arrogante (former Director), and Ms. Fitzgerald (Administration Assistant) have put in IT tickets to have it corrected and were told by the IT Department that it had been fixed. Commissioner Monroe stated there had been issues with emails bouncing back as well. He stated he spoke to someone in IT and was not reassured about it. Ms. Samuel explained that IT reset the system from the Civic Center and it worked well for a few days, but subsequently went back to having issues. Commissioner Evans requested employees' cell phone numbers since she has called before and received extended busy signals. Commissioner Monroe stated phone issues have been going for months and months and has had emails bouncing back as well. He also mentioned that there has been no sign on the building for 8 months and also that is ridiculous that a \$25 million dollar building has no proper phone coverage. Ms. Samuel explained the building has firewalls that guard against spam and malware attacks and stated there had been no issues with the emails since November. The only issue has been the phones. Ms. Samuel reiterated how the staff all have had many conversations with IT about the phone issues. As soon as something happens, staff opens another ticket. Chief Young stated that Veleeta McDonald, Special Projects Coordinator, has been working with a company to increase the antenna strength to address the dead-zone issues and stated that cell phones and radios are not able to be used in the building. Ms. McDonald is not sure if that was part of the building initial design. Chief Young and Ms. McDonald are looking over plans from the architects and say that it appears this was not included in the original designs and they will be submitting a proposal to resolve the issues.

Commissioner Bagley-Heath commented that this should be worked on 24/7 until it is resolved. Chief Young stated she will personally be looking into this issue. Chief Young voices her concern that since this is a public building, the public should be able to contact us. Chief Young has the funding to upgrade if necessary and she hopes to have that resolved during the 1st quarter of this year. Commissioner Evans is pleased to hear that things are going to be corrected.

Commissioner Kelsey would like to see more advertising for the Commission's public meetings and see the Commissioners taking more of a leadership role in promoting meetings by email blasting, social media and community calendar notices. Commissioner Evans stated that we have had discussions with Ms. Samuel about spreading the footprint for these meetings. Commissioner Kelsey would like to see the things published better. Commissioner Hall-Houston asked if Commissioners could share

from their own social media accounts. Chief Young spoke up and said Commissioners can indeed share on their own social media accounts.

Ms. Samuel explained how the Facebook algorithm works with notifications. Content that doesn't perform well will not be reposted. You must like and share to keep things showing up on Facebook. Commissioner Evans commented that Chatham Area Transit Board seems to be able to publish meeting notifications frequently.

Commissioner Evans reviewed all the Minutes for 2019 and found some inconsistencies in recorded attendance and noted some meeting minutes were not yet on the website. Commissioner Kelsey stated that the September Minutes were posted online.

Commissioner Evans reminded Commissioners that, according to the bylaws, a minimum of 6 written (or digital) program evaluations are due for 2020. Also, Commissioners should make sure that they do not accumulate more than 2 absences from Commission Meetings. Commissioner Evans encouraged the Commissioners to attend some Weave-A-Dream activities.

Commissioner Evans asked Mr. Bogle to order badges after the appointment of the new Commissioners. Any Commissioners who have misplaced their badges can request a replacement.

Commissioner Evans mentioned some upcoming events taking place in January: Telfair's Pulse Art & Technology Festival and the MountainFilm on Tour Savannah film festival. In February, the Savannah Black Heritage Festival takes place. Commissioner Evans will send out new review assignments within a week via email.

Commissioner Evans commented that the meeting was very productive and thanked everyone for being understanding and patient as they work through the challenges.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:39 PM