



## Minutes

Metro Arts Board of Commissioners  
April 18, 2024, 12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.  
Lentz Health Department  
2500 Charlotte Ave  
Centennial Rooms A and B  
Nashville, TN 37209

**Commissioners:** Leah Dupree Love (Chair), Heather Lefkowitz (Secretary), Tré Hardin, Timothy Jester, Dawana Wade, Beverly Watts, Campbell West,  
**Absent Commissioners:** Janet Kurtz (Vice Chair), Darek Bell, Carol McCoy, John Nefflen, & Arlene Nicholas-Phillips

### **METRO ARTS MISSION:**

Drive an Equitable and Vibrant Community through the Arts

#### **A. Call to Order**

- a. Commissioner Chair Dupree Love called meeting to order at 12:05 p.m.

#### **B. Public Comment**

1. Councilwoman Joy Styles
2. Councilman
3. Alan Fey
4. Drew Ogle
5. Lydia Yousef
6. Christine Hall
7. Ashley Bachelder
8. Nichole Williams
9. Daniel Jones

#### **C. Approval of Minutes:**

*A motion to approve February 15, 2024, minutes by Commissioner Watts and second Commissioner Lefkowitz.*

*A motion to approve March 28, 2024, minutes by Commissioner Hardin and seconded by Commissioner Jester.*

#### **D. Artist Spotlight:**

Nichole Robinson infused the Commission meeting with her distinctive and joyful storytelling, sharing her experiences of working with elementary schools in Nashville.

#### **E. Public Art Committee (Commissioner West)**

Commissioner West opened with updates about Commissioner Watts and Commission Nicholas - Phillips joining the Public Art Committee. She then passed it on to Public Arts Manager Jessica Ingram.

1. Old Hickory Community Center Design Concept (ACTION ITEM)
  - a. Jessica presented the Old Hickory Community Center design concept, specifically the budget increase for the "Wings of Time" artwork by Gordon Huether. Approved in February, the design features laser-cut acrylic herons with dichroic film suspended in the atrium to create a magical effect with natural light. The herons symbolize self-determination, progress, and community inclusiveness, enhancing the center's appeal, particularly for children. The project highlights the area's rich history and natural beauty.

***A motion for approval of Gordon Heather's artwork for Design for Wings of Time at the Old Hickory Community Center by Commissioner West and seconded by Commissioner Watts.***

2. Bordeaux Gateway project artist budget (ACTION ITEM)

The past administration's participatory budget funded this project with an initial artist budget of \$185,000, which was anticipated to be insufficient. Discussions with the PAC and the Mayor's office emphasized the need for flexibility due to infrastructure challenges. Four semifinalists—Amari Booker, Stephen Hutchins, Shabazz Larkin, Prada Studio, and James Thrailkill—were selected. The design process will undergo T-dot review and community feedback. The project's complex site, featuring elevation, drainage, and roadway issues, necessitates careful collaboration and additional resources to overcome logistical challenges.

***A motion Public Art Committee recommends approval of an increase of the Board of Gateway Project artist budget from \$185,000 to \$300,000 by Commissioner West and Seconded by Commissioner Watts.***

3. Celestial Falls interior artwork at Donelson Library artist budget (ACTION ITEM)

"Celestial Falls" by Amber Lilly has been successfully installed, with the exterior installation of the "Whole House" top slide nearing completion. Despite challenges such as increased costs in materials, labor, and living expenses in Nashville, and a shortage of artisans, the project showcases impressive blue waves and aluminum-gilded flowers. Lilly adapted to these changes by hiring a master gilder who trained local artists, enhancing the city's skilled workforce. The project, approved by the Public Art Committee, includes provisions for increased costs and highlights the lengthy and detailed nature of public art projects.

***A motion to approve an increase the artist budget for Maber Lelli's Celestial Falls project at Donelson Library by \$76,845.48 to account for increased material and labor costs by Commissioner West and seconded by Commissioner Watts.***

## **F. Grants & Funding Committee (Commissioner Jester)**

Commissioner Jester began the grant updates by apologizing for a recent cancellation and thanking the sound technicians for their work. The meeting addressed key issues including ensuring artists receive notices, acknowledging that mural artists are currently unpaid but included in the MHRC conciliation process, and discussing a brief potential delay in the grant funding cycle to complete audits and payments. Public feedback was solicited on the delay's impact. The Thrive program was also reviewed for compliance with Metro code, with discussions emphasizing the need for autonomy in decision-making. No decisions were made; the focus was on brainstorming and community input. Future actions will involve further discussions, public feedback, and legislative timelines. Commissioner West highlighted the timeline considerations for grant rubric approval through City Council, noting it requires multiple readings and could take several weeks. Metro Attorney Macy Amos agreed to check the original legislation for amendment procedures.

## **G. Budget & Oversight Committee (Commissioner Watts)**

Commissioner Watts has met with Legal, Finance, and HR multiple times, including this morning, to discuss budget and other issues, such as artist payments. These discussions led to some resolutions and the issuance of a letter. Recent meetings included a budget discussion with staff members Christina and Sydney, who presented effectively despite limited prior knowledge. The current fiscal year budget is \$5,461,700, while the requested budget for fiscal year 2025 is \$13,653,400, more than double the current budget. This is noteworthy given it is a flat budget year, necessitating adjustments. A budget questionnaire from Council member Porterville was received and must be submitted by May 8, 2024, for a May 23 meeting with the council. The FY25 budget was submitted in February by Executive Director Singh before his FMLA leave. The composition of the budget request remains unclear and requires further examination.

Despite the ongoing discussions, it has been made clear that this is a flat budget year, and the budget cannot exceed the current amount. The Commissioner was asked about the commonality of requesting significantly more than the previous years, to which he responded that it varies and is not unusual depending on future needs. The budget process typically begins 90 to 180 days prior, with directives starting in the fall. There is concern about what will not be funded if the \$13 million request is not approved. The budget questionnaire from the council, due in three weeks, will help address these questions. Given the absence of an acting executive director and lack of clarity on the \$13 million request, there is an urgent need to access and review detailed notes and background data to understand and justify the budget request. Some of this information was shared during a recent meeting and emailed to relevant parties.

The upcoming flat budget year maintains the current budget of \$5,461,700, while a \$13,653,400 request for fiscal year 2025 includes \$10.6 million for operating and Thrive programs. This budget is not guaranteed, and concerns about over-expectation for grant funding were raised. Some of the \$13 million will fund existing programs like Restorative Arts and new initiatives. The February budget meeting highlighted 109 Thrive and 201 operating applications totaling \$10.6 million. There is a need for clarity on the budget request details, which Chris can provide. The practice of assuming grant approval without

contingencies was questioned, emphasizing the need to manage expectations and improve the budget process.

In addition to budget discussions, human resources issues related to bylaws and staff management were addressed. The commission is responsible for employing, disciplining, and potentially appointing an interim executive director, with HR assistance as needed. The necessity of a personnel committee was questioned, concluding it is only needed for managing the executive director. The commission's lack of familiarity with Metro procedures prompted an inquiry into how to move forward effectively. Committees were urged to establish clear processes, with public arts noted for having detailed procedures. Concerns about the Thrive rubric and stakeholder responses were raised. Authority to handle FMLA and interim appointments was confirmed, but the need for actionable steps was emphasized to avoid keeping staff in limbo.

In addition to budget discussions, human resources issues were addressed concerning bylaws and staff management. The commission is responsible for employing, disciplining, and potentially appointing an interim executive director. The need for clarity on processes and responsibilities prompted inquiries into Metro procedures and resources, aiming for transparent and effective governance. Despite repeated queries, resolution on HR matters remains elusive, prompting the question of when to act on the commission's authority. Options discussed include appointing an interim director or temporarily assigning staff to maintain operations. The urgency to decide and avoid prolonged uncertainty was emphasized, acknowledging the discomfort of inaction among commission members. Clarifications on discussing HR matters in open meetings and the commission's authority to handle personnel issues were provided. Ultimately, the commission seeks clarity on available options and the best course of action moving forward.

Commissioner Jester delivered a personal statement, asserting the independence and authenticity of his words, which reflect extensive research and deliberation. He commends Executive Director Daniel Singh for fostering inclusivity within Metro Arts but contends that Singh's effectiveness as a leader has waned beyond reconciliation. Despite acknowledging Singh's equity efforts, Jester advocates for Singh's removal, proposing the appointment of an interim director and initiating a national search for a successor with robust management experience. He underscores the imperative of promoting healthy relationships with staff and artists while advancing equity and diversity in grant administration. Reflecting on ongoing challenges, Jester emphasizes the need for tough conversations and decisive action to uphold the interests of the Nashville arts community.

***A motion that this Commission terminate Executive Director Daniel Singh and immediately, in coordination with Metro Nashville's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and with our workforce Diversity Manager, work to appoint an interim director who is capable of fixing problems and healing our embattled staff by Commissioner Jester and seconded by Commissioner West.***

***The motion was then amended by Commissioner Jester.***

### Questions & Discussion

1. Reinstatement or Termination of Director Singh: The meeting primarily focused on discussing the reinstatement or termination of Director Singh, who has been on FMLA leave. Concerns were raised

regarding the lack of leadership and direction in the organization during Singh's absence, prompting considerations for the appointment of an interim director.

2. Need for Stability and Effective Leadership: One commissioner expressed reluctance to terminate Singh without clarity on the next steps and the process for selecting an interim director. They emphasized the importance of maintaining stability, especially during critical times like the upcoming budget process.

3. Value of Experienced Leadership: Reflections were shared on past experiences with interim directors, highlighting the value of having someone with substantial knowledge of the organization to ensure a smooth transition, particularly during challenging times such as budget negotiations.

4. Perspective from Staff Member: staff member provided insights into the challenges of the budget process and the importance of strong leadership during such times. They emphasized the need for experienced leadership to navigate the complexities of budgeting and funding, expressing concerns about potential disruptions in the absence of effective leadership.

5. Discussion on Potential Motions: The discussion also revolved around potential motions, including putting Director Singh on administrative leave while initiating the search for an interim director. Concerns were raised about the procedural uncertainties and the potential burden on Finance + Operations Director Christian Afotey if tasked with handling budget-related responsibilities temporarily.

6. Emphasis on Broad Leadership: Concerns were reiterated regarding the potential burden on Director Christian Afotey and the need for broader leadership. Commissioners emphasized the importance of having a leader to guide the staff through challenging periods and expressed openness to exploring alternative solutions.

7. Recognition of Complexity: Overall, there was recognition of the complexity of the situation and the necessity of finding a solution that adequately supports the staff and ensures the continuation of essential tasks. Discussions emphasized balancing the need for stability with the desire for effective leadership.

Commissioner Chair Love inquired, "To ensure our decisions align with your needs, what specific support or leadership structure do you believe would best benefit the team at this time? Are there preferences regarding an interim director or potential candidates from within the staff? Your input is crucial in guiding our decision-making process, so please share your insights to help us proceed effectively."

Vivian Foxx:

- Supports the need for an interim director due to Chris's workload and mental health concerns.

- Emphasizes the importance of clear leadership and assistance for the team.
- Expresses frustration over confusion within the team and highlights their ability to work well despite lacking a director.

Daryn Jackson:

- Advocates for a leader who can define the agency's mission and unify the team.
- Describes the team as underutilized due to the absence of a shared vision and agenda.
- Stresses the necessity of knowing who is in charge and urges for someone to step up to lead.

Sydney Davis:

- Voices frustration over unclear job expectations, lack of resources, and inadequate leadership support.
- Urges for immediate action to address workplace issues and the need for strong leadership.
- Highlights the strain on the team and emphasizes the importance of support from an interim director.

Claudia Lawhon:

- Asserts that Chris is overwhelmed and deserves support from an interim executive director.
- Believes it's unfair to add more responsibilities to Chris's plate and emphasizes the need for support for the entire team.

## **H. Committee for Anti-Racism & Equity**

Commissioner Hardin was introduced as the new chair. He let everyone know that he would be meeting with staff. He hopes that it can continue to be a tool for the arts community. He is excited to hear from the community.

## **I. Communications Updates**

Communications Manager Daryn Jackson provided an update on recent developments in the public art collection. She highlighted several innovative projects aimed at enhancing how the city showcases its public art. The team is piloting new promotional media packages for ongoing installations, designed to be both professional and engaging.

These efforts involve collaboration across various Metro departments, including the Metro Nashville Network and ITS teams. Notably, team members Tim Jarvis and Aaron Cowley have been leading on-site videography, while John Ferguson has been capturing dynamic drone footage of new sculptures, such as the one at the fairgrounds and another at the new Donaldson Library.

These media packages will benefit artists by providing high-quality portfolio assets and offer the agency valuable promotional and archival materials. Jackson praised the public art team for their hard work and

expertise, managing complex installations daily. She also commended the ITS team for their creativity and support, emphasizing the excitement and success of this collaborative effort.

#### **J. Chair's Updates**

Commission Chair Love emphasized that the commission's decisions are made with careful consideration, ensuring that the community's voice is heard and acknowledging that the issues at hand have developed over time. The commission is dedicated to acting in the best interest of the arts community, and she expressed her gratitude to everyone for their commitment.

Chair Love also announced the new committee appointments:

- Commissioner Hardin to the CARE Committee
- Commissioner Watts to the Budget & Oversight Committee
- Commissioner Jester to the Grant & Funding Committee

#### **K. New/Old Business**

The commission scheduled a special called meeting for April 25.

#### ***L. Adjourn Meeting***

***Commissioner Chair Love adjourned meeting at 2:27 p.m. and seconded by Commissioner Jester.***