



METRO ARTS

NASHVILLE OFFICE OF ARTS + CULTURE

Minutes

Metro Arts Board of Commissioners

February 15, 2024

12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Metro Southeast Building, Green Hills Room

1417 Murfreesboro Pike

Nashville, TN 37217

Commissioners: Heather Lefkowitz (Secretary), Darek Bell, Will Cheek, Janet Kurtz, Carol McCoy, John Nefflen, Campbell West, Tim Jester, Dawana Wade, Beverly Watts, and Arlene Nicholas-Phillips Daniel Singh (Executive Director, ex-officio)

Absent Commissioners: Diana Perez (Chair) & Leah Dupree Love (Vice Chair)

Metro Staff: Atilio Murga, Anne-Leslie Owens, Masonya Osei, Asia Pyron, Daryn Jackson, Chuck Beard, Christiana Afotey, Sydnei Davis, Jesse Ross, AJ Dykens-Hodapp and Vivian Foxx

METRO ARTS MISSION:

Drive an Equitable and Vibrant Community through the Arts

- A. Call to Order, Welcome, and Land Acknowledgement
Commissioner Lefkowitz called meeting to order at 12:05, due to Commissioner Chair Perez out sick.
- B. Public Comment
 1. Simone Boyd
 2. Joseph Gutierrez
 3. Stephanie Pruitt-Gaines
 4. Janine Christiano
 5. Olusola Tribble
 6. Councilperson Joy Styles
- C. Approval of Minutes
A motion to Approve January 25, 2024, meeting minutes by Commissioner Nefflen and seconded by Commissioner Kurtz.
- D. Artist Spotlight: Stephanie Pruitt-Gaines
- E. Metro Human Relations Commission Update: Rev Tucker
 - a. Director Davie Tucker welcomed new commissioners and expressed gratitude for their service, emphasizing the significant impact of volunteer work on city development. He introduced a report summary outlining the limited scope of the inquiry, focusing on historic July and August votes to determine potential Title 6 violations. Noteworthy was the allocation of 70% of funds to 10 institutions since the organization's inception, urging

courage in decision-making aligned with the mission. Tucker highlighted ongoing efforts, including interviews with witnesses and analysis of meeting minutes despite challenges like incomplete recordings. He addressed a complaint backed by numerous individuals, including grant applicants, underscoring the need for updates and transparency. Tucker assured the report's availability before the next meeting, promising thoroughness and acknowledging the involvement of outside counsel due to complexities and conflicts with Metro Legal. He referenced Matthew Desmond's quote on complexity and power, inviting questions before concluding the update. There was discussion regarding the presence of outside counsel during the report presentation, emphasizing the need for legal clarity amidst conflicts with Metro.

F. Committee for Anti-Racism and Equity (Chair Perez followed by Justin Laing)

- a. Commissioner Lefkowitz provided an update on the committee's recent meetings, highlighting discussions regarding changes to the community member application process. Recommendations were made to staff for future iterations of the form, with plans to onboard additional members by June. The committee aims to integrate anti-racism and equity commitments into all activities, with discussions underway for joint training sessions for committee and commission members in May or June. Justin Lang was acknowledged for providing a previous update in January, with plans for him to speak further for context. Lefkowitz emphasized leveraging existing resources within the committee and Metro to address budget constraints and facilitate training initiatives amidst ongoing challenges.
- b. Daniel provided context regarding his role in anti-racist efforts within the organization, highlighting the challenges of aligning existing processes with the anti-racism charge given by the previous leadership. He collaborated with C.A.R.E. to integrate anti-racism principles into the cultural planning process, recognizing the need to address systemic issues and promote accountability to marginalized groups. Justin, a nationally recognized consultant in the arts, was brought in to support this initiative and align with C.A.R.E.'s vision and practices. Daniel emphasized the technical manifestations of systemic issues and invited questions from the commission regarding Justin's role and the ongoing efforts to address racial inequities.
- c. The discussion then revolved around aligning the organization's processes with its commitment to anti-racism. Questions arose about the approval of materials by Metro Human Relations and the collaboration with Andrea Blackman's office. Concerns were raised regarding ongoing legal issues and whether it's practical to conduct anti-racism training amidst these challenges. Commissioners expressed differing perspectives on the timing and prioritization of anti-racism initiatives, with some advocating for immediate action and others emphasizing the need for comprehensive alignment and restorative work. The conversation highlighted the complexity of addressing systemic issues and the importance of transparent, inclusive processes. Daniel clarified his role as a subcontractor and emphasized the need for alignment between the care committee's vision and the organization's actions. Ultimately, the discussion underscored the significance of addressing underlying systemic issues to foster meaningful change.

G. Public Art Committee (Commissioner West)

****All Public Art Action Items were moved to the February Commission Meeting**

1. Temporary Art on Metro Property Guidelines Amendment Recommendation (ACTION)
2. Public Art Guidelines Amendment (ACTION)
3. Approve Old Hickory Community Center Design Concept (ACTION)

H. Cultural Planning: Martin Cohen

- a. Martin Cohen provided an overview of the cultural planning process, emphasizing the need to align the organization's work with its goals. He acknowledged the challenges and complexities faced over the past three years and highlighted the importance of community engagement in shaping the vision for cultural planning. Cohen described the methodology used, emphasizing qualitative and quantitative research to gather input from diverse stakeholders. He underscored the significance of inclusivity in engagement efforts and stressed the need to reach communities beyond traditional methods. Despite barriers and transitions within Metro Arts, Cohen expressed optimism about moving the process forward and leveraging the groundwork laid in recent years.

I. Chair's Updates

a. **Acting Chair Commissioner Lefkowitz provided updates.**

- Chair Perez expressed gratitude to all attendees and regret for her absence.
- A letter was sent out by Chair Perez regarding the formation of an oversight committee, addressing concerns raised within Metro Arts.
- The purpose of the oversight committee, as outlined in Chair Perez's letter, is to collaborate with various departments within Metro Arts to address financial oversight and human resource concerns.

- Members appointed to the oversight committee include:

Commissioners:

- , - Heather Lefkowitz (Committee Chair)
- Will Cheek
- Beverly Watts
- Diana Perez
- John Nefflen
- Campbell West
- Timothy Jester
- Commissioner Lefkowitz welcomed any questions or clarifications regarding the oversight committee.

b. **New Committee Appointments:**

- Acting Chair Commissioner Lefkowitz announced new committee appointments.
- Commissioner [Insert Commissioner's Name] was appointed as the Secretary.
- The following committee appointments were made:
 - Executive Committee:
 - Commissioner Lefkowitz (Secretary)
 - Grants Committee:
 - Commissioner Dupree Love (Chair)
 - Commissioners Jester, McCoy, and Wade
 - Advocacy Committee:
 - Commissioner Kurtz (Chair)
 - Commissioners Cheek and Bell
 - Steering Committee:
 - Commissioner Wade
 - Public Arts Committee:
 - Commissioner West (Chair)
 - Commissioners Watts and Nicholas-Phillips
 - Care Committee:
 - Commissioner Perez (Chair)
 - Commissioner Lefkowitz (New Member)

c. Acknowledgment of Commissioner McCoy's Apology:

- Commissioner McCoy offered an apology during the meeting.
- In the November meeting, Commissioner McCoy raised numerous questions regarding finances, expressing zealotry in doing so.
- Commissioner McCoy apologized to the new Finance Director, Christiana Afotey, if her zeal was perceived as rudeness.

J. Executive Director's Report

- a. Daniel emphasized the importance of aligning the mandates of CARE with the rest of the Commission to streamline efforts and avoid repeated discussions. He noted that CARE's charter is under legal review to ensure alignment with the Commission's bylaws, marking the beginning of the conversation on integrating anti-racism work into all aspects of their work. Additionally, Daniel highlighted the significance of joint training involving CARE, all committees, including public art, and the full Commission, reaffirming its priority. Despite community feedback, he pointed out the success of their grant programs, citing the high number of applications received. Daniel explained the rationale behind moving grant cycles earlier to align with state cycles, facilitating better budget planning processes. He concluded by inviting questions from the Commission.

K. New/Old Business

1. Discussion on Letter from Metro Legal

During the committee meeting, Commissioner McCoy expressed a desire to discuss a letter from Metro Legal that had been sent out recently. She also renewed her request for the establishment of a Budget and Finance Committee, suggesting that the current ad hoc committee might not suffice in the long term. Commissioner McCoy's motion to have her request reviewed by the executive committee was supported by others.

In response, it was noted that there had been discussions in the executive committee about the possibility of the ad hoc committee transitioning into a standing committee. Commissioners expressed agreement with this idea and emphasized the urgency of addressing the issues raised in the Metro Legal letter, particularly concerning the disbursement of grant funds.

Commissioner Cheek proposed modifying the agenda to include a specific discussion of the Metro Legal letter. After a second and a vote, the agenda was adjusted accordingly.

A motion to modify the agenda was made by Commissioner Cheek and seconded by Commissioner West.

The meeting transitioned smoothly from the Chair's report to a focused discussion on the contents of the letter.

There was a brief discussion about the legality of discussing an item that hadn't been formally noticed to the public. However, it was agreed that the topic fell within the scope of the meeting, especially given its relevance to the director's report.

The meeting proceeded with the agenda modification, and further discussions were had regarding the Metro Legal letter and its implications for the committee's work moving forward.

Commissioner McCoy expressed deep concerns about the handling of grants within the organization, particularly regarding accountability and transparency. She highlighted the evolution of the Thrive grants, noting a significant increase in both the number of recipients and the amount awarded, including funds allocated to micro-organizations with limited budgets.

Expressing skepticism about the effectiveness of funding micro agencies, Commissioner McCoy questioned the accountability measures in place for individual grants. She referenced Simone Boyd's

diligence in scrutinizing Metro Arts' funding practices and echoed Boyd's concerns about the allocation of funds.

Commissioner McCoy drew attention to a substantial increase in consultant fees, suggesting that such funds should be directed towards artists instead. She also raised concerns about the lack of communication between the organization's director and the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) personnel within Metro.

Overall, Commissioner McCoy called for greater accountability, proper utilization of funds, and adherence to DEI principles in Metro Arts' grant allocation processes.

L. Adjourn Meeting

Meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.