

MEETING MINUTES

Metro Arts Commission

Thursday, August 15, 2024, 12:00pm-2:00pm
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools Board Room
Nashville, TN 37204

[Meeting video](#)

Attendance at Meeting:

Commissioners: Leah Dupree Love (Acting Chair), Heather Lefkowitz (Secretary), Timothy Jester, Evan Brown, Carol McCoy, Beverly Watts, Dawana Wade, Jessie Rosenblum,

Metro Arts Staff: Interim Director Dr. Paulette Coleman, Chris Atofey, Jessica Ingram, Daryn Jackson, Vivian Foxx

Guests: Tessa Ortiz-Marsh (Metro Legal), Tyler Yarbro

Not present:

Commissioners Campbell West, Janet Kurtz (Vice Chair), Tre Hardin

Action Items

- Managers to submit 2–3-page summaries of their work and provide documents on policies, procedures, and guidelines by August 31 for use by Budget & Oversight Committee
- Nominating Committee to schedule special commission meeting in September to vote on new leadership slate
- Staff to post 2022 annual report online alongside 2021 report

Meeting summary

1. Call to Order: Chair Leah Dupree Love called the meeting to order at 12:07 PM. She noted that a quorum of eight commissioners was present, thanking everyone for their patience with parking difficulties.

2. Welcome and Introductions: Chair Love welcomed all attendees and introduced two new commissioners:

- A. Commissioner Jessie Rosenblum introduced herself, stating, "I'm very honored to be here. I've been involved with the Nashville art community for several years, so I'm just excited to be part of it."
- B. Commissioner Mayra Yu introduced herself as the Executive Director of Casa de la Cultura Latino Americana in Nashville. She explained, "I'm a volunteer there, and my day job is to be a certified medical interpreter at Vanderbilt. I've been working with the community for Casa de la Cultura for over 13 years, and all the work that I've done has been just as a volunteer."

3. Land Acknowledgement

- A. Chair Love read the land acknowledgement.

4. Public Comment: Two individuals provided public comments:

- A. Ashley Bachelder from the Metro Human Relations Commission (MHRC) spoke about the recently finalized conciliation agreement. She stated, "This serves as a full resolution of the title six complaint, and though we technically labeled this complaint as now resolved, it means that we now move into a compliance and monitoring phase of the title six process." Bachelder emphasized that the agreement should not be viewed as enforcing the cancellation or delay of any grants for the current fiscal year.
- B. Ben Tran, the new chair of MHRC, clarified aspects of the conciliation agreement. He stated, "I want to be clear that their agreement does not by any means prohibit Metro Arts from proceeding with the current grant cycle, with applications already submitted for operational grants or Thrive." Tran urged the commission to trust the work done leading up to this point and to use all available resources to see this year's grants through.

5. Approval of Minutes: The minutes from the July 18, 2024 meeting were reviewed. Vivian Foxx noted that one change was needed: to add Commissioner Nichols Phillips to the attendance list. Commissioner Beverly Watts moved to approve the minutes with this change, and the motion was seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved.

6. Artist Spotlight: Shawn Whitsell: Shawn Whitsell, a playwright, actor, director, producer, and founder of the Destiny Theater Experience, presented a poem from the perspective of a prison cell. He explained that the poem was originally commissioned by a Vanderbilt graduate student for a project about incarceration. Whitsell announced upcoming performances, including a pre-show piece for Nashville Shakespeare Festival on September 14 and a show called "Lightning Girl" at the Dark Horse Theater on August 23 and 24.

7. Public Art Committee Report:

- A. Jessica Ingram presented two design proposals:

- a. Omari Booker's design for Strobel House: Ingram explained that Booker conducted community engagement workshops at Daybreak Arts and Room in the Inn. The design includes three-dimensional works in planters and a mural with three-dimensional aspects. Themes of abundance, nature, and transformation were incorporated based on community feedback. The commission voted unanimously to approve the design.
 - b. Creative Girls Rock design for Z. Alexander Looby Community Center: This design honors Z. Alexander Looby and other civil rights figures. The mural will span the building, starting 8 feet up from the ground. The commission voted unanimously to approve the design.
- B. Ingram also reported on the Lending Library exhibition at the Nashville Public Library. She shared that 113 artworks were purchased for \$61,045, with the average purchase price increasing from \$661 to \$2,000.
- C. At the end of her report, Jessica Ingram announced her resignation as Public Art Manager.
- D. Communications Director Daryn Jackson presented a video, one of several she collaborated on with other Metro partners, featuring public art works. She also announced her resignation.

8. Grants and Funding Committee Report: Commissioner Tim Jester provided a detailed report.

- a. Jester clarified timelines for Thrive grants and operating grants based on the conciliation agreement. He asked all involved to “work with necessary parties to create a plan for robust communication, to make a decision about current operating grant applications, to publicize a more specific timeline for execution proposed operating grant guidelines, and partner with the Thrive working group to determine allocations of funds between Thrive awards and operating grants.”
- b. Attorney Tyler Yarbrow provided clarification on several points:
 - i. The working group will identify a legal mechanism to distribute funds to individual artists. The group includes representatives from Metro Arts Commission, MHRC, Metro Finance, Metro Legal, and the artist community.
 - ii. Policy decisions still rest with the Metro Arts Commission.
 - iii. The agreement requires broad public engagement to inform policy decisions.
 - iv. January 6, 2025 is the outer deadline for publishing grant policies and procedures. The commission is encouraged to move faster if possible.
 - v. Timelines are designed to be achievable while allowing for necessary public engagement and policy discussions.

9. CARE Committee Report: Commissioner Heather Lefkowitz reported that the committee is working on developing a definition of equity that can be useful in evaluating issues and policies that come before the committee.

10. Budget and Oversight Committee Report: Commissioner Beverly Watts reported that the committee is reviewing current budgets and processes. She stated, "We're in the process of looking at what do we have in place, really pure and simple, what is that budget looking like? What's the closeout looking like? And what kind of things will we need as we move forward, as commissioners, to make decisions going forward?"

11. Nominating Committee Report: Commissioner Dawana Wade reported on the committee's work to develop a slate of leadership for the next year. She thanked Acting Chair Leah Love for stepping into the role. She announced plans to hold a special meeting in September for elections, as required by the bylaws. Wade requested that commissioners be polled for availability for a late September meeting.

12. Interim Director's Report: Dr. Paulette Coleman provided a comprehensive report, including:

- A. Updates on staffing changes and welcomes to new commissioners
- B. Plans for a commissioner retreat
- C. Details on the conciliation agreement and its implications for grant programs. This agreement balances legal compliance with continued support for Nashville's arts community, aiming to reinvigorate grant-making activities with a more robust and compliant program.
- D. Announcement of staff tasks for completing the annual report and documenting policies and procedures
- E. Discussion of the path forward for grants, especially the Thrive program

13. Old Business/New Business

- A. Chair Love reminded new commissioners they will be assigned to committees.
- B. Chris Atofey, Finance Director, announced her resignation.

14. Announcements

Commissioner Lefkowitz discussed resources being developed for commissioners, including a weekly digest of information and detailed meeting minutes. Commissioner Yu announced an upcoming free event by Casa de la Cultura called "Mexico en el Corazón" at the Fisher Art Center at Belmont on September 8.

15. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:34 PM upon a motion by Commissioner Watts and a second.