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Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Wednesday, May 13, 2021, 5:30 pm

MEETING CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM

Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair Karen Paul, Councilor Ali Dieng, Councilor Joan Shannon

Mary Danko – Fletcher Free Library, Doreen Kraft – BCA, Sara Katz – BCA, Cindi Wight – BPRW, Holli Bushnell – BPRW Staff

Meeting called to order at 5:35pm by Chair Shannon

Approval of agenda

Councilor Dieng moved to approve the agenda with the following modification: Remove beltline sign art update. Councilor Paul Seconded, all were in favor.

Approval of draft minutes from March 10, 2020

Paul moved to approve the minutes. Dieng seconded. All were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum opened at 5:36pm.

Laurie Stavrand spoke about the need for public performance spaces in the wake of the closure of North End Studios and the dissolution of the Vermont Performing Arts League. She pointed out that Burlington has several large immigrant communities with different cultural practices, and that they need a place that's physically accessible, affordable, and supportive of their artistic practices. Some of these spaces are going away or are in danger of disappearing and there is a tremendous need for them.

Hemant Ghising teaches karate to middle and elementary refugees and immigrants and has lost his space in with the closure of North End Studios. That space was one of the only affordable spaces in Burlington and he's not sure he can find another location. If his costs go up it will force him to charge more and force some parents to cease classes due to the cost.

David Shein reported that he had just taken on dismantling Vermont Performing Arts League/North End Studios. He has been getting daily calls in regards to events scheduled at North End Studios that have had to be cancelled. No one knows what to do or how to help these folks figure out solutions. He hopes the council can help because these community events are at risk. He also expressed hope that the cities

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of Burlington and Winooski can get together and figure out a solution. The need is immediate and people are already starting to suffer.

The public forum was closed at 5:50pm

Agenda Items

1. Dog Task Force -

Shannon asked if Dieng could provide the committee with his concerns on this item. Dieng began by thanking Shannon and BPRW director Cindi Wight for coming to community meetings about the dog parks. Two separate meetings were held and different people came both times. The New North End has growing concerns about dogs/dog issues. The City and BPRW has done an amazing job improving Starr Farms dog park, but the issues concerning dogs are now citywide. Dieng's concern is in making Burlington safe and welcoming for everyone. There are already people interested in participating on the dog task force. Dieng's hope is that the committee will be able to bring a resolution to the full city council that includes the scope of the task force. Dieng is also willing to put a vision in writing, email committee members, and improve the current resolution to reflect goals.

Shannon suggested that the next agenda focus on what the job of task force will be and how members are selected. She pondered whether the committee may or may not want to specify categories to be filled. Due to the urgency of the public forum questions she asked if this item could be put off until next meeting. Both Dieng and Paul agreed that the closure of performance spaces was more urgent. Wight commented that she would be happy to get together with Dieng and Jake from BPRW to brainstorm. Shannon asked if Wight could put together a history of dog task forces and Wight agreed to do so.

2. 1% for Public Art

Doreen Kraft provided a brief update on the 1% for Public Art Ordinance. The ordinance was sent out earlier on 5/13/2021, and there is a lot to it. It may take time to go through and she did not expect a full discussion that evening. Sara Katz has been working with Eileen Blackwood and Kraft to develop the policy. With Blackwood's departure there is an urgency to get through ordinance. Kraft suggested the item be moved to next agenda to give the committee time to pre-read the ordinance and provide questions in advance. Instead of multiple meetings this would allow them to address concerns in advance. The committee was in agreement.

3. Asian History Month Updates

Mary Danko informed the committee that the Fletcher Free Library has changed up the stories at Leddy Story Walk. The new story focuses on the Moon festival and tells a beautiful Asian

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American story. They have also updated the story experience in window, book displays, and the carousel to reflect AAPI history and experiences.

4. Performing Arts Venues/North End Studios Closure

Shannon stated that this subject came up very suddenly and is effecting far more than just Burlington. She asked if there have been discussions on this issue or is this the first time. Wight commented that BPRW is in conversation with Champlain Housing Trust to take over rental and management of event room in the Old North End Community Center. Shannon asked if booked events that have had to be cancelled due to the NES closure could continue to happen. Wight wasn't sure if NES would be willing or able to provide schedule, but she will check with Melissa Cate to see if BPRW has received any information on that. NES managed the bookings for their space. Shannon asked Wight to find out if NES will share their schedule and contact info for the bookings. She also asked Wight to notify the community if NES is unable or unwilling to provide this info.

Kraft clarified that there are 3 spaces being discussed. CHT, 294 Winooski Ave (formal NES space), O'Brien Center in Winooski. O'Brien and CHT are the spaces that are closing. Sara Katz confirmed that the NES space is also closing. Shannon asked if there has been conversation about O'Brien center with Winooski folks. Kraft stated that she has spoken with Cindi about CHT, but has not been involved in any conversations about the O'Brien Center.

Shannon asked what other performance venues there are in the city. Dieng commented that it would be very valuable for city to take leadership role in this issue. He proposed a joint assessment through BPRW and BCA of what spaces currently exist in the city (both public and private rentable spaces – costs, contact, etc...). Once the city is assessed he proposed an assessment on spaces in the greater Champlain Valley – this would look at what community spaces exist, who manages them and any rental costs. Ultimately, this assessment would provide resources for community members looking for rental space. The assessment could be made available to Council/PACC as starting point.

Shannon agreed that the assessment is something that can start in one place and build on over time. She asked if the new BCA space might be available or coming online soon. Unfortunately, Kraft confirmed that the space is still primarily a warehouse with no occupancy permits. In terms of the assessment, she felt that understanding what the uses and needs of these spaces are – What equipment is needed, if there are sound or lighting requirements, and any sort of accessibility needs.

At this time David Shein jumped back into the conversation, requesting that the city moves quickly on this issue as the need is immediate. Shannon confirmed that the city is working on taking over the CHT space in the Old North End Community Center. She asked if Shein might have access to the NES schedule and contact info. Shein believed he could potentially provide that info and Shannon requested he connect with Wight.

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Shannon asked Kraft if BCA might be able to develop a website/webpage that would direct people to different space rental options. Kraft confirmed that they could develop something like that without too much difficulty. BCA already has a list of rental spaces from previous community events. They will develop a Google Doc or something similar that people can add to in case there are any changes or covid updates (a lot of spaces are still shut down).

Wight commented that BPRW is going forward with an RFP for the former occupied by the Hindu Temple. They are looking to rent the space in a fair and equitable way. Shannon asked if the rental of the former Hindu Temple space can that be coordinated with the CHT space. Unfortunately, they cannot be tied together. People could use the event hall, but there would be a fee.

Kraft asked if the council would support holding off on leasing the former Hindu Temple space as that space might suit for some of these current needs. Shannon supported this idea and asked Wight to explore it. Wight's concern is that the use of the space is equitable. Allowing more people to use the space would mean serving more people. Shannon suggested that the city manages the space on a temporary basis so events in crisis with need have a place to go. Kraft suggested that staff get together and talk it through spaces and usage with city partners.

Shannon thanked the committee and staff for their efforts and willingness to change gears.

Schedule next meeting – Committee will be queried via email

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:28pm.