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## Minutes

### Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Wednesday, March 27, 2019, 5:30 pm  
Room 12, 149 Church Street, City Hall

#### Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair David Hartnett, Councilor Joan Shannon, Councilor Ali Dieng

Jesse Freedman – CEDO, Kristen Merriman-Shapiro – CEDO, Mary Denko – Fletcher Free Library, Rebecca Thompson – Fletcher Free Library, Cindi Wight – BPRW Holli Bushnell – BPRW/Clerk's Office, Zach Williamson – BCA, Sara Katz – BCA, 2 members of the public (names to be added)

Meeting called to order at 5:34pm

#### 1. Approval of agenda

Councilor Shannon moved to approve, Councilor Harnett Seconded, all were in favor

#### 2. Approval of draft minutes from August 23, 2018

Hartnett asked to hold the approval of the minutes until the arrival of Councilor Dieng.

#### 3. Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 5:35pm. As no one wished to speak, the public forum was also closed at 5:35pm.

#### 4. Old Business

##### a. CEDO Update

Kristen Merriman-Shapiro provided the committee with an update on the Moran FRAME concept. As the plan has been approved by the City Council CEDO will be moving forward with hiring consultants to help with the permitting process in April. The plan is to work on permitting May through July, then return to PACC and the Council with updated estimates on cost and work. Currently CEDO is on track to meet their goals of bonding for TIF funds before the end of 2019.

Hartnett asked if there as a timeline in place for construction. Merriman-Shapiro reports that the goal is to begin the deconstruction in late 2019 or early 2020 as weather and colder temperatures won't be a factor in disassembling the building. Landscaping and other site work will wait until the

spring of 2020. She would be happy to come back to PACC and report on the progress as the plan develops further.

Shannon asked if the funds for the project will be committed by the end of 2019 and if the bids for work on the project might come in higher (as we just experienced with City Hall Park). Merriman-Shapiro confirmed that the funds will be committed by the end of the year. She also assuaged the fears of the councilors that the bidding process for the FRAME is very different for CHP. It is not a straight bid, but rather construction management meaning the city has allocated a specific amount of funds for the project and bidders must work within those available funds. Essentially, it is of a question of what we can get for the money we have as opposed to how much it will cost to get what we want. Additionally, the timing for the bids is better than it was for CHP. Most companies will have completed their big summer projects and have more time available as they go into the fall. CEDO is also hoping to receive more bids than the city received for CHP. That said, CEDO will be reporting back to the city after permitting to ensure they are still on target, and they will certainly update PACC with any changes.

Jesse Freedman followed Merriman-Shapiro with an update on the plans for Memorial Auditorium. After the December 18<sup>th</sup> town hall discussion CEDO has been working on the Super Block concept. With the help of Jeff Glassburg they have been working to identify financing, financial partners, and areas where the funding gap can be narrowed. They have also looked at the possibility of obtaining or developing the holdings between the city owned parking lot on the corner of South Winooski St and Main St and Memorial Auditorium. The goal is to get a good idea of what an RFP would look like before sending it out for initial bids. The funding gap still exists, but, thanks to the work CEDO has put in, it is narrowing. In addition to their funding pursuits, CEDO has also retained the services of an arts consultant to look at the audience capacity for performing arts spaces in Burlington. Freedman reports that, while the city is close to reaching capacity for performance venues, the size of Memorial (between 1700 to 2000 seats) should allow it to reach a different audience than that of the Flynn (1400 seats) or other performing arts spaces. The plan is to do another study to make sure that the current plan for the operation of Memorial is financially viable. Freedman concluded by saying that CEDO is feeling increasingly optimistic as they hone in on exactly what the residents of Burlington are looking for.

Shannon asked for the exact planned seating capacity of the main auditorium floor. Freedman reported that, as the plans have not been finalized, the capacity could be anywhere between 1,700 and 2,000 (the building has a historic seating capacity of approximately 2,000). Shannon then asked if the potential future move of Higher Ground to the Burton facility would impact the market for Memorial and if Memorial could be used as a rain facility for outdoor events. Freedman reported that their survey shows the Higher Ground move will not affect Memorial and that there is potential to use the space as a rain facility. He did express that CEDO is moving forward cautiously as they do not want to impact other indoor venues in the city (such as the Flynn). That said, their study does indicate that Burlington has a limitless capacity when it comes to outdoor performance venues (good news for Moran)

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A member of the public asked if the city is still considering using the lower level as a public commons space. Freedman confirms that the “annex” or basement level is still intended to be space for the winter location of the farmer’s market and a youth-lead performance space. That said, the exact details of how that space will run is up to the operator. It is designed for public use, but CEDO will need to look at the long-term stability of the space and marketing costs before they can confirm usage.

Another member of the public asked if there might be a benefit to having a larger seating capacity and if there was the potential of expanding the building to add more seating, such as on the north side of the building. Freedman stated that an extension is not currently part of the plan nor is it budgeted. There is potential to reduce the size of the lobby in an effort to expand the main auditorium space, but there may be structural issues or historical restrictions. Expanding the seating may be considered in the second phase of the project, giving CEDO a chance to calculate the cost and value. Councilor Shannon also commented that she would like to see CEDO explore an increased seating capacity so that Memorial will clearly be in a different market from Higher Ground or the Flynn. She asked if there was a possibility of getting events that have moved to other locations such as the Champlain Valley Expo back at Memorial. Freedman believes that’s quite possible and the consultants will certainly be looking into those options. That said, he also feels that the current projected capacity in conjunction with the quality and type of programming CEDO anticipates should not impact other theaters. Additionally, CEDO is looking to add daily or weekly activities and events like craft shows and conferences to help cover operation costs.

Shannon asked if voters will still need to vote on the bond for \$15 million and if \$15 million is still the maximum amount the city can bond for. In the same vein, Councilor Dieng asked about the city’s debt policy. He commented that it’s important that the city does not incur debt just because they can. He too had concerns about the city’s ability to still bond for the \$15 million. Merriman-Shapiro confirmed that the bonding capacity is still \$15 million, however other upcoming projects may impact that. Freedman reported that, in terms of the final costs of the project, hard construction costs are still around \$27 million. The funding gap still exists, but with the addition of around \$5 million in TIF funds and a focus on value engineering the gap has narrowed down to \$1 to 2 million. We are much closer to closing the gap than we were at the December meeting.

Dieng asked for clarification on the 3 options that had been previously presented, stating the rough details of the super block plan, the full renovation, and the option of mothballing the space. Freedman reminded Dieng that mothballing the building costs between \$100-200 thousand per year, and that is what we are doing currently (keeping the heat and the lights on and fixing whatever breaks). Dieng asked if there was a time frame for moving forward with the project or if there was pressure to move forward as with Moran. Freedman reassured him that CEDO is moving slowly forward and there is not a hard timeline at the moment. They will work to bridge the funding gap before they move forward with the next step of the plan. Though the superblock is the most expensive option it actually fills the funding gap more easily than focusing just on the building.

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Dieng commented that he would like to see a public/private partnership explored. He would like to see the idea developed over the next 4 or so years, exploring all the options, and making decisions several years down the line. In that same vein, Shannon commented that the city feels “dug up all over.” There are lots of big projects in the works right now and the timing might be off to start work on Memorial. That said, she feels there is some urgency to begin before the building deteriorates further. She asked if there is a timeline for the presentation of a vision or proposal to the public. Merriman-Shapiro believes that the bonding issue may be included in the March 2020 ballot. There is a timeline for the downtown TIF district (closes in 2035 or 2036) and the city will need to bond for these funds by a certain time (probably 2020). As with Moran, money that is not used will need to be returned to the state.

Councilor Dieng asked if community members could vote on the 3 options for the building. Merriman-Shapiro feels it’s a better idea to work through PACC, develop a clear plan, and then ask the community to vote on the funding. Councilor Shannon commented that she feels CEDO needs more viable options as, in terms of funding, they currently have none. It’s not logical to go to ask the voters to select an option when we have no way to pay for any of the 3 on the table. Merriman-Shapiro reports that the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of development will include more refined budgets. All that information will be presented to PACC before it moves to the public.

Councilor Hartnett commented that he feels what the committee heard in December were first drafts. He pointed out that Burlington is a major hub in Vermont and that both tourists and state residents want to come here for events (not Essex, not Colchester, Burlington). He’d like to see CEDO look at the largest seating capacity they can, draw large crowds, and make the project bigger. There are still lots of questions when it comes to Memorial, but he asked them to think big moving forward. Freedman concluded by sharing that designs will evolve to maximize the potential of the space.

## **5. Department Head items**

### **a. Parks Update**

Cindi Wight provided those assembled with a hand out detailing the upcoming events for BPRW. She went through the events, highlighting any changes from previous years and any important information. Two important things she focused on were the unveiling of a new mascot at kid’s day and the partnership between Parks and Local Motion to provide block party “kits.”

Harnett asked if Wight could provide an update on the corrections contract. Wight reports that both the city and general and BPRW in particular are on board with corrections. The numbers of participants have improved since the contract negotiations and there has been a reduction in the amount of money the city will pay. The reason fewer individuals were participating in the program was because laws have changed and fewer individuals are being sentenced to community service. The city is currently allocated 30,000 hours of community service work, now the question is how do we maximize those hours? If those numbers decline the city may have to look at working with other populations such as the homeless (other cities around the country are implementing homeless-work programs).

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Dieng asked if there was a way that city residents and visitors could see all the events happening in the city on a given day, perhaps on the BPRW website. Wight stated that there is a communications group that meets frequently to discuss disseminating information on all the events that happen in the city. That said, it is a complicated and challenging task. Dieng then asked if Wight could provide PACC with projected revenues for Leddy Beach Bites. Wight reported that the event was revenue generating last year despite the fact that many of the scheduled evenings were rained out. This year, as Beach Bites will be happening every Wednesday, revenue could be even better.

Shannon reported that a constituent reached out to her with some concern and confusion about the chapel rental rates for the Louisa Howard Chapel at Lakeview Cemetery. Holli Bushnell has provided her with some details on the requirements for rental, and she planned to attend the Cemetery Commission on 3/28/2019.

A comment was made that the smoking ban in City Hall Park is still not being enforced. Wight reports that signage is posted everywhere – benches, light posts, and free standing signs. The ban would need to be enforced by police, but it is not their top priority.

#### **b. Library Update**

Mary Danko reports that there are a couple of big events coming up at FFL of interest to the committee. The Jazz Brunch will take place on 3/31 from 10:30 to 1:30. It is put on in conjunction with the Friends of the Library and the cost is around \$45. There will be a silent auction with lots of interesting options available, including a painting donated by BCA. The library is also hosting a Harry Potter Party on 4/7 (WHICH SOUNDS SO AWESOME!). They are still looking for some volunteers, and plan to play up the fact that the old portion of the library looks a bit like Hogwarts. All sorts of fun, Harry Potter related activities will be taking place.

Danko then introduced the committee to Becca Thompson who gave a presentation on her early literacy program in home based daycares around the city. After doing some research the library realized that home-based certified daycares tend to be the most under-served in terms of access to programming. Becca developed a curriculum of base skills and a rubric to assess the measurable impact (assessments were at the beginning of her visits, multiple weeks into visitations, and at the end of the program). She traveled to a number of different home-based daycares around the city for several months, staying at each location for around an hour and providing multi-tiered lessons that included singing, reading, games, and group participation. She reports that providers appreciated the support from another adult and the opportunity to have structured time (an extremely difficult commodity to come by). The kids really enjoyed her programming and the lessons carried over into other parts of their lives (as reported by their primary care-givers). Becca visited day-cares with low “star” ratings (0-3), and noted that there was dramatic improvement amongst the 0-star rated centers. Centers with higher ratings also improved, but the results were not quite as dramatic.

Thompson has since developed a larger volunteer program, sending individuals besides herself out to 0-3 star rated daycare centers. These 10 volunteers, who must commit to the program for a full  
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year, range in age from their 20's to retirees (retired teachers being her ideal candidates), and have gone through background checks and a full day of training in order to interact best with the children. The library provides kit bags that the volunteers can take with them to their assigned daycare center, making the program easy for all those involved. While it is still a pilot program, Thompson is enthusiastic about the future. She will reassess after a few home visits and tweak anything that needs to be changed.

Dieng asked how Thompson will be assessing the success of this second phase. Thompson reports that she attends the first class and will attend another in the middle of the time period of visits. Danko reported that volunteers have the opportunity to get together with Thompson and other library staff and bounce ideas off of one another. Dieng suggested there could be some sort of recognition for completing the program and both Danko and Thompson agreed that would be a good idea.

Hartnett was extremely positive about the program, stating that he has total confidence in Thompson's ability to move forward. He congratulated her on her outside the box thinking and on reaching some of the goals of the early learning initiative. Danko mentioned that the current program is only in the second phase of many, the ultimate goal being to grow the program and build trust within the community so that they can eventually reach unregistered home daycares.

Shannon commented that she was one of the kids that would have benefited from this program. She felt woefully unprepared when she went to school for the first time. Being behind isn't just about being unable to complete the work, it's about self-esteem, being a peer, and feeling part of the rest of the class. When children have that base level knowledge it is much easier for them to flourish.

Dieng asked when the program was launched. Thompson informed him it began in February of 2018, and she stuck with the program and with the library even when it was unclear if she would be compensated for her work after Americore ended in March, because she truly believes in the work she is doing.

Hartnett commented that this program is something he would like to see presented in front of the full council.

### **c. BCA Update**

Sara Katz gave a quick update on the various goals BCA is currently pursuing. The community fund grand is due by 4/15. It is the fourth year where they will select 11 to 16 arts organizations to support through grant funding. They are also going into their scholarship fundraising and giving season. The FY20 goal is to increase their scholarship participation by 20% and they will be promoting and fundraising accordingly. BCA will be working with FFL and BPRW to do some "gap" programming towards the end of August (the time of year when there is limited to no daycare, school, or meal support). They are hoping to fill the void and give parents and caregivers more options and support during that time. Finally, Katz presented a framed poster from Highlight as a

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farewell and thank you gift to Councilor Hartnett. She recognized that Highlight in particular benefited from Hartnett's support and guidance and expressed her gratitude for his years of service to the community.

## **6. Adjournment**

Though no one moved to adjourn, the general consensus holds that the meeting adjourned around 7:30pm for a celebration of Councilor Hartnett's service, the enjoyment of cake, and general merriment.

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