



City of Culver City

Mike Balkman Council
Chambers
9770 Culver Blvd.
Culver City, CA 90232

Staff Report

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Item #: A-1.

CAC - 1) Consideration of a Recommendation from the CAC Artist Laureate Subcommittee to Appoint Victoria Marks as Culver City Artist Laureate for 2025-2027; and 2) Make Recommendation to the City Council

Meeting Date: May 20, 2025

Contact Person/Dept: Sally Unsworth/ City Manager, Office of Economic and Cultural Development

Phone Number: (310) 253-6003

Fiscal Impact: Yes ☒ No ☐

General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒

Public Hearing: ☐

Action Item: ☒

Attachments: Yes ☒ No ☐

Public Notification: Meetings and Agendas - Cultural Affairs Commission (5/15/25); Culver City Arts Foundation (5/15/25)

Department Approval: Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager (5/13/25)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC) consider the information provided, together with the CAC Artist Laureate Ad-Hoc Subcommittee (Subcommittee) recommendation and make a recommendation to the City Council to appoint Victoria Marks as Culver City's Artist Laureate for a two-year term beginning July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2027.

BACKGROUND

On May 11, 2015, the City Council considered the possibility of creating a Poet Laureate position and directed the Cultural Affairs Commission to investigate and provide a recommendation. The CAC formed an ad hoc subcommittee which researched and considered public comment on the subject. This subcommittee recommended establishing an Artist Laureate Program that would encompass all arts disciplines. They also recommended appointing Dr. Janet Hault as Honorary Artist Laureate for poetry for a two-year term, with duties including facilitating public awareness of poetic arts and advising the CAC on program guidelines and selection criteria.

The program was formally established by the City Council in March 2018. The City Council appointed Alexey Steele as the first Artist Laureate in January 2019 for a two-year term, which was later extended for a third year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most recently, Katy Krantz was appointed

as Culver City's Artist Laureate for a two-year term during 2023 and 2024, following a recommendation process involving a review panel, Subcommittee, and the Cultural Affairs Commission.

The program recognizes the importance of the arts and artists who enrich the community and serves as a collaboration between the City, the Cultural Affairs Commission, and the Culver City Arts Foundation. The Artist Laureate serves as an honorary, civic appointment and cultural ambassador. Program goals include raising community consciousness and appreciation for the arts, recognizing artistic excellence, and spotlighting the role artists play in a vibrant community.

DISCUSSION

The program overview and guidelines were reviewed and updated in the summer of 2022 with input from the Subcommittee, representatives of the Culver City Arts Foundation, Alexey Steele, and staff. Changes at that time included an increased stipend (\$10,000 per year from \$4,000), funding for supplies and related costs (up to \$10,000), adding language about advocating for arts across disciplines, and adjusting the review criteria from three categories to four.

2024 Program Evaluation Process

In late 2024, Sara Daleiden Consulting was engaged to facilitate an evaluation of the Artist Laureate Program. This process included conducting interviews with various program leaders and stakeholders in October 2024, followed by an evaluation session on November 13, 2024, at City Hall. The evaluation aimed to foster connection among program leaders, evaluate the program to identify areas for refinement and growth, and identify strategic recommendations.

Participants in the evaluation process (interviews and session) included:

- **Alexey Steele**, Past Artist Laureate, City of Culver City and Independent Artist
- **Katy Krantz**, Outgoing Artist Laureate, City of Culver City and Independent Artist
- **Christine Byers**, Former Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Culver City and Independent Consultant
- **Alicia Ide**, Board Vice-Chair, Culver City Arts Foundation, Former Artist Laureate Program Administrator and Public Works Management Analyst, City of Culver City
- **Tania Fleischer**, Commissioner, Cultural Affairs Commission, City of Culver City
- **Jim Clarke**, Board Chair, Culver City Arts Foundation, Former Mayor and Council Member, City of Culver City and Facilitator, Culver City Leadership
- **Shona Gupta**, Board Member, Culver City Arts Foundation
- **Heather Moses**, Arts Coordinator, Culver City Unified School District
- **Jill Thomsen**, Community Services Specialist, City of Culver City
- **Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin**, former Cultural Affairs Commissioner, City of Culver City
- **Brenda Williams**, Commission Chair, Cultural Affairs Commission, City of Culver City
- Along with staff conversations with **Lee Lawlor**, Performing Arts Management Analyst, **Sam Lee**, Public Art Management Analyst, and **Sally Unsworth**, Cultural Affairs Manager, City of Culver City.

The evaluation interviews and group session highlighted various aspects of the program and

produced recommendations.

Key recommendations from the consultant's evaluation summary included:

- Enhancing the applicant pool through strategies such as reducing the required time living and working in Culver City and expanding the geographic reach to applicants who live or work in zip codes that overlap or adjacent to Culver City.
- Exploring enhanced social media and partner distribution for application outreach.
- Presenting the program application orientation as an open house event showcasing past Laureates' work
- Supporting the Artist Laureate throughout their term (e.g., with an initial Research and Design phase, providing creative workspace, and/or career development)
- Refining the workflow (e.g., clarifying staff roles as intermediaries and reporting leads, establishing regular briefings for the Artist Laureate Workgroup, involving the Subcommittee in work plan approval); and
- Building teamwork and advocacy capacity (e.g., aligning with community partners integrating arts into City functions, developing an artist network).

The stipend was noted as important, with consensus among participants for an increase to \$30,000 total for the 2025-2027 term (\$15,000 per year) with an additional \$10,000 (total for two years) for supplies and related costs. Session participants noted that they invested their expertise in the Artist Laureate Program because they believe art is necessary and can address critical city problems, and they wanted to enrich the community and celebrate artists.

Following the receipt of the evaluation summary in December 2024, staff and the Subcommittee considered these recommendations in preparation for the next application cycle. The following program updates were incorporated for the 2025-2027 program:

- The geographic boundaries for interested applicants were expanded to include eligible artists that lived or worked in Culver City or neighboring cities and districts including Mar Vista, Baldwin Hills, Palms, Crenshaw, Baldwin Vista, Leimert Park, Hyde Park, Ladera Heights, Marina Del Rey, Del Rey, and unincorporated areas bordering Culver City. This expansion also eliminated a specific residency time requirement for living and working in Culver City.
- The application process was expanded to include an initial "Call for Letters of Interest" phase for interested artists. Outreach efforts were also greatly expanded to include multiple social media blasts, targeted outreach to local groups, artist collectives, nearby neighborhood groups, and various academic, visual, and performing arts departments.
- A mandatory virtual Artist Laureate orientation session was held on March 19, 2025. Interested applicants received information including a program overview, key information about City contracting and reporting requirements, and a Q&A period.
- Following the "Call for Letters of Interest", the Subcommittee members reviewed all letters received (47 in total) and made a recommendation to invite 25 artists to submit a full application to be considered for the program.
- An expanded orientation and engagement period will be introduced in July - September 2025 to include formal and informal introductions to the Artist Laureate including soliciting ideas, feedback and networking opportunities between the Artist Laureate and community

stakeholders. A special effort will be made to connect the Artist Laureate across City departments prior to a formal workplan presentation to the Cultural Affairs Commission in October 2025.

- Throughout the 2025-2027 program, bi-monthly check-in meetings with the Artist Laureate will be encouraged with Cultural Affairs staff, and regular reporting will occur with the Cultural Affairs Commission and Culver City Arts Foundation.

OBSERVABLE OUTCOMES

By expanding the geographic boundaries for applicants, increasing outreach to promote the program, and reducing other barriers to participation, the program saw an over 500% increase (7 applications in 2022 vs. 47 letters of interest in 2025) in engagement with the application process from the previous program cycle. The quality of the artists who applied to the program was excellent and the increased outreach contributed to a heightening of the program's profile amongst the larger Los Angeles artistic community.

2025-2027 Artist Laureate Selection Process

The application process began with the release of a Call for Letters of Interest on February 11, 2025. Applicants were required to submit a letter by March 3, 2025. A mandatory virtual information meeting was held on March 19, 2025, and potential applicants were required to attend or view a recording. Following this, qualified applicants were invited to submit a full online application by April 6, 2025.

Applicants were required to meet several eligibility requirements, including being at least 18 years old, having publicly exhibited/performed/presented/published artistic work within the last 3 years, not being currently enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student in a related degree program, being authorized to work in the United States, attending the mandatory orientation, and residing or working in the expanded geographic area. Required application materials included a resume/CV, at least five work samples, and at least two written recommendations.

Applications were reviewed and scored by an independent selection committee comprising distinguished professionals in the relevant artistic disciplines, and by the Subcommittee (Tania Fleischer and Brenda Williams).

The following independent professionals, with expertise in relevant artistic disciplines, were recruited to review the application:

- **Irene Borger** - Director, Herb Albert Award in the Arts
- **Shona Gupta** - Business and Technology sector professional; Culver City Resident, Culver City Arts Foundation Board Member
- **Adam Jefferis** - Director of Education, The Actors' Gang
- **Katy Krantz** - Artist, Culver City Resident, Former Culver City Artist Laureate
- **Lacey Vorrasi-Banis** - Writer, Adjunct Professor for Journalism University of Southern California, Culver City Resident

The applications were scored based on four criteria:

- **Artistic Quality** (40 points total), assessing originality and uniqueness through work samples and artist statement.

- **Community Impact** (35 points total), evaluating potential impact within Culver City based on proposed engagement activities, collaboration ability, and outreach. The Artist Laureate is expected to serve as a cultural ambassador, attend community events, engage artistically with the public, and liaise/partner with the Culver City Unified School District, community/non-profit/cultural institutions, and the business community.
- **Artistic Activities** (15 points total), reviewing the record of artistic activities and achievements through recognition, recommendations, and resume.
- **Cultural Equity** (10 points total), considering the cultural diversity of the artist, activities, and proposed engagement, demonstrated through application materials and potentially finalist interviews. Culver City is dedicated to achieving cultural equity, ensuring representation for historically underrepresented groups in arts policy, artist support, venues, and resource distribution

Based on the scoring and review, a pool of finalists was identified and invited to an in-person interview with the selection committee and Subcommittee.

Finalists included:

- **Flora Kao** - Visual Artist
- **Emer Kinsella** - Musician and Composer
- **Victoria Marks** - Multi-Disciplinary Artist and Choreographer
- **Megumi Smith** - Percussionist

The interview topics focused on how the candidate, as the next cultural ambassador, would engage with the community. Finalists were asked to elaborate on their artistic process, ability to connect with diverse audiences and across artistic disciplines, connection to and interest in the Culver City community, ideas on artistic innovation, and specific plans for how they will develop a specific project workplan with the City.

Following the review process, interviews, and deliberation, the selection committee recommended Victoria Marks to the CAC Artist Laureate Ad Hoc Subcommittee, which supported the recommendation.

Victoria Marks

Victoria Marks is a multi-disciplinary artist and choreographer/director whose primary artistic medium is people and the relationships between them. She creates movement-centered performances with and for groups of people, which she describes as a form of group portraiture. She defines choreography broadly as any set of intentional actions or movements. Her work spans stage, film, and public space, and she describes herself as a bridge builder who focuses on facilitating connection and creating safe and joyful spaces for people to come together. Marks has a strong background in community-centered performance making, having created projects like "Action Conversations" with diverse groups, including teen mothers and older women, veterans and artists, and others. Her work aims to bring wonder, build empathy, and make ordinary life more beautiful by engaging people where they meet and creating warm, playful, and relevant opportunities for

engagement.

Marks is a Professor and Chair of the Inter-Departmental Program in Disability Studies at UCLA, and her extensive professional accomplishments include numerous grants and awards, commissions for her work by prominent organizations, and significant roles as a consultant, advisor, and panelist in the arts field. She envisions using her tenure to make public spaces more vital, dip into micro-communities to support growth and interconnection, and view the city as a canvas for projects that connect residents and build civic pride.

Based on her artistic excellence, significant experience in community engagement, and compelling vision for connecting with the diverse communities of Culver City, the CAC Artist Laureate Ad Hoc Subcommittee concurs with the independent selection committee's assessment that Victoria Marks is exceptionally well-suited to serve as the next Artist Laureate.

Next Steps

Should the Cultural Affairs Commission recommend Victoria Marks's appointment, her application materials, along with the Commission's recommendation, will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration at the June 9, 2025 meeting.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

The two-year Artist Laureate Program budget totals \$40,000, which includes a \$30,000 stipend for the Artist Laureate intended as compensation for their time (\$15,000 per year), and up to \$10,000 allocated for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses. Funding for the program comes from the City's Cultural Trust Fund and a commitment from the Culver City Arts Foundation to contribute toward the program. The City's portion of the funding is included in the relevant fiscal year budgets.

ATTACHMENTS

1. 25-05-20_ATT 1_2025-2027 Artist Laureate Program Overview and Guidelines
2. 25-05-20_ATT 2_Victoria Marks Application Materials

RECOMMENDED MOTIONS

That the Cultural Affairs Commission:

1. Recommend the City Council Appoint Victoria Marks as Culver City Artist Laureate for July 2025 - June 2027.