

City of Culver City, California
City Council Agenda Item Report

Meeting Date: 12/05/05		Item Number: C-3	
AGENDA ITEM: Consideration of 2006 Performing Arts Grant Awards as Recommended by the Cultural Affairs Commission.			
Contact Person/Dept.: Susan Obrow / Christine Byers		Phone Number: (310) 253-5776 or 5762	
Fiscal Impact: Yes ☒ No ☐		General Fund: Yes ☐ No ☒	
Public Hearing: ☐		Action Item: ☒ Attachments: ☒	
Public Notification: Master Notification List (11/30/05), 2006 Performing Art Grant Applicants(XX/XX/XX), Cultural Affairs Commission(XX/XX/XX)			
Department Approval: Susan Evans (11/28/05)		CAO Approval: Martin Cole for Jerry Fulwood (11/30/2005)	
City Controller Approval: Marlee Chang 11/30/05			

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider the recommendation of the Cultural Affairs Commission and award funds for the 2006 Performing Arts Grant program.

BACKGROUND:

Culver City's Performing Arts Grant Program was established in 1994. The City's municipal code stipulates that 25% of the money deposited into the Art Fund in the prior fiscal year be appropriated for this program for the current fiscal year. For FY 2005-06, the budgeted amount from the Art Fund is \$25,824. To this, an additional \$15,000 was allocated by the City Council from a larger grant donated in the summer of 2005 by Sony Pictures Entertainment. The total amount available for Performing Arts Grants for 2006 is \$40,824.

On June 14, 2005, Cultural Affairs staff and the Cultural Affairs Commission ("CAC") Grants and Artist Services Subcommittee met to review the draft Notice of Funding Availability ("NOFA") for the 2006 Performing Arts Grant program. Based on comments received last year, the 2006 NOFA included a requirement that applicants provide a CD, DVD, video or audio tape with an excerpt of their work for the review panel's consideration. The CAC considered the 2006 NOFA at their regular meeting on July 12, 2005 and approved the document with minor changes. During the week of July 25, 2005, the 2006 NOFA was posted on the City's web page, and notices distributed electronically to former applicants; individuals and organizations included in the Cultural Affairs master database (collected, for example, from prior Town Hall

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meetings); the City's Master Notification system and the LACN (Los Angeles County Arts Commission) listserv.

On Wednesday, August 10, a workshop was held by staff at the Veteran's Memorial Building at which the grant guidelines and application were reviewed in detail. Twelve individuals attended. Staff informed attendees that the Ivy Substation would not be available for grantees this year due to the residency of The Actors' Gang and its community commitment to the Culver City Unified School District. Also, staff notified workshop attendees that alternative theatrical spaces were being explored for use in Culver City.

A total of nine applications were submitted by the deadline on Thursday, September 15, 2005.

The panel review session was held on Tuesday, October 11, 2005 at City Hall from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Five distinguished panelists were joined by the two members of the CAC Grants and Artist Services sub-committee who attended as an additional resource for questions and also as observers.

The 2006 Performing Arts Grant Review Panelists were:

1. Dolores Chavez, Executive Director, Common Ground
2. Joel Kimmel, Director of Development, The Actors' Gang
3. Mercedes Paz, Member, President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (and Culver City resident)
4. Janice Pober, Senior Vice President, Corporate Affairs, Sony Pictures Entertainment
5. David Young, Principal Bass, Los Angeles Opera

DISCUSSION:

Each panelist was sent an advance copy of all nine applications which were first reviewed by Cultural Affairs staff for completeness. The panelists were also provided a score sheet for each applicant (see attached), an overview of Culver City's Performing Arts Grant program, and a funding history of each of the nine applicants from 1995 to the present. There were four scoring criteria identified in the 2006 NOFA which are as follows:

1. Artistic excellence of proposed project (40 points);
2. Realistic budget and diversified funding base (25 points);
3. Outreach programs to the Culver City community (25 points); and,
4. Performance history in the Culver City community (10 points).

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Staff opened the review panel discussion by providing a brief overview of the grant program's history, guideline changes from the previous year, and discussion of the four review criteria listed above. The additional benefit to grant recipients of a fee waiver for using a City or Redevelopment Agency owned or operated facility was also explained to the panel.

The review panel discussed the value of performance history in the Culver City community as a scoring criterion. They expressed concern that the existing wording might lead to scoring that allowed an advantage for applicants who may have a history of performing locally but may not display the artistic excellence of new applicants. The discussion led to a decision to score each applicant with ten points to create an equal opportunity for each applicant. The review panel urged staff and the Cultural Affairs Commission to re-evaluate this criterion in future years.

After the overview, each application was reviewed in alphabetical order. The panelists first had the opportunity to ask questions of other panelists, staff or the subcommittee, and then to offer comments to the group about the application. This was followed by each panelist providing scores in each of the four categories resulting in an overall average score for that applicant. The CAC subcommittee and staff did not provide scores. In one instance, as noted below, Ms. Janice Pober and Mr. Joel Kimmel recused themselves from providing scores because they had recently interacted with an applicant and wanted to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest. In this instance, the score listed is an average of three panelists' scores rather than five.

Upon completing review of the individual applications, the nine qualifying applicants were ranked from highest to lowest; average scores for all nine ranged from 89 to 43. The panel felt that those applicants with average scores of 86 and above should receive 100% of the funding requested. Those applicants with scores below 86 received a portion of the funding requested and the amount recommended is based in part on their prior year funding history and whether or not an in-kind grant (fee waiver) would be included.

The panel's recommendation was reviewed by the CAC subcommittee. The total amount recommended for award is \$32,000. The review panel and CAC subcommittee were satisfied with the scoring and granting of funds for this year's applicants and respectfully recommended that remaining funds be rolled over into the 2007 Performing Arts Grants program. Staff projects that there is a strong possibility that another performing arts facility will be identified in 2007 and that there will be many more grant applications from theatre companies. The additional funding will be beneficial to attract more performing arts organizations of artistic excellence to the City of Culver City.

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At the conclusion of the review process, the panelists provided some recommendations to staff for future years.

Below is a brief overview of the nine applicants (from highest ranked to lowest) with summary comments as provided by the panelists:

Vox Femina Los Angeles

Panel Score: 89.4

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$2,500	\$2,500

The panel felt that the unity of sound as exhibited in the excerpt provided on the CD accompanying the application was difficult to achieve and “gorgeous.” As an organization, this group is exemplary in its artistic excellence, diversity of membership, and public outreach. The panel was unanimous in asking why this organization does not seek a bigger venue in Culver City so that they could reach a larger audience. The budget numbers were realistic, the budget notes thorough, and having operated at a surplus for eight years was noted as unusual and commendable for an organization of this size. The panel also noted that paying living wages to artists was laudable.

Culver City Academy of Visual and Performing Arts

Panel Score: 89.3

(This average does not include scores from Ms. Pober or Mr. Kimmel.)

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$4,000	\$4,000

The proposed project was enthusiastically embraced by the review panel. However, there were some comments with regard to the application itself. These comments included: overseas travel costs mentioned in the proposal needed addressing in the budget notes; full-time artistic and technical production staff costs were not adequately addressed in the budget nor were names or biographical background information provided for the creative team.

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We Tell Stories

Panel Score: 88.6

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$7,000	\$7,000

The organization has a strong presence in the Culver City community and the panel was supportive of this year's project as a continued collaboration between the theatre company and the Julian Dixon Library. The panel noted that these performances would encourage children to come to the library and that this may be the first opportunity for many children to see live theatre. Panelists noted the professional quality of the organization and the well-written application but the absence of alternative funding sources for this project was a concern.

About Productions

Panel Score: 87.4

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$7,500	\$7,500

The panel was unanimous in its support of a program that memorialized oral history and felt that the project could be expanded beyond the Senior Center to include younger audiences. The panel would have liked to have known more about the artistic process for developing this production.

The Definiens Project

Panel Score: 86

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$2,500	\$2,500

The panel was enthusiastic about the project and the proposed venue. They felt it was "smart" and "creative." The proposal was well written and the organization appeared to be fiscally responsible. This program has the potential of attracting new audiences to Culver City.

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Henry Mancini Institute

Panel Score: 83

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$5,500	\$3,000

In-Kind Grant Request (Fee Waiver)
\$842

This organization's positive and distinguished presence in Culver City was noted by the panel. The proposed project, a Valentine's dance, was extremely attractive because of the potential of a contemporary interpretation of a traditional event. The panel noted the fiscal robustness of the organization and the relative large cash grant request in light of this. They suggested that this organization may consider collaborating with the Culver City High School in future years as a vehicle for diversifying its ties to the community.

Los Angeles Doctors' Symphony

Panel Score: 77.4

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$2,500	\$1,000

In-Kind Grant Request (Fee Waiver)
\$2,400

The panel acknowledged that this organization has a set program that is successful year after year with a specific audience. The application was complete, professional, and well written. However, the panel was not impressed with the artistic quality as presented in the support material. They felt it lacked vibrancy.

Westchester Symphony Society

Panel Score: 76.6

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$7,500	\$4,000

In-Kind Grant Request (Fee Waiver)
\$2,190

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The panel recognized this organization's steady following and healthy attendance levels. However, after listening to the support material, the panel concluded that the organization could continue to strive for consistent artistic excellence. The financial information provided reflects a healthy organization and shows diversified funding. The application itself was not as professionally prepared as expected.

Culver City Playhouse

Panel Score: 43

Cash Grant Request	Recommended Cash Award
\$10,000	\$500

In-Kind Grant Request (Fee Waiver)
\$900

The panel noted that this is a new organization seeking to establish itself in Culver City and that this year's award would be a "seed" grant. Support material did not offer sufficient background information on the theatrical accomplishments of the creative team. The fact that this organization asked for a large percentage of their total project budget as a cash grant raised some concern. In addition, the panel was concerned with the projected \$37,000 deficit for the organization for its first year.

* * *

At the regularly scheduled meeting of the Cultural Affairs Commission on November 8, 2005, the award recommendations as outlined above were approved 4-0 (absent Susan Deen). An excerpt of the minutes from the November 8, 2005 CAC meeting is attached.

FISCAL ANALYSIS:

The total amount recommended for the 2006 Performing Arts Grant awards is \$32,000, leaving \$8,824 in reserve to be carried over into FY 2006-07. These funds come from the combination of Art Fund monies as allocated pursuant to Culver City's Municipal Code and a privately donated grant from Sony Pictures Entertainment.

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ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment 1 – 2006 Performing Arts Grant Applicants' Prior Year Funding History
- Attachment 2 – Sample Score Sheet
- Attachment 3 – Excerpt of the November 8, 2005 CAC Meeting
- Attachment 4 – 2006 Culver City Performing Arts Grant Applications

MOTION:

That the City Council:

1. Allocate funds for the 2006 Performing Arts Grant program as recommended by the Cultural Affairs Commission and as outlined above in the staff report;