

**MEETING DATE:** May 11, 2015

**AGENDA ITEM :** (1) Consideration of the Creation of the Position of Honorary City Poet Laureate; and (2) (If the Position of Honorary City Poet Laureate is Created) Appointment of a Person to Such Position.

**ATTACHMENTS**

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1. Information from Dr. Janet Hout	1 - 9

DATE: January 6, 2015

TO: Martin Cole  
Assistant City Manager  
Culver City, California

FROM: Dr. Janet Cameron Hoult  
Professor Emerita, CSULA  
Culver City, California

RE: Establishment of a procedure to appoint a Poet Laureate for Culver City in preparation for the 2017 Centennial

When Councilmember Jim Clarke, who is chairing the Centennial Committee, told me that the suggestion had been made to appoint me Poet Laureate for the Centennial and have me conduct a poetry contest, I said I would be delighted. When the Centennial Committee discussed it, they were absolutely correct in indicating that it is the responsibility of the Culver City City Council to make such an appointment, not the Centennial Committee.

At a subsequent City Council meeting, a request was made for more information about the position of Poet Laureate and what process cities use to make an appointment. I volunteered to assist and am herewith presenting a brief history of Poets Laureate and examples of cities in California with Poets Laureate as well as my suggestions for proceeding here in Culver City.

*FYI and (enjoyment..!) I have also attached an article about Lethbridge, our sister city in Canada, and their pursuit of a Poet Laureate....with n annual stipend of \$20,000...!*

When I checked out the mission of the Cultural Affairs Commission and the activities they have encouraged with great success – art and architecture are at the forefront – I found very few events focused on poetry. I think it would be wise for me to speak with the Commission which meets next Tuesday and see how we might be able to work together to encourage literary art in Culver City.

As mentioned in the attachment, the City Council could appoint me as the de facto Poet Laureate, since, for several years, I have been providing poetry at the City Council when requested for a special commendation or to raise awareness for a designated month or week as well as focusing on the issues facing our city. With that title I would have the city's blessing and the authority to officially begin poetry groups at the Senior Citizens Center and the Culver City Library. I will develop the curriculum for the poetry groups and handle the publicity by writing announcements, developing flyers and working with our local journalists. When the poetry groups are operational, I will begin the development of a plan for the Centennial poetry contests. As the first Poet Laureate, my responsibilities would

focus on bringing poetry to the citizens of Culver City and setting in place a procedure for selecting a Poet Laureate every two years. One who would be named in January 2017 at the start of our Culver City Centennial year.

## **A Poet Laureate for Culver City**

Before a Poet Laureate can be appointed for Culver City, some very important details need to be explained. First, the City Council and citizens of Culver City should be aware of the history of the post. Then, they need to be aware of the duties and responsibilities of a Poet Laureate and what that would entail for our city. A list of cities throughout California with Poets Laureate is included along with their population. The selection processes used by three of the cities, Albany, Emeryville and Los Gatos are provided in detail for comparison. You will note that they are very different and range from the simple to the complex. Finally, a plan to move ahead with the idea of focusing on the Centennial year 2017 is included.

### **History and Definition:**

A Poet Laureate (plural: Poets Laureate) is an honorary title, originating from the ancient Greeks' practice of crowning their artists and athletes with laurels. A Poet Laureate is officially appointed by a government or conferring institution and is often expected to compose poems for special events and occasions as well as advancing the knowledge and enjoyment of literary arts through public readings, education and community events. In the 1300s, two Italians were the first to be crowned Poets Laureate and in Henry VII of England's day, he crowned the Poet Laureate. Today more than a dozen national governments continue the Poet Laureate tradition. In the U.S., the Librarian of Congress identifies a poet he'd like to serve as Poet Laureate, confirms that the poet is willing and able to serve as Poet Laureate and then appoints the poet to the position. He often seeks suggestions from the Library's Poetry and Literature Center and other poets before he makes the final decision. There are other Poets Laureate in addition to those named by countries, states and cities such as the Children's Poet Laureate designated by the Poetry Foundation.

### **Procedures in California Cities:**

Many Poets Laureate are selected by a literary group in a given country, state or city. As you see above, the selection in the U.S. is done by an individual who asks for suggestions if he doesn't already have someone in mind.

The following list is of California cities which have appointed a Poet Laureate:

California Cities w/Poets Laureate	Population
Emeryville	10,080
Albany	18,539
Windsor	26,801
Benecia	26,997
Los Gatos	29,413

West Hollywood	34,399
<b>Culver City</b>	<b>38,883</b>
Dublin	46,036
Brentwood	51,481
Cupertino	58,302
Davis	65,662
San Ramon	72,148
Alameda	73,812
Salinas	150,441
Oakland	390,724
Sacramento	466,388
Fresno	494,665
San Francisco	805,235
Los Angeles	3,792,621

The first two on the list, Albany and Emeryville, are smaller in size than Culver City, but have very different procedures. Emeryville has a much simpler procedure while Albany's is more complex. Los Gatos is closer in size to Culver City, and differs somewhat from the other two. A comparison of the procedures of the three cities can give us some ideas for what procedure we may want to establish here in Culver City (highlighted in green in anticipation of the appointment of a Poet Laureate)....

## **Emeryville, California**

In **Emeryville** the Poet Laureate serves as the City's literary ambassador during a two-year term commencing mid-year.

The request for proposals includes the following criteria:

- The selected poet lives or works in Emeryville, and be at least 18 years of age.
- The selected poet has demonstrated a commitment to poetry through prior publication and submission of a body of work of no less than twenty poems, and/or a performance record such as spoken word, poetry slams, film, new media or other performance-related venues.
- The selected poet embraces a willingness to engage the community in a discourse about poetry, to present his or her work to the public and Emeryville K-12 students.
- The selected poet is willing to allow selected poems to be published on the City website, to be duplicated as posters for distribution at events or in the schools, to be framed for installation in City Hall, and possibly for use in visual art installations.

The duties of the **Emeryville** Poet Laureate include:

- Represent the City of Emeryville and the poetic arts through participation in poetry events and interviews.

- Present poetry at no more than four events per year. These events may vary from year-to-year, but could include readings at scheduled City events and in the schools.
- Accept invitations, as schedule permits, to present his/her poetry at community events or with community groups, in interviews with the media, and to submit works for publication on the City website and other outreach vehicles.
- Act as an advocate and resource for poetry and literary events in Emeryville

## **Albany, California**

In **Albany**, the honorary position of Poet Laureate is given to a writer who uses poetry to express and celebrate a spirit of community throughout the year and to foster a love of poetry and literature among citizens young and old. Published poets who live or work in **Albany** are eligible to apply.

The Poet Laureate writes poems throughout the year and participates in community events, education, and readings. Each year the **Albany** Poet Laureate will:

1. Publicly present to the City at least 4 new poems for public occasions (example: Arbor Day Memorial Day Services, July 4th, Dinner with Albany)
2. Hold at least one free public youth poetry event, which may include workshops during or after school, and youth poetry slams or readings.
3. Offer a public reading of your work and that of other poets at the library or other designated venue.
4. Participate in other activities that promote poetry throughout the community.

**Length of Appointment:** The appointment of Poet Laureate is for 1 year with an option for renewal.

**Payment:** The position of the City of **Albany** Poet Laureate is entirely honorary.

**Qualifications:** The person appointed as a Poet Laureate must:

- have lived or worked in **Albany** for at least 6 months prior to the application deadline date (“work” means that you work in **Albany** at least 20 hours a week)
- have presented poems publicly for at least 5 years, preferably published poems in circulation magazines and/or books. Online publications, public performances and readings may also be considered.
- have a record of active contribution as a poet, as acknowledged by peers and by community involvement in the form of teaching, judging, or performance

**To apply:** Submit 1 digital (via CD or email) and 5 hard-copy sets of the following materials:

- evidence that meets the above qualifications (photocopies of published works, statement of residence or employment, news clips, web printouts, etc.)
- a resume and contact information

- 2 personal or professional references (maximum 300 words each)
  - no more than 20 pages of selections from your work, published or unpublished
  - a personal statement not to exceed 500 words about why you are interested in the position and what activities and goals you want to pursue during your appointment
  - [optional] a video, recording, or YouTube or other link of you reciting your work
- Deliver your submission before Sunday, July 7, 2013 to:

Albany Poet Laureate Program  
 c/o Albany Arts Committee  
 1249 Marin Avenue Albany, CA 94706  
 Email digital files and links to: [albanyartcalendar@gmail.com](mailto:albanyartcalendar@gmail.com)

**Note:**

- The Arts Committee is not responsible for loss or damage. No packets will be returned.
- Failure to maintain residency or work location in Albany during the term of appointment may result in termination of the appointment by the City.
- The candidate selected will be required to sign a contract with the City. Due to the public nature of this position, the candidate must agree that any work submitted will meet certain criteria with regard to content.
- All works submitted during the Poet Laureate's term remain the property of the Poet, who grants the City a permanent license to archive and reproduce them.
- See the Poet Laureate website at <http://www.albanyca.org/index.aspx?page=725> for more information.

The Albany Poet Laureate Program is administered by the Albany Arts Committee.

## **Los Gatos, California**

**Los Gatos** appointed as its first Poet Laureate a person who served in a community volunteer position the first two years and helped to establish the procedure now used.

### **Purpose of the Poet Laureate in Los Gatos**

- To encourage the appreciation and advancement of the literary arts in Los Gatos
- To stimulate the cultural awareness of the community
- To introduce the youth of the community to the wonders and benefits of poetry as a part of history and culture

### **Advantages for the Town**

- Reflects the enlightened and educated community that is Los Gatos
- Enhances the Town's cultural credibility
- Potential source of fund raising

- Stimulates creative engagement in the community for old and young alike
- Minimal impact on Town budget (voluntary position; however, some expenses for supplies may be required)

### **Selection process**

Form a volunteer committee to select candidate to recommend to the Town Council, composed of a selection of the following:

- Member of Library Board
- Member of Arts and Cultural Commission
- An educator
- Member from Friends of the Library
- Member of Town Council
- Member from the Museums Board
- Member from the Community-at-large
- Professional poets
- Boards and/or directors of literary organizations
- Town staff

### **Criteria for appointment**

- Must be resident of Los Gatos
- Evidence of body of work, published or unpublished
- Over 18 years of age
- Must agree to fulfill duties of poet laureate for length of term
- Public speaking ability
- Two personal or professional references

Procedures for selection of a Poet Laureate for Culver City can follow similar lines as the three above. In order to begin the process, it will b

### **Suggested Procedure for Establishing the Poet Laureate Position in Culver City**

1. The Culver City City Council could appoint me as the de facto Poet Laureate for two years - 2015-2016. In 2017, at the start of the Centennial year, another Poet Laureate could be appointed.
2. For several years, I have been providing poetry at the City Council when requested for special commendations or to raise awareness for a designated month or week as well as focusing on issues facing our city.
3. The author of two award winning poetry books, my second book, WHERE DID THE SUN GO? Myths and Legends of Solar Eclipses around the World Told with Poetry and Puppetry, was the focus of a presentation and puppet show for children I gave for the Friends of the Culver City Library.
4. With the title of Poet Laureate, I would have the city's blessing and the authority to officially begin poetry groups at the Senior Citizens Center and the Culver City Library as well as working with other groups in the

community to further interest and knowledge of poetry and begin to establish the process for the future selection of Poets Laureate.

5. As an Emeritus Professor of Language Education from the CSULA Charter College of Education, I have an extensive background in curriculum development and look forward to designing the programs for the poetry groups.
6. Publicity, including writing announcements, developing flyers and working with our local journalists, will be part of the responsibilities. However, as a community volunteer with no stipend, some funds would be welcome to cover printing expenses.
7. When the poetry groups are operational, the development of a plan for the Centennial poetry contests will begin.
8. As the poetry groups develop their skills, they will be encouraged to share their work at poetry readings within Culver City and to submit their poetry for the Centennial Poetry Contest.
9. I will work with the Centennial Committee to determine for which events poetry would be appropriate and work with the poetry groups to provide a series of Centennial oriented poems
10. As the first Poet Laureate, my responsibilities would focus on bringing poetry to the citizens of Culver City and setting in place a procedure for selecting a Poet Laureate who would be named in January 2017 at the start of our Culver City Centennial year.
11. I would continue to work with the newly appointed Poet Laureate - 2017-2019 - as she/he provides the leadership for the poetry to be presented during the Centennial year.
12. The Culver City Cultural Affairs Commission is the logical group to become involved in developing the procedure to be used in appointing future Poets Laureate. I plan to speak with them to see how we can work together in setting the procedure in motion.

# Should city have a poet laureate?

By Mabell, Dave on October 18, 2014.

Lethbridge Herald

Both Calgary and Edmonton have one, and it's time Lethbridge named a "poet laureate" as well. That's the suggestion from a university dean, and it's got city council members interested.

Professor Edward Jurkowski, dean of fine arts at the University of Lethbridge, outlined the idea in a presentation to council. As a "literary ambassador" for the city, the writer would be a part-time city representative and educator while also writing poems suitable for special events like the university's 50th birthday.

The university would cover half of the proposed \$20,000 annual budget, he said, and would provide office space along with a one-month residency at the U of L "writers cottage" in Blairmore. But the woman or man selected should be deemed a city employee, he said.

In Calgary, pointed out Mayor Chris Spearman, private-sector sponsors have picked up the tab for that city's official poet. What council should investigate, said Councillor Jeff Carlson, is how other cities administratively handle such a unique position.

Carlson suggested the Allied Arts Council should be asked if it's interested in taking on the proposal.

Council agreed to receive the submission as information, but to remain open to further ideas on how the initiative could proceed.