

REGULAR MEETING OF THE
CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

September 20, 2022
7:00 P.M.

Call to Order & Roll Call

Chair Fleischer called the regular meeting of the Cultural Affairs Commission to order at 7:00 P.M. in Council Chambers at City Hall.

Present: Chair Tania Fleischer
Vice Chair Brenda Williams
Commissioner Ehsaan Mesghali
Commissioner Leora O'Carroll
Commissioner Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin

Staff: Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager
Lee Lawlor, Performing Arts Associate

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Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Fleischer led the Pledge of Allegiance.

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Public Comment - Items NOT On the Agenda

Chair Fleischer invited public comment.

The following member of the public addressed the Commission:

Angus MacDonald, Monarch Theatre, provided background on the theatre; expressed concern with rates charged for non-profits to use the Ivy Substation theatre administered by The Actors' Gang; asserted that the rates needed to be reduced; discussed the need for a schedule of when the theatre is going to be

dark during the next six months; the need for an outdoor venue with sound reinforcement; the need for a raised stage or a raised audience area; the Drollinger Family Stage at Loyola Marymount; providing a dedicated stage at the Wende's new community cultural center: insurance costs; and Assembly Bill (AB) 5.

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Receipt of Correspondence

Lee Lawlor, Performing Arts Associate, reported that no correspondence had been received.

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Consent Calendar Items

Item C-1

CAC - Approval of Minutes for the Regular Meeting of August 16, 2022

Vice Chair Williams noted a typographical error in the minutes which staff agreed to correct.

MOVED BY COMMISSIONER O'CARROLL, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER MESGHALI AND UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED, THAT THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION APPROVE MINUTES FOR THE REGULAR MEETING OF AUGUST 16, 2022 AS CORRECTED.

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Order of the Agenda

No changes were made.

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Action Items

Item A-1

CAC – 1) Consideration of a Concept by Charles Gaines for a Permanent Art Installation at Washington and National Blvds.; and, 2) Make a Recommendation to the City Council

Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager, provided a summary of the material of record.

Emily Womack, Dyson & Womack, discussed the process and length of the project; she provided background on the artist; and she introduced and provided background on members of the project team.

Merideth Hildebrandt, Charles Gaines Studio, provided background on the work of Charles Gaines; discussed the proposed work, *A Frame for a Tree*; collaboration with arborists, a landscape architecture firm, and structural engineers; design of the metal structure; lighting; and public interaction.

Charles Gaines discussed his intent to create an iconic, identifying feature for the city; establishing a conversation between organic forms and intellectual cognitive structures; domination of the site by the tree; and he expressed appreciation for being selected.

Chair Fleischer invited public comment.

Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager, indicated that no requests to speak on the item had been received.

Discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding an informal meeting between Dyson & Womack, Commissioner Mesghali, and former Commissioner Pali; consideration of the item by the Public Art Subcommittee in June; support for the artist and for the project; concerns regarding the reaction of the living tree to the grid; the modular structure; changing and moving branches; the importance of proper maintenance; the need to aggressively prune the tree before installation; the simplistic appearance of the art as deceiving; technical issues; executing the project elegantly; the tree as a gateway; the grid; and confidence

that the tree would be taken care of with an arborist involved in the process.

Responding to inquiry, Peter Tolkin, TOLO Architecture, clarified the distance from the tree to the grid; discussed the color of the grid; mediation between the structure and the tree; tree trimming over time; adjustments to the grid; and development of a maintenance strategy to ensure that the tree does not take over the grid.

Discussion ensued between project representatives, staff, and Commissioners regarding natural deterrents to people climbing the tree; activation of the area around the artwork; lighting; detailing; development of the project; preserving the vision of the artist; ensuring that the roots of the tree are not affected; preliminary discussions with the structural engineer; creation of a community gathering space; the structure; the importance of maintaining the connection points; the importance of the details in the minimalist artwork; having a light installation footprint; foot traffic; distance to the Metro rail; concern with invasive ficus roots; the liquefaction recommendation; the soil report; taking the creatures who live in the tree into consideration when formulating a lighting plan; Platform Park; the fence; the tree as being the artwork; trimming the tree so that the grid is visible; maintaining the structural integrity of the tree; the border; the structure as a frame for the tree; placement; integration with the park; the conceptual schematic phase; Commission input; the city streetlight; the busy intersection; the work of the lighting designer; and ensuring that the artwork is successful for the city.

MOVED BY VICE CHAIR WILLIAMS, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER O'CARROLL AND UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED THAT THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION: RECOMMEND THAT THE CITY COUNCIL APPROVE AN ART CONCEPT BY CHARLES GAINES TITLED, A FRAME FOR A TREE, AUTHORIZE A BUDGET AMENDMENT, AND THE PREPARATION AND EXECUTION OF NECESSARY DOCUMENTS TO COMMENCE PHASE 2 OF THE PROJECT.

Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager, indicated that the item would be up for consideration by the City Council on October 24, 2022.

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Item A-2

**CAC – Overview of Changes to Cultural Affairs as Approved
by the City Council on September 12, 2022**

Jesse Mays, Assistant City Manager, discussed recent changes to the organization of Cultural Affairs; the move from the Administrative Services Department to the City Manager's Office; the move of the Economic Development Division from Community Development to the City Manager's Office; the decision to create the Office of Economic and Cultural Development by combining Economic Development and Cultural Affairs; benefits of shared access to resources; the new Special Events Coordinator position being created; the nexus between Economic Development and Cultural Affairs; broader restructuring of the Community Development Department; work to better reflect the needs of the city; the request for additional funding to increase salary level and responsibility for one of the full time positions; elevation of the Public Art Coordinator position to a Management Analyst position; adding capacity and flexibility; preparation for succession planning; significant attrition associated with COVID and the "Great Resignation"; changes being made across the City; flexibility afforded with a Management Analyst classification; and requirements and desired qualifications in advertising to fill the position.

Commissioner O'Carroll read a letter she had drafted regarding the elimination of the Public Art Coordinator position; she discussed the powers and duties of the Cultural Affairs Commission; the need for the Cultural Affairs Commission to be included in the reorganization process; the general lack of understanding of what goes on in Cultural Affairs; the effect of looking like the City has very little understanding of the arts; concern with combining Cultural Affairs with the Economic Development Division; the fact that most of the work of Cultural Affairs is not economically driven; the priceless benefit to the enrichment of the community; concern with diminishing Cultural Affairs over time; concern that the Commission was bypassed; upholding the mission of Cultural Affairs; concern that the appropriate channels were not followed; the inability of Commissioners to fulfill their duties; and she

voiced objection that the Commission and its powers were disregarded in the case of the reorganization.

Additional discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding concern with sidetracking the main goal and purpose of the Commission; concern with overlooking parts of the community; history with the studios and cultural institutions in the city; cultural resources in the city; concern with stretching the division thin; concern with requiring the Commission to support both Cultural and Economic Affairs in the City; and acknowledgement of overlap between Cultural Affairs and Economic Development but concern with muddying the waters and diluting the focus.

Further discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding the staff report; the balance between appealing to politicians by indicating that Cultural Affairs are part of the economic health of the city while fulfilling the mission to bridge communities through beauty and art; the change from the Public Art Coordinator position to a Management Analyst position; concern with a repeat of when the Cultural Affairs Coordinator was transferred to the Transportation Department and worked two jobs; the opportunity lost by not involving Commissioners in the process; the importance of the work done by the Cultural Affairs Division and Commissioners; and reasoning behind the agenda item.

Discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding sending a letter to the City Council to let them know that the Commission expects Cultural Affairs to be maintained and grown; making it clear to the City Council what the Commission actually does; concern that the matter was passed by the City Council at midnight without Commission consideration; concern that public art will be pushed aside; and support for raises for staff.

Additional discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding recruiting for the Management Analyst job; job duties of the new position; maintaining flexibility; accomplishing work on public art and performing arts as well as administrative functions; concern with pinning the position down to public art; seeing who applies; looking at the office as a whole; filling in the gaps as appropriate

to what the department needs; the need for three full time positions; the full time public art position that is being reclassified and would be shared; staff development of expertise where necessary; assistance provided by consultants and the Commission; confidence that staff can get the job done; concern with the lack of consultation or notice to the Commission; City Manager purview; powers and duties of the Commission; implementation of the Public Art Program; the need to have a say in staffing; consistency of how the City operates with other Boards and Commissions; clarification that Commissions are not involved with staffing and organizational decisions in the City; specific skillsets necessary to perform the duties; concern with expecting people to learn on the job; including the need for expertise in public art in the position description; concern with adding to the workload of the Cultural Affairs Manager; concern that the word "analyst" is antithetical to the position; input from the Human Resources Director; Civil Service Commission consideration for different positions; hiring someone to fill the position expeditiously by using the flexible, high level Management Analyst position; the fact that Cultural Affairs typically does not have a Management Analyst; concern that the specialized nature of public art maintenance would be lost; concern with being able to attract the right person with that title; concern that the Management Analyst position will go to Economic Development; increased involvement of Economic Development staff in Cultural Affairs; opening up facilities for Performing Arts Grant recipients; and encouragement to communicate thoughts to the City Council.

Chair Fleischer noted the importance of having specialized staff in Cultural Affairs; expressed concern that cultural infrastructure would not grow; she discussed insufficient staffing; untapped revenue in tourism; the Historic Preservation Ordinance; and staffing levels in West Hollywood.

Further discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding concern that issues could become chronic; increased development in the city; the importance of maintaining public art properly; concern with having a Management Analyst focused on development; a suggestion to have the statement drafted by Commissioner O'Carroll

submitted to the City Council as it reflects the sentiments of the Commission; and concern that the Commission was not afforded any input until after the decision was made.

Commissioner O'Carroll summarized main points in her letter including concern that the powers and duties of the Commission were disregarded with the proposed reorganization; she asserted that ample notice was not given to the Commission to discuss the item beforehand; noted lack of comprehension of what is done in Cultural Affairs with the replacement of the Public Art Coordinator with a Management Analyst position; concern about Cultural Affairs being combined with Economic Development; exposure to risk of being diminished over time as there is no readily apparent economic benefit; and she objected to the way the process was managed.

Discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding emphasizing the need to fill the Management Analyst position with someone who has expertise in the Arts; what should be included in the letter to the City Council; protesting the lost position; and wording for the motion.

MOVED BY VICE CHAIR WILLIAMS, SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER MESGHALI AND UNANIMOUSLY CARRIED, THAT THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION: LET THE RECORD SHOW THAT IN THE CASE OF THE REORGANIZATION THAT WAS CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM A-4 ON SEPTEMBER 12, 2022, THE CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION OBJECTS TO THE FACT THAT ITS POWERS WERE DISREGARDED AND BYPASSED. WE REQUEST THAT THE CITY COUNCIL CONSIDER THE POSITION OF THE COMMISSION AS REFLECTED IN THE ATTACHED LETTER.

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Public Comment - Items Not On the Agenda (Continued)

Chair Fleischer invited public comment.

Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager, indicated that there was no further Public Comment for Items Not on the Agenda.

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Items from Members/Staff

Christine Byers, Cultural Affairs Manager, reported that Artist Laureate applications for the 2023 appointment were due on October 10, 2022; discussed outreach; the robust response for Performing Arts Grant Program applications; the process to repair *The Lion's Fountain*; adjustments to filming policy in response to the damage done to *The Lion's Fountain* earlier this year; and the upcoming meeting of the Public Art Subcommittee.

Lee Lawlor, Performing Arts Associate, announced an upcoming performance at The Culver Steps from first-time Performing Arts Grant Program recipient, Emersion Music.

Commissioner Wisnosky Stehlin reported attending the State of the City event at Culver City Middle School, and she discussed the benefits of joint City Council/Commission meetings.

Discussion ensued between staff and Commissioners regarding comments from former Assistant City Manager Serena Wright Black regarding the nuanced, specialized work of Cultural Affairs; perception; communication; and staff agreement to look into a joint meeting between the Commission and the City Council.

Commissioner O'Carroll reported attending the August 17 Culver City Arts Foundation Board meeting; discussed upcoming Foundation events; resiliency planning; visiting the Foundation booth at Fiesta La Ballona; and she expressed admiration for the many accomplishments of the Foundation.

Vice Chair Williams reported attending Fiesta La Ballona.

Chair Fleischer asked that the Cultural Affairs Manager work with the Assistant City Manager to emphasize the importance of hiring a person with expertise in the arts; discussed the 2023 Performing Arts Grant Program Subcommittee meeting; applications received; and she expressed excitement at seeing future applications for the Artist Laureate Program.

Adjournment

There being no further business, at 9:36 P.M., the Cultural Affairs Commission adjourned to a meeting to be held at 7:00 P.M. on Tuesday, October 18, 2022.

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SECRETARY of the Cultural Affairs Commission

APPROVED _____

TANIA FLEISCHER

CHAIR of the Culver City Cultural Affairs Commission
Culver City, California

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that, on the date below written, these minutes were filed in the Office of the City Clerk, Culver City, California and constitute the Official Minutes of said meeting.

Jeremy Bocchino
CITY CLERK

Date