

Staff: Holli Bushnell, Office Assistant
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Minutes

Parks, Arts & Culture Committee Meeting

Wednesday, November 29, 2023, 5:00pm

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON AT 645 PINE ST, FRONT CONFERENCE ROOM, AND VIA ZOOM

Attendance:

Committee Members: Chair Joe Magee, Councilor Ali Dieng, Councilor Mark Barlow

City Staff: Holli Bushnell - BPRW, Mary Danko - FFL, Zach Williamson – BCA, Cindi Wight – BPRW, Doreen Kraft - BCA

Public Present: Jonathan Chapple-Sokol – President, Friends of FFL

Meeting called to order at 5:01 pm by Chair Joe Magee

Approval of Agenda

Ali Dieng moved to approve the agenda, Mark Barlow seconded, all were in favor.

Approval of Draft Minutes from 10/25/2023

Barlow moved to approve the minutes, Dieng seconded, all were in favor

Public Forum

Public forum was opened at 5:02pm. Jonathan Chapple-Sokol asked why the word “literacy” isn’t in the committee’s name. Chapple-Sokol pointed out that PACC oversees what goes on at the library and literacy is the library’s primary focus. The library is the city’s largest indoor park, and there is plenty of culture there, but literacy is the main purpose of the library. Public forum was closed at 5:04pm

Cemetery Operations Report –

Holli Bushnell, office assistant for the city cemeteries, provided a power point presentation detailing the history, staffing, budget, green and equity practices, volunteer initiatives, and future plans for the cemeteries department. The report also pointed out the differences between Burlington’s public city cemeteries and privately owned cemeteries in the area. BPRW director Cindi Wight reported the budget information to the committee as the finances are outside of Bushnell’s purview. Wight was also able to speak to future initiatives such as new section development and work with the Islamic Society while Bushnell shared her dreams for a future alkaline hydrolysis and human composting facility in Burlington.

Barlow asked if the cemetery staff is staff isolated to work on those grounds or if other members of BPRW assist in cemetery upkeep. Bushnell and Wight confirmed that the staff is isolated to cemetery as roughly half the work grounds staff does is specialized (grave digging, stone maintenance). That said,

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with Steve Bachand taking over the Grounds and Cemetery Manager position the cemetery has been able to request assistance from other parts of BPRW with greater ease than previously. For example, the was understaffed leading up to Memorial Day, and some members of the grounds crew came over after their regular work day to mow and prep the cemeteries in advance of the holiday. Additionally, staff does borrow equipment from other parts of the department. The fleet is available to help as it is for the rest of the department, but the cemetery dose use a lot of our own equipment.

Magee was laudatory of the collaborative work between Dan Cahill's conservation team and cemeteries as part of their green efforts. Dieng appreciated the thorough, detailed information provided by Bushnell and Wight.

Fletcher Free Library MOU –

Jonathan Chapple-Sokol, president of Friends of FFL, explained that 5 years ago the Friends entered into an MOU with the library. This MOU allowed the Friends to become the primary fiscal agent to raise funds for FFL. The Friends historically were just civic organization, occasionally putting on programs but mostly just raising funds. With the MOU they became a cross between a foundation and a friends group – and became the primary recipient of non-municipal funds for Library (the funds raised during the annual appeal). Mary Danko added that donations can be anonymous to Friends with MOU in place and can have as many or as few strings as the donor wants. This is something FFL cannot do on its own.

From the MOU put in place in 2018, the Friends knew that the Library was be interested in engaging in a capital campaign within the 5 years. Unfortunately, like all of us, no one saw Covid coming, and a capital campaign was never able to be launched during the existing MOU. That MOU expired in October of 2023. Chapple-Sokol is at PACC to make the simple request for the committee to consider an extension to the existing MOU for 10 more years. And while that is his primary purpose for attending the meeting, Chapple-Sokol did want to provide information on the next steps for FFL and the Friends.

The library is planning to engage in a capital campaign, and that will execute an addendum to the MOU to define responsibilities. Using the BCA foundation language re-written for the Friends of Fletcher Free Library, the fund will be received by friends (note: this has not yet been run by the city attorneys, but the language is familiar/similar to existing MOUs). The Friends have also engaged an attorney, and they intend to work out the details together with city attorneys. The goal is to formalize the relationship for capital campaign. The Friends recently received a substantial bequest and the agreement between city and friends was used to manage the bequest. That said, the friends and FFL may want to create language in an addendum that becomes a little more pro-forma than case by case which is currently the situation. For example, if funds or a bequest are willed to FFL, there needs to be greater procedure. The first step in making sure everything is correctly organized is to update current the MOU.

Danko shared that, when she took over as director for FFL, the Friends managed around \$25,000 a year. Right now they are managing around \$250,000. The Friends act as a fiscal agent because they're a

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501c3. They have excellent accounting and donor systems. They have to make sure everything they do is in support of library because that's what their 501c3 requires of them. FFL is looking for PACC's support at full City Council for the MOU extension.

The committee had no questions. Barlow moved to approve the request for PACC to support the MOU extension, Dieng seconded.

Magee asked for confirmation as to whether the extension is for 10 years extension or if it's adding 5 years to the initial MOU. Chappel-Sokol confirmed it is for 10 additional years. Barlow requested that the language of the MOU make it clear that the extension is for 10 years when it goes to full council. Chappel-Sokol confirmed that the ambiguous language will be updated before the item goes before the full council.

All were in favor of providing PACC support for the FFL/Friends of FFL MOU at the full council meeting.

Highlight Update -

Zach Williamson shared that, as of this meeting, Highlight is about a month away. BCA will be making a big announcement at Foam tomorrow, 12/1, sharing the full line up for the event. Williamson feels it's going to be another amazing year for Highlight. He doesn't even mind that some people still call it first night.

The Bright Idea Project is what makes Highlight unique – this year ideas generated include a Taylor Swift dance party, Futurama dance party, and a number of other events that embrace community, presenting appropriate entertainment for BTV on NYE. Tickets have been on sale for the month of November for \$12, and will go up to \$15 in December. BCA has already sold over 380 tickets which is more than usual. The tickets tend to sell steadily through December and then hundreds of tickets are usually sold a day at the end of the month. BCA estimates approximately 3500 tickets will be sold, but BCA and other organizations will also give a bunch away. BCA is thrilled to be working with the Unitarian Universalist Church, Vermont Comedy Club, and Echo where they will feature full days of programming. Echo won't be available next year, 2024, due to renovations. Events will also be taking place in Waterfront Park, at Skinny Pancake and Foam Brewers, and all around the downtown and waterfront areas.

Dieng asked how fundraising is going. Williamson shared that they are a little bit below where they'd like to be from previous years, roughly \$110,000. That said, BCA always sets their goal lower for ticket sales and then gets a pleasant surprise from day and week of sales. Williamson is confident that they'll make up the difference through ticket fundraising. That said, the event did lose some support due to economic issues.

Dieng asked about performer contracts and if there is a plan for inclement weather. Williamson shared that contracts for performers were sent out in September and October. Performers have deposited checks to hold the date and have been provided funds they need to create their pieces. In terms of

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weather issues, everyone gets paid regardless of weather issues. BCA is using the same stage package as last three years at Waterfront Park, which is the biggest gamble in terms of the weather. Cirque du Fuego is creating a giant champ to burn in effigy and BCA is working with the Fluffy Bus artists who previously exhibited at Burning Man.

Magee shared that he is excited for Big Gay New Year.

Doreen Kraft concluded by sharing that, in terms of fundraising, they still have a number of requests out to individual donors and will be in contact with them again this week. It is very common to hear from 2 to 3 donors this week. Kraft is confident that the funding gap will be closed soon.

Solar Eclipse Update –

Williamson shared that the Solar Eclipse on 4/8/2024 is another tricky weather situation when compared to Highlight. He was able to attend a conference in Montpelier where he was able to hear a number of speakers including the eclipse coordinator from Casper, WY, and get a number of great tips and information from what the experience cities had with the eclipse in 2017. Following this meeting, Williamson met with VT department of tourism, ski Vermont, echo, and others to coordinate and share info. It was a good connection to the larger state initiative concerning the eclipse. Williamson continued by sharing that he feels this is an amazing project to work on and a great example of a successful interdepartmental, if not full city effort.

Williamson continued by sharing that BCA has been looking at ways to educate and communicate to large group of people who've probably never been to BTV before. They are starting to document different teams to coordinate info, and there is a fundraising element to this project as well. BCA is still hoping to raise more funds. Presently, BCA has received \$20,000 from Northfield savings bank and is working with hotels to secure additional funding through them. As they did not raise as much as they hoped, that does diminish performance aspects of the event. Instead, BCA will act as a centralizing agency for events run by private organizations. BCA is actively encouraging businesses to elevate what they're doing the whole 4-day period surrounding the eclipse. BCA will be doing less of their own programming and trying to do more to broadcast what everyone else is doing. BCA will be providing merchandise - likely engaging an RFP for a national merchandising company to be on the ground selling products. BCA also wants to work with local artisans for some merchandise. They are not trying to leave out locals, but feel they will need national brand assistance for simplicity.

Barlow congratulated Williamson on the progress he's made. Magee asked if there is a precedent to reach out to federal government for funds. Williamson shared that BCA has been looking at the RRC interdepartmental team as a model for eclipse work. He also noted that there will be a new mayor who will only have been mayor for a week when the eclipse takes place. He has been working to mitigate transition a week after new mayor assumes job.

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Kraft shared that BCA did look into potential federal funds, and noted that so far they haven't funded any of the states in the path of totality. It is the state offices that do the funding for this sort of thing. As is typical in VT, there's never enough funding – not even the department of tourism has a significant budget and there are no funds for municipalities. Kraft feels that the public safety aspect might find funding in the state budget or in the form of a special allocation from governor. Either would be helpful and appropriate. Magee felt that these options might be worth exploring or at least something to think about over next month.

Dieng appreciated the collaboration BCA is doing with local businesses and the idea of making the City the one stop to get eclipse info. He also noted that Williamson did not mention any events taking place in the NNE or other parts of city. Dieng also suggested team look into bathrooms being supported by private organizations.

Williamson shared that the current thinking is to work with NPAs and community groups. Working with them, BCA will distribute solar eclipse kits to smaller sections of the community for them to do own events and gather in their own spaces. People can celebrate how they want to and stay out of the downtown area where visitors will likely gather. The main goal is to provide resources to community groups. BCA is also working with BPRW at Roosevelt Park and other spaces in south end (largely providing resources to groups in those areas). Bathrooms are still in the budget, but BCA has been encouraging businesses to help pay for them. While they are not a massive expense, most businesses aren't interested in handling the bathrooms and are looking to BCA to manage that. It would be great to get support for the bathrooms. BCA is stretching dollars as far as they can.

Dieng felt it would be imperative to explore bringing different religious leaders to speak about the eclipse too. He suggested a panel discussion about religious beliefs as part of education. Kraft asked Dieng if he could assist in bringing groups together that would be part of that panel. She wondered if there is there an existing gathering BCA could highlight or join that might already be holding this kind of discussion around the eclipse. Dieng suggested that Vermont Interfaith Action would be good place to start.

Kraft briefly mentioned requesting councilor funds and Dieng commented that he would not support the use of councilor funds for the eclipse.

Bathrooms at Waterfront -

Magee commented that an update on the waterfront bathrooms might be better suited along with the urban park ranger update in December.

Dieng stated that, whenever we talk about BPRW and Waterfront, mostly we hear about parks, recreation. This is bigger discussion than just our bathrooms. How many organization are there? Have there been any capital improvements? What are the new elements of the FRAME? Are any private

**CITY OF BURLINGTON
PARKS, ARTS & CULTURE COMMITTEE**

**Councilor Joe Magee, Chair, Ward 3
Councilor Ali Dieng, Ward 7
Councilor Mark Barlow, North District**

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businesses involved? What city departments exist at the waterfront? In reality, the Waterfront is its own entity. What are the issues, hopes, dreams, and subject to discuss.

Magee felt that it might be best to further discuss this topic in January considering the already heavy agenda for December, but it's definitely a discussion worth having. Staff and community alike have asked to add waterfront bathrooms issue to PACCs agenda and the Parks Commission can look at as well.

Wight shared that both Echo and the community Sailing Center are required to have public bathrooms as part of their leases. There are publically available restrooms on the waterfront year round through them while BPRWs bathrooms are seasonal. BPRW could contract out care of restroom but most organizations who do that work in the area are at capacity. She asked if Burlington Harbor Marina and the Sailing Center if they should be invited to the meeting. Magee shared that he was looking for more information from city concerns/responsibilities such as the urban reserve and FRAME, etc...

Dieng added that he would like to hear about the skate park, docks, bike path, and train/main street landing. He is looking for the bigger picture of the area. M

Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 6:34pm. The next meeting will be held 12/13 at 5pm at 645 Pine St in the front conference room. Items for the agenda include Urban Park Ranger Update, Rec Report, Solar Eclipse Update. Waterfront as larger topic of discussion for January.