



CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING
November 18, 2020
6:00pm
Savannah Cultural Arts Center
201 Montgomery Street

Present: *Commissioners:*

- Linda J. Evans, Chair
- Sharon Wanda Aikens
- Curt Bryant
- Michael Chaney
- Barbara Essig
- Lu Fang
- Andrea Hall-Houston
- Antonio Hunter
- Patrick Kelsey
- Kristopher Monroe

Virtual:

- Eddie Edenfield
- Raymond Gaddy
- Antonio Hunter
- Patrick Kelsey
- Kareem McMichael
- Robin Sherman
- Anne Allen Westbrook

City Staff:

- Stuart Miller, Director, Cultural Resources
- CJ Bogle, Contract Coordinator, Cultural Resources
- Jacqué Fountain, Senior Administrative Assistant, Cultural Resources

Absent:

- Darren Bagley-Heath, Vice Chair
- Jan Kramer

Public Attending: None

I. Call to Order/Determination of Quorum

The meeting was called to order at 6:01 PM by Commission Chair Linda J. Evans and a quorum was determined.

II. Review and Approval of March Minutes

Commissioner Evans called for a vote to approve the September Cultural Affairs Commission (CAC) minutes. Minutes were approved with no objections.

III. Announcements

None

IV. Chair's Report

Commissioner Evans stated it has been difficult for the subcommittees to form a work plan or an agenda as the City has not formally released its new priorities. However, there is a general idea of the work each of the three subcommittees is tasked with. Commissioner Evans stated subcommittee chairs should gather their groups together between now and the end of the year to formulate a skeleton plan for work to begin in January. Commissioner Evans suggested that Commissioners consider adding one or two members of the community to the subcommittees (in an advisory capacity) to bring a different perspective and assist in assuring the work of the subcommittee. This type of addition may require a by-law change. Commissioner Evans stated the meeting dates, times, agendas, and frequencies of the subcommittees will be set by the chair.

Commissioner Evans stated city boards, commissions and authorities have specific qualifications for membership. Some positions require members to be residents of Chatham County, while other positions are more specific in requiring members to live in Savannah. Commissioner Evans stated at some point the residency requirement disappeared from the list of qualifications to become a member of the Cultural Affairs Commission. The Clerk of Council and the City Attorney were recently consulted on this residency issue. It was determined that members of the Commission do not have to be residents of Savannah as the Cultural Affairs Commission by-laws do not specifically state that members must be residents. Commissioner Evans stated the Cultural Affairs Commission is tasked with making funding recommendations and for awarding the Weave-A-Dream and Arts and Cultural Enrichment programs. The funding and grants are achieved with Savannah taxpayer dollars. Commissioner Evans stated that if the Commissioners agree that taxpayers should assert how their tax dollars are allocated for art and

culture programming, then it may be necessary to have the by-laws amended to include a residency requirement. Commissioner Evans stated when the time comes for the next review and revision of the by-laws, residency requirements could be a topic for discussion. Commissioner Evans stated that Commissioner Patrick Kelsey provided a list (from the City of Savannah website) of the requirements for all the City's commissions and boards, of which are all different. The requirements include residency, length of the term, and term limits. The Cultural Affairs Commission's requirements state "No city or county requirement, a three-year term, and no more than two consecutive terms."

Commissioner Kristopher Monroe stated that technically there is nothing to prevent an individual living out of state, such as South Carolina, from applying. Commissioner Evans agreed.

Commissioner Eddie Edenfield asked what documentation was being referenced. Commissioner Evans stated the documentation is found on the City's website in the section for boards, commissions, and authorities. Commissioner Kelsey stated that each commission will be labeled on that page and the requirements can be found by clicking on the individual commission.

Commissioner Curt Bryant asked when the by-laws will be coming due for revision. Commissioner Evans stated there is no specific date for by-law revision and that date should be decided upon by the Commission. Commissioner Bryant asked if there is a subcommittee to review the by-laws. Commissioner Evans stated there is not a subcommittee, but one would have to be established. Commissioner Evans stated that the by-laws must be reviewed with a fine-tooth comb and amendment recommendations must first be reviewed by the City Attorney.

Commissioner Edenfield asked if the by-law changes the Cultural Affairs Commission makes would have to be submitted to the City Council for final approval or if the Cultural Affairs Commission is self-governing. Commissioner Evans stated the by-law changes would have to be reviewed by the City Council to be approved and approval takes time.

V. 2020 Cultural and Arts Investment Program Discussion

- ***Savannah Jazz Festival (September 23rd – 27th)***
(Assigned Commissioners: Aikens, Bryant, Evans, Hall-Houston, Kramer)

Commissioner Evans stated the Savannah “Safe” Jazz Festival took place September 23rd – 27th. The concerts were all recorded and live-streamed. The sixteen performances are available on the savannahjazz.org website. Commissioner Evans stated the City Council approved live streaming of the event to audiences free of charge and to allow a select number of people to watch the performances live. A limited number of community members were eligible to attend in person and were chosen through a lottery system. Audiences of 50 people were allowed at Chips of the Sea in a socially distanced atmosphere. Due to live-streaming, it was expected that more than 500,000 people would view the performances virtually. Commissioner Evans opened the floor for feedback to the Commissioners who attended the event and for the Commissioners who may have viewed the event online.

Commissioner Lu Fang stated he watched a portion of the Jazz Festival online and he found it interesting that the videography highlighted the musicians up close which gives the viewer a much better vantage point than when in an audience sitting in the grass.

Commissioner Curt Bryant stated that through reviewing the Jazz Festival and other events, he has been particularly impressed with what people are doing during these events (through the pandemic) to make changes and adapt (sometimes on the spot) and pull off these events. Commissioner Bryant added that the effort and professionalism of these people are to be commended.

- ***Savannah Philharmonic’s Picnic in the Park (October 18th)***
(Assigned Commissioners: Edenfield, Fang, Saleem, Westbrook)

Commissioner Evans stated the Savannah Philharmonic’s Picnic in the Park “Halloween Masquerade” took place Saturday, October 18th from 5 – 6 pm at Trustees Garden by the Morris Center. The event was prerecorded by WTOC and the recording of the live stream broadcast is available on savannahphilharmonic.org. Commissioner Evans stated that in addition to the musical performances, the Savannah Philharmonic tried to make the event interactive by hosting an Instagram photo contest in which people could post pictures of themselves in a spooky costume. The only rule for the contest was that each person in the photo had to be

wearing a mask. Prizes for the contest included gift cards for Kroger, Enmarket, and Target. There was also a contest for the best musicians' costume where people could vote for the winner on Facebook. Commissioner Evans stated there were four different ways that audiences could view the performance; WTOC television, the Savannah Philharmonic's website, the Savannah Philharmonic's YouTube page, and through a socially distanced viewing party that was held at Plant Riverside on the new MLK Park lawn. Commissioner Evans opened the floor for feedback to the commissioners who attended the event and for the commissioners who may have viewed the event online.

Commissioner Barbara Essig stated she viewed the Savannah Philharmonic's Picnic in the Park online and was truly impressed with the quality of the concert and the costumes. There was a guest conductor. Drones were used to zoom in and out on the performance. Commissioner Essig stated it was very entertaining and she watched it all the way through.

Commissioner Fang stated that he was there as part of the performance. From his perspective, the Picnic in the Park was very well organized, and the new director is fantastic.

Commissioner Essig stated sometimes people look for traditions that organizations incorporate in their performances. Normally, the Picnic in the Park's tradition is for families to participate by decorating their picnic tables. This year families were encouraged to participate by showing pictures of their homes decorated for Halloween. Commissioner Essig stated she thought that was a clever way to still uphold the tradition of audience participation at Picnic in the Park.

Commissioner Antonio Hunter stated he viewed the Savannah Philharmonic's Picnic in the Park on WTOC and he enjoyed that he was able to watch it at home.

Commissioner Anne Allen Westbrook asked if commissioners could still go back and watch the different events from the year as commissioners are required to review six events. Commissioner Evans responded that although reviewing six events is a requirement for Commissioners according to the by-laws, the Commission decided earlier in the year that following the requirement would be impractical during the pandemic. Commissioner Evans stated the Commission voted to suspend the requirement for this year and for each Commissioner to just do their best to review what they could.

Commissioner Michael Chaney stated he found the links to view the Jazz Festival and Philharmonic online were difficult to navigate on the individual websites. He suggested passing that information on to the organizations. Commissioner Evans agreed that the organizations needed to be notified and informed to make the links for recorded events more apparent.

- ***Telfair Museum’s Family Free Weekend (November 13th – 15th)***
(Assigned Commissioners: Edenfield, Fang, Hunter, Kelsey, Monroe)

Commissioner Evans stated the Telfair Museum’s Family Free Weekend was held November 13 – 15th in person with controlled entry to the facility. Commissioner Evans opened the floor for feedback to the Commissioners who attended the event.

Commissioner Curt Bryant stated this was the first time that he did not attend the Family Free Weekend. Historically this event is tied with other exhibits or events that are occurring to encourage the parents to want to participate. Commissioner Bryant stated that he did not attend as he did not see that the event was tied to anything else and he also wanted to make sure to allow room for a family to attend (considering limited space due to the pandemic).

VI. Weave-A-Dream Program

Commissioner Evans stated she would relay the details of the Weave-A-Dream report in Commissioner Darren Bagley-Heath’s absence. Commissioner Evans stated money was allocated for the Weave-A-Dream project, but due to the uncertainty of the year, applications were not being received. Most of the projects that the smaller organizations present involve people gathering and meeting. The pandemic posed an obstacle for those projects and as such applications were not being submitted. Commissioner Evans stated that CJ Bogle, Contract Coordinator, put out a press release and made the push to encourage small organizations to apply for Weave-A-Dream funding. As a result, the Commission received several applications late in the year. Commissioner Evans stated the applications were reviewed and funds were awarded with the stipulation that projects are completed by the end of the year.

Commissioner Evans stated Park Place Outreach received funds for the Frances Lowery Wilson Memorial Garden and Education Program. “Fran” Wilson was a social worker at Park Place Outreach who had a talent for cooking, gardening, and nurturing the people around her. Since her

passing last year, the staff at Park Place decided to honor her memory through a project that will incorporate fiber arts, culinary arts, outdoor space beautification, and gardening. The project highlights all of Fran Wilson's qualities that everyone so adored. The youth who live at Park Place (on Henry Street) will be engaged in several aspects of the project as planners, creators, and exhibitors. The surrounding neighborhood will be improved, and the urban streetscape will be beautified as a result of the project. Commissioner Evans stated Weave-A-Dream projects must include one of two city priorities which are youth engagement or neighborhood revitalization and this project achieves both of those priorities. The total project cost is \$3650. Park Place Outreach requested \$1825. They were awarded \$900.

Commissioner Evans stated Whale Week (a returning project) received funds for local experts, artists, and educators to lead interactive projects and lesson plans teaching students about the North Atlantic Right Whales' unique connection to Georgia. The purpose is to encourage local pride and stewardship of the oceans. Each year this event coincides with the whale's migration to the coastal shores of Georgia to give birth to their offspring. There will be a week of events for all ages which will include storytelling, artmaking, music, films, press conferences, a presentation by the Georgia Conservancy, youth speakers, and more. The total project cost is \$8100. Whale Week requested \$4000. They were awarded \$4000.

Commissioner Evans stated Through It All (a new organization) received funds for the Arts in Civics project. It is a voter and civics program that encourages voting and civic engagement through art. Through It All is a volunteer-run organization that provides learning and tutoring opportunities for at-risk families who live in Section 8 housing. The Arts in Civics program will aim to encourage civic participation and voter registration through youth-created art and posters. The youth will use their artistic creativity to have their voices heard and connect with the adults in their communities. The project is non-partisan. The total project cost is \$15,180. Through It All requested \$3000. They were awarded \$1000.

Commissioner Evans stated the Starlandia Foundation (a returning organization) received funds for the Starland Fence Project. Sixteen local artists have been selected to paint individual murals on 6'x9' heavy-duty canvas that can be removed, rolled up, stored, and used repeatedly. The murals will initially be displayed on the fencing that surrounds the construction sites in the Starland District. Commissioner Evans stated the Starlandia Foundation and the Commission have discussed ideas for

other areas throughout the city that the murals could also be displayed after it is removed from the Starland District. The selected artist will receive a 6'x9' canvas, will receive \$100 towards their material, and will be paid a stipend. The total project cost is \$10,000. Starlandia Foundation requested \$5000. They were awarded \$5000.

Commissioner Evans stated Morningstar Arts received funds for Project SMART which stands for Studios Making Art and Reproduction Textiles. The project will include making art and reproducing textiles in a studio setting where members of the community will work with a collaborative group of local artists and educators at the Savannah African Art Museum. Morningstar Arts requested \$2000. They were awarded \$1000.

Commissioner Evans stated \$11,900 was disbursed among these five projects.

Commissioner Bryant asked if the submissions for Weave-A-Dream funding would occur on a rolling basis for the next calendar year. Commissioner Evans stated yes, they would. Commissioner Bryant asked when the Commission would convene to discuss the allotment of grants. Commissioner Evans stated that would be decided by the Weave-A-Dream team.

VII. Director's Report

Stuart Miller, Cultural Resources Director, stated the budget hearing for the 2021 proposed city budget would occur on November 19th and 20th. The 2021 proposed budget book can be found at www.savannahga.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20294/2021-Proposed-Budget-Book. Mr. Miller stated that in a very tough economical year the cultural contributions program is proposed as flat from 2020. In the City Manager's (Michael Brown) notes on the proposed budget Mr. Brown writes *Savannah residents are not getting the support they need from federal and state governments and our community cannot sustain reductions to social and cultural services at this time; That is why we have not made any cuts to community organizations and social service agencies supported by the city through the community partnership and cultural arts investment programs*. Mr. Miller stated during a tough economic year, Mr. Brown's sentiments are notable. Mr. Miller stated the proposed budget is subject to the approval of the city council, but it is good news for the cultural contributions program.

Mr. Miller stated there is still no official opening date for the Savannah Cultural Arts Center, but the team does have plans for the center upon

reopening. Mr. Miller stated that in the meantime the Culture Arts Center has been cranking up virtual programming.

Mr. Miller stated that the Growing Good Project was completed During the past week (November 9th). The project was funded by a grant through the Georgia Council for the Arts. Originally, the Growing Good Project was to be completed during the Spring, but due to the pandemic, the project was delayed. The project was also originally intended to be completed in the schools, but due to pandemic restrictions, it could not be completed in the school environment. Mr. Miller stated there were all sorts of obstacles that had to be overcome to accomplish the finalization of the Growing Good Project. The project became a virtual program in which Savannah Cultural Arts Center provided Growing Good supply kits to the schools to participate in the project. Mr. Miller described Growing Good as an ecology-based project which included a custom-made ceramic pot, mediums to decorate the pot, potting soil to fill the pot with, and basil seeds to plant in the soil. The project also discussed the importance of healthy eating and dental hygiene and included a dental art assignment and dental hygiene travel kit provided by Dentistry for Children. Mr. Miller stated 500 Growing Good supply kits were produced by the Cultural Arts Center for at risk youth in Title 1 schools. Mr. Miller stated the Growing Good supply kit components were arranged on a table at the back of the Ben Tucker Theater and could be viewed by council members after the meeting.

Mr. Miller stated that although the Cultural Arts Center is unable to hold in-person classes, we are finding ways to continue programming for the community.

Mr. Miller stated the council approved CIP funding for the Cultural Arts Center to install an internal antenna booster that will enable radio and cellular signals within the building. The antenna will be installed over the next six weeks. Funding was also approved for upgraded audiovisual and lighting grids for the Bent Tucker Theater and the Gallery. Installation should be completed by December 23rd.

Mr. Miller stated he wanted to thank the Commission members for their service and he is continually impressed with how the Commission elevates the state of the arts in Savannah. Mr. Miller stated he appreciates the work of the commission and he looks forward to working with the Commission members in 2021.

VIII. Contract Coordinator's Report

Mr. Bogle stated that the ACE recommendation letters were sent out on November 18, 2020.

IX. Elections

Commissioner Evans stated her term as Chair has ended and this would be her last meeting. Commissioner Bagley-Heath, Vice-Chair, has opted not to renew another three-year term leaving the position open for 2021. Commissioner Evans stated the call was put out for nominations for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Four people were nominated, of those individuals, two opted not to accept their nominations. The two final candidates were Patrick Kelsey and Eddie Edenfield. Commissioner Evans stated a vote for Chair would be cast, the individual with the highest number of votes would be elected Chair while the second-highest number of votes would elect the Vice-Chair.

Mr. Bogle advised the Commissioners that in order to cast a vote for Chair, they would circle the name of the candidate they were voting for.

Commissioner Robin Sherman stated he did not see any sort of presentation or documents from the candidates as to why each would like to be Chair or Vice-Chair, what each would do to improve the Commission, what each felt should be fixed or changed, and how much time each could devote to the Commission. Commissioner Sherman stated that because he is new to the Commission, he is not familiar with either candidate or their backgrounds, so it would be difficult for him to vote.

Commissioner Evans stated she understood Commissioner Sherman's sentiments and asked each candidate if they would like to give a statement to address their positions. Commissioners Kelsey and Edenfield agreed to make a statement.

Commissioner Kelsey stated it is his third year on the Commission. He completes a fair amount of advocacy work on the local state and federal levels each year. Commissioner Kelsey stated he is looking to serve as chair for a term, as he believes the purpose of the Commission has not been completely fulfilled. Commissioner Kelsey stated he would like to ensure that the artists, the individuals, and the organizations are better represented as a whole. He would also like to see that the by-laws as structured are fulfilled to their potential.

Commissioner Edenfield stated he was surprised to be nominated and would be very interested in the Vice-Chair position. Commissioner Edenfield stated

Commissioner Kelsey's dedication and commitment have enabled him to give more time and effort to the Commission than he was able to during 2020. He stated that either the Chair or Vice-Chair position would present an opportunity for servant leadership and serving the community. Commissioner Edenfield stated that serving on the Commission over the past two years has been a great honor and he looks forward to the work of the board.

Commissioner Evans thanked both Commissioner Kelsey and Commissioner Edenfield for their statements and announced the election would begin.

Jacqué Fountain, Senior Administrative Assistant, collected the voting ballots from each Commissioner. Ms. Fountain tallied the votes and Mr. Bogle confirmed the vote tally.

X. General Discussion

Commissioner Evans stated the work that the Commissioners will be doing in 2021 is very important. The Mayor and Council depend on the Commission to sift through all of the funding proposals and to make recommendations. The Commission must remember that the funding is not considered a donation, but rather the city is making an investment and (like any investment) a return is expected. The Commission must insist that the organizations articulate the return on investment. Commissioner Evans stated after the investment is made the Commission is tasked with follow-up, oversight and adjustment.

Commissioner Evans encourages each Commissioner to make deeper and more meaningful connections with small volunteer-run and emerging art organizations. The application process has been streamlined to make it less onerous. Commissioner Evans stated she foresees the day when the emphasis will be placed more on the Weave A Dream program over the ACE programs.

Commissioner Evans stated that new leadership is an opportunity for growth and change. She encourages the Commissioners to support the new leadership and to keep doing the work.

Commissioner Evans announced the election winners. Commissioner Kelsey was elected to the position of Chair and Commissioner Edenfield was elected to the position of Vice-Chair.

XI. Adjournment

Commissioner Evans adjourned the meeting at 7:34 PM.

**Next Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting
January 13th, 2021
6 PM**