

2/11/21 LMA

MINUTES
LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ARTS COMMITTEE MEETING
February 11, 2021 3:30pm
Zoom Meeting

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Amy Kaplan, Chair
Harris Falk
Dick Lowenstein
Wendy Batteau
Lisa Newman
Mark Friedman
Arline Gertzoff
Karen Kramer
Brandi Briggs

ALSO PRESENT:

Nancy Diamond, Westport Arts Advisory Committee Chair
Randa Trivisanno, Westport Public Arts Collection Committee Chair
Kathie Bennowitz, Westport Town Curator

Meeting was called to order at 3:33 PM, and in response to Agenda Item #1, Nancy Diamond, Chair of the Westport Arts Advisory Committee presented an overview of the committee's charge and responsibilities as well as a summary of the various initiatives WAAC has created or manages to further its mission. These include TEATalks(art and creativity talks presented to the public), the OtoCast App(tying together wayfinding and marketing with Westport's artistic heritage for tourists and residents alike), Let's Connect (periodically scheduled round tables with other local arts orgs to determine community needs and encourage collaboration) and most prominently, the management, safeguarding and exhibition of the Westport Public Arts Collection. Although over the past 4-5 years, WAAC and WestPAC have made incredible strides forward in professionalizing and modernizing the management of the Collection, funding from the town is minimal and most of WestPAC's funding needs are provided by an associated nonprofit organization, Friends of WestPAC. In FY20/21, Town of Westport appropriated \$30,000 to WAAC, which was a 96% increase from previous years. The increase was due to significant expenses incurred by the new Collection management systems as well as remediation, moving and storage of parts of the Collection due to the reconstruction of Coleytown Middle School. This higher appropriation is in place in the FY21-22 First Selectman's Proposed Budget and is anticipated to remain at that level moving forward. Friends of WestPAC will continue to provide significant financial resources to support WestPAC's operations. The LMA committee expressed some concern over proper climate-controlled storage of the Collection, including works on view in various locations, and other work not displayed publicly. It

was noted by all that the Collection is quite valuable and a monetary asset to the town, in addition to its value as a resource and repository of the town's creative legacy. The committee encouraged WAAC and WestPAC to consider the long term storage and exhibition needs for the Collection, and if an appropriation from the town budget is warranted in order to safeguard and/or to create public access to this most precious asset, to request such from the First Selectman and the Board of Finance. Such an expense should properly be part of town financial planning, and should appear on a list of forecasted capital expenses.

As WestPAC continues the work of cataloguing and evaluating the Collection, they are also working on new policies for acquisitions, specifically work representing BIPOC artists and subjects, as well as outdoor art that would enhance our public spaces. Creating a policy for review of such requests that streamlines the approval process through the various town departments and agencies is a goal of WAAC and WestPAC, and some suggestions were made about working with Parks and Rec and Planning and Zoning on ways to encourage more public art in town, on both public and private property. The LMA committee expressed support of these endeavors and a willingness to work with WAAC and WestPAC in furthering these goals. The committee then moved on to Agenda Item #2, a brief discussion of other areas of oversight. The Library and Earthplace have presented their appropriation requests to the Finance Board and are awaiting the final First Selectman's Proposed Budget for FY21-22. In short, the Library has requested funding equal to last years appropriation, with no increase. Despite the disruptions of Covid-19, they have been able to obtain government PPP loans and grants and to otherwise adjust staffing and programming to cover the loss of revenue in 20/21. Earthplace has similarly been severely impacted in their ability to raise revenues, and although they have also received PPP loans and grants, they are still facing a greater funding need this upcoming FY and have requested a budget increase of \$10,000, for a total of \$105,000. This committee will hear from the library and Earthplace in more detail at an upcoming meeting. The committee then discussed the Levitt Pavillion, which receives funding through the Parks and Rec department. This funding as well as other conditions of operation are governed by a Licensing Agreement between the Town and the Levitt. The committee is aware of some unresolved issues regarding the operations of the Levitt, well as an 2019 internal audit examining the Agreement. Several recommendations of the audit have not yet been implemented, and the committee expressed a desire to follow up with the recently empaneled Parks and Rec Commission Sub-Committee on the Levitt Pavillion to make sure that concerns of town residents are heard and addressed. While that Sub-Committee is charged with direct oversight of the Levitt Pavillion, the RTM LMA Committee does have an obligation to study the operations of the Levitt Pavillion, as they do in fact, request and receive town funds. This committee will continue to explore ways to urge the town and the Levitt to respond appropriately to issues and concerns raised by townspeople.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 5:35.

Minutes submitted by Amy Kaplan, Chair, RTM LMA on 2/18/2021