

3/15/21 LMA

**REPORT/MINUTES
LIBRARY, MUSEUM & ARTS COMMITTEE MEETING
March 15, 5:00pm
Electronic Meeting, Zoom ID: Meeting ID: 834 2616 3847**

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Amy Kaplan, Chair

Harris Falk

Dick Lowenstein

Brandi Briggs

Wendy Batteau

Lisa Newman

Mark Friedman

Arline Gertzoff

Absent:

Karen Kramer

Other RTM members present:

Sal Liccione

ALSO PRESENT:

Tony McDowell, Earthplace Executive Director

Agenda Item #1

At 5:05PM the Chair called the meeting to order. Mr. McDowell took the committee through a brief history of Earthplace and Town funding, as a means of illustrating the tremendous value that the town currently receives from Earthplace for a minimal investment. Currently, town funding makes up only about 4% of Earthplace revenues. In return the town receives nature and science programming for our Department of Education, an outdoor trail network, Harborwatch water-quality monitoring services, and high school internships. Town of Westport does not pay additional fees for many of those services, and Earthplace even funds after-school busing to their centers from our schools. Earthplace also operates daycare, afterschool and special needs programming along with a nature discovery center for all ages. The pandemic year impacted revenues severely in that all in-person programming was halted (including events, room rentals and field trips,) and then resumed on a limited and distanced basis, not allowing for sufficient numbers to gain sufficient income. Despite receiving PPP loans (later converted to grants) of approximately \$414,000, there was a need to use \$220,000 in capital reserves and they still anticipate a revenue shortfall of approximately \$36,000. Earthplace applied for and received another stimulus loan/grant from the federal government of \$393,000, included in the FY21 projections. Goals for the coming year include servicing more students and programming-learning from new hybrid and to-go capabilities (Nature in a Box) as well as getting more students and families back into the facilities as allowed. Camp reservations are up and preschool reservations are full. Schools should be back to full attendance by fall, and Earthplace

is hoping for the same. After partnering together on many initiatives, Sustainable Westport has changed its status from a Selectman's Advisory Committee to a partner organization within Earthplace's 501c3 non-profit. **Sustainable Westport as an individual entity does not receive town funds.** Mr McDowell explained this is a formalization of a working relationship that already existed, and will make it easier for Sustainable Westport to fundraise for their various initiatives as well as continue to work with Earthplace to engage community support. **As part of a 501c3 organization, Sustainable Westport (and Earthplace) must abide by regulatory limits on any lobbying for specific legislation or legislators.**

Mr McDowell then explained why Earthplace seeks a \$10,000 increase for FY21-22. This will be the first increase requested since 2013, and although Earthplace has operated and grown successfully, they have done so with a very lean budget that did not account for the long-term depreciation of their buildings and physical infrastructure. As a result, large maintenance projects have tended to be postponed indefinitely. At this point the building exterior has the greatest need, with roof, siding, gutter and other exterior repairs needed. The estimated cost for that project alone is \$28,000. Earthplace also plans to replace an existing porta-potty with two outdoor compostable toilets, an upgrade in keeping with their mission, but with an estimated \$60,000 cost. Earthplace will seek community contributions to help raise funds for that initiative. This committee has long been in agreement that Earthplace is a source of pride and a cultural center for Westport and provides many valuable programs for the community at a low cost to the Town.

Brandi Briggs made a motion to recommend to the full RTM approval of the requested Earthplace appropriation in the amount of \$105,000.

Harris Falk seconded. All Committee members present voted in favor, 8-0.

Lisa Newman made a motion to adjourn. Harris Falk seconded, all were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 5:43 PM.

Minutes submitted by Amy Kaplan, RTM LMA Chair 3/16/2021