



MEETING MINUTES
METUCHEN ARTS COUNCIL (MAC)
February 26, 2024 7:30pm
At the Metuchen Senior Center

Voting Members Present: Chair Mark Harris, Vice-Chair Meg Loftus Suchan, Secretary Deborah Kmetz, Carol Gaffney, Carolyn Hamming, Terry Kohl, Nunzio Moudatsos, Grace Shackney, John Sharp

Auxiliary/Guests/Liaisons Present: Joel Branch, Robert Diken, Lynne Mueller, Rick Perrine, Wendi Richards, Dylan Thurston

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Mark Harris called the meeting to order at 7:34 pm and acknowledged the Sunshine Law.

MINUTES: Secretary Deborah Kmetz asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. All voting members present at the previous meeting voted to approve.

CHAIR'S REPORT:

- Mark Harris read the following report:

- **Begin quote** -

I attended the Metuchen Commission Chair Training Workshop last night and had an opportunity to talk directly with Melissa Perilstein after. The main presentation included a series of slides which will be shared after tonight's meeting. We were told that they can also be shared with all of our voting members. The presentation was by Mayor Jonathan Busch, Melissa Perilstein, and Deborah Zupan. Here are the major points:

"The role of a Commission is to support the Borough with impactful community initiatives based on their individual missions." The Mayor talked about how disputes must not be played out in public.

We are to work through our Council liaison to insure collaboration and communication with the Borough. I discussed with Melissa about our dual contacts, Rick and Joel, and how we sometimes get confusing directions. She indicated that she would make sure they are working together.

Applications must be submitted for every event. No event is considered approved until we get confirmation. More on this is below.

They encourage commissions to partner with one another.

Private organizations are welcome to seek partnerships. We must keep legal considerations in mind and reach out to our liaison with questions.

We are all bound by the Borough Ethics Code. See <https://ecode360.com/14611972#14611972> for this document. There was discussion about members who miss too many meetings, but this is waiting for further research by the Borough.

Social media was a big topic. As we already knew, all web sites and social media will be rolled into the Borough platforms. Melissa now estimates this will happen by June, 2024. In the meantime, all of the on-line locations we have must be informational only and comments must

be disabled. All of our e-mails, text messages, and social media posts are subject to the Open Public Records Act (OPRA). Nothing should be deleted as Deborah Zupan can request searches if an OPRA request is made related to our work.

There was a discussion about the Open Public Meeting Act (OPMA). We are in compliance with all of that. They noted that all full Commission meetings must be conducted in person. Smaller groups, like our Executive Board Zoom meetings, can continue as they are.

All events must be submitted to Deborah Zupan, preferably 90 days in advance. We should not post events on social media until an event is approved by the Borough. Requests should come through our Council Liaison and might require a fee and insurance.

The discussion of budget is basically in line with what we do. They pointed out that Commissions cannot give grants, do fundraising, or accept in kind donations. There was some discussion about groups like FOMA as a good option for fundraising. I did discuss this with Melissa after the meeting and explained that our By-laws discuss "grants". I explained that we now understand the sensitivity of that term and will change the document to talk about "providing support to specific Metuchen programs offered by arts organizations". She is very happy with that language and is fine with the support to Mignolo we have planned. She did say that they can not have vendors on the Plaza selling things or requesting donations, including Mignolo itself. Vendors can be there for information only. I will send this information to Tobi.

Melissa and I also discussed Porch Fest after the meeting. She is discussing this with the Metuchen Police Department to determine if they have any specific concerns. She understands that the group planning this needs answers soon. She also told me that my e-mail to Rick yesterday was forwarded to her and Joel.

- **End quote** -

- **Discussion:** Joel Branch commented that he was glad for the seminar to put everyone on the same page. As he has told other commissions, we will work through any questions arising from the new forms. Rick Perrine said that the special events applications were introduced last summer and as we set our 2025 plans, we should submit forms as soon as we decide to consider events to sponsor. Meg Loftus requested clarification of the timing of the forms, to which Rick Perrine replied the sooner the better, 90 days is optimal, but exceptions may be made for events that come up. Rick further commented that the Borough will look at everyone's ideas for the year before approving any. Carolyn Hamming asked who is doing the actual approvals. Rick replied: Melissa Perilstein and her staff; the Police Chief; DPW; Rick for the Recreation Department. Carolyn asked how long approvals would take. Joel indicated they would act as soon as possible. Meg said hopefully we can ask for rush decisions. Mark said we can contact Melissa and let her know if we have any problems. Joel commented that this group does well and he will help us if we need timely responses. Robert Diken asked what factors they will consider in approving requests - whether or not they like the program suggested, or time factors? Will our programming be considered more or less valid than that of other organizations? Joel commented that they will consider both, as objectively as possible. The subject of a community events calendar was discussed and it was agreed that, while this would be very useful, many factors hinder its creation. Meg commented that she had brought the MAC calendar of events to the MDA to ask if there were any conflicts and was not told of any. Robert and Meg confirmed turning off comments on the social media posts they manage. Terry Kohl asked if MDA events would take priority over MAC events. Joel replied that they would be considered equally. Grace Shackney commented that it sounds like the permissions have to do with needing borough resources such as police, DPW, and use of the plaza, and she asked if forms would be needed for events at the schoolhouse or the library. Joel and Rick confirmed they are needed for all events, regardless of the need for borough resources. Terry expressed

concern about the borough rejecting an idea because they simply don't like it. Meg replied that we should keep having great ideas and we won't be rejected.

FINANCIAL BUSINESS:

- **Event Funding:** Mark Harris suggested that FOMA might cover Linda LaStella's request for money because FOMA had allotted money for two concerts on the plaza and MAC was subsequently limited to one such concert, freeing up some funds. Robert Diken agreed to ask the FOMA board.

OLD BUSINESS REPORTS:

- **Windows of Understanding:** Grace Shackney reported that the Windows of Understanding opening was well attended and announced a walking tour of the Barnes Preserve will take place on April 20th using the trail that inspired Joe Castronova's work in the exhibit. Walter Stochel will lead the walk. Robert Diken commented that this is the first year student art was included in the opening. The student art is on the topic of climate change. Robert encouraged everyone to go see the exhibit, on view until the end of April.
- **Jazz:** Lynne Mueller reported a very successful sold out Valentine's Day event featuring Kate Baker at Hailey's Harp and Pub. The same venue will feature Cynthia Sayer on May 9. The Dave Stryker Quartet will perform on March 24 at the library.
- **FOMA:** Robert Diken reported that 100 tickets had been sold for the upcoming (March 2) FOMA Gala. The event will feature Joe Frame and then Swingadelic. Robert thanked the FOMA Gala Committee for their hard work in putting the event together, and to Arts Council members for their support.
- **MDA:** Meg Loftus reported that Julia Win's mural, homage to a dairy factory, was almost complete. The mural proposed for the new Starbuck's will feature nature, birds, and a groundhog. She reported that four or five more sculptures, on loan from Grounds for Sculpture, will be placed around town. Grace Shackney commented that she had walked through town with Melissa Perilstein looking for places to put the new sculptures. Discussion followed regarding murals on the buildings of chains like Starbucks vs. local businesses. Grace commented that the mural locations depend on the cooperation of the property owners.

NEW BUSINESS:

- Mark Harris and Robert Diken attended a NJ Council for the Arts seminar and saw an opportunity to have our events listed there. The seminar was about inter-group events, and one idea in town would be to include store owners, other Borough commissions, Borough government, the MDA, and the public to talk about how MAC can connect with the town.
- Grace Shackney reported that one of the artworks on the Greenway had been vandalized and the artist was working to restore it.
- **Heart Festival:** Grace further reported that MAC will have a table at the Heart Festival on August 10 in New Brunswick to give out information.
- **Rotunda Gallery:** Robert Diken requested a status update on the reopening of the Rotunda Gallery. Rick Perrine responded the painting of the entire building was underway and a reopening date had not yet been set.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Carmen Balentine (absent) reported by email: He will be hosting Trivia Night again at Beans & Bread on Saturday, March 9 at 6:30PM. He will also be co-hosting karaoke night with Shannan Foat-Gelber at Beans & Bread on Saturday, March 23 (Time to be Determined).
- Deborah Kmetz announced Thursday night 5-7pm hours at Nails in the Wall Gallery until May 16 for the exhibit, "More than Just Words: the ART of Communication."
- Lynne Mueller announced a classical concert being held at St. Luke's Episcopal Church sponsored by FOMA, MAC, and Westerhoff School of Art and Music.
- Terry Kohl announced "The Unarmed Child," an original composition performed by Rise Up Chorus and Metuchen Dance Centre will take place on March 9 at Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield, NJ.

ADJOURNMENT:

All business being conducted, the meeting was adjourned by Mark Harris at about 9:00 pm. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, March 18 at 7:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Deborah Kmetz, Metuchen Arts Council Secretary