

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY CULTURAL AND HERITAGE
COMMISSION MINUTES****May 27, 2021**

The regular meeting of the Cumberland County Cultural and Heritage Commission was held on Thursday, May 27, 2021 at 4:00p.m., via teleconference.

Present: Suzanne Merighi Maria Cerda-Moreno
Marianne Lods Michael Cagno
Sharon Yoshida Robert Dragotta
Penny Watson

Commissioner Pearson

Matthew Pisarski, Planning Director
Omarey Williams, Shared Services Coordinator
Matt Horowitz, Recording Secretary

Guests: Christopher “Chris” Shrum
Jerry Young

Approval of Minutes – April 22, 2021

A number of corrections, comments, additions, deletions, etc. were made by a handful of Commission members. A motion to approve the April 22, 2021 minutes was made by Maria Cerda-Moreno. The motion was seconded by Robert Dragotta and passed unanimously by the Commission with the aforementioned corrections to be made.

Long Term Plan Update with Christopher Shrum

Omarey Williams introduced consultant Christopher “Chris” Shrum, who is actively working on the Commission’s Long Term Plan. Mr. Williams explained, in addition to the draft he had previously provided, Mr. Shrum had since sent a memorandum to Mr. Pisarski and himself in regard to what he had envisioned for the Long Term Plan moving forward. Mr. Williams stated Mr. Shrum was on the call that day and was planning to run through the Memorandum/Draft and field questions from the Commission in preparation for the Final Draft to be presented the following month. Ms. Merighi thanked Mr. Shrum for his attendance at the meeting. Mr. Shrum first identified a handful of core themes: Organization Development, Infrastructure, Sense of Place, Program Development, and Community Outreach & Audience Development.

Mr. Shrum stated in identifying these themes, he had identified a handful of initiatives specific to each corresponding theme. Mr. Shrum mentioned under the Organization Development theme/cluster, Commission Capacity Building seemed to be of the highest priority from his perspective. Ms. Merighi asked Mr. Shrum to, please, further explain what he meant by

“Commission Capacity Building,” to which Mr. Shrum stated he thought this would be from the Commission’s perspective (staffing, organization systems, fund development, and program evaluation). Mr. Shrum listed additional priorities within this theme as Regular Get-together/Cultural & Heritage Roundtable, Technical Assistance Program, Partnership Development, and Shared Fundraising Event in descending order according to impact and readiness for implementation.

Referring to the Technical Assistance Program, Mr. Shrum explained he reduced its priority based on the nature of implementation and staff capacity (or lack thereof.) Ms. Merighi asked for clarification as to what Mr. Shrum meant by “Technical Assistance,” to which Mr. Shrum explained he meant “technical assistance” in the broadest of definitions; ie: assisting an organization with developing a marketing plan or assisting them with audience development. Regarding Partnership Development, Mr. Shrum stated that this struck him as a “real opportunity,” specifically referring to the director at the Boys & Girls Club. Although, Mr. Shrum explained the cultivation process needed for this item might be beyond the current capacity of the staff. Robert Dragotta asked Mr. Shrum what he meant by “capacity” and/or “building the capacity of the Commission.” Mr. Shrum said he looked at the County/Commission’s role (for lack of a better term) as a local arts agency.

Mr. Williams politely interjected, on behalf of the Commission, asking for actionable steps to take and more clarification within the Long Term Plan. Mr. Dragotta stated, regarding Capacity, he believed both the County, as well as grants, funded the Commission monetarily. Ms. Merighi stated she believed the Commission were simply looking for some more specific ideas that would pertain to what the Commission could be doing over the next five years. Mr. Williams inquired if Mr. Shrum could try to include specific examples within his Final Draft of said Long Term Plan, to which Mr. Shrum agreed and said he would do his best to oblige. Michael Cagno suggested he thought it might be helpful to have a Notes Section within the Final Draft of the Long Term Plan to help try to address such issues, questions, etc. Mr. Cagno, also, mentioned it was important for everyone to remember this was a Strategic Plan, rather than an Operations Plan, as the “operations” would, ultimately, fall on the County staff/Commission volunteers.

Mr. Shrum stated that he agreed with Mr. Cagno’s comments, as well as everyone else’s, and thanked the Commission and County staff for their involvement and dedication to the Long Term Plan thus far. Mr. Williams now wanted to open the floor for any additional comments the Commission might want to make Mr. Shrum aware of prior to his exiting the teleconference call. Ms. Merighi mentioned several grammatical errors and specific areas of concern within Mr. Shrum’s Memorandum/Sketch, which was sent out to the Commission. Ms. Merighi asked for clarification on the “Digital Humanities” initiative under the National Endowment for The Humanities (NEH) section, Mr. Shrum explained this meant a grant could/would provide assistance to Cultural & Heritage organizations across the County to convert their collections and programs to the digital space in a very effective and meaningful way. Mr. Shrum offered to Mr. Williams that he was happy to work with either the County or a group of arts organizations to make a proposal for funding regarding the Our Town Grant, if interested. Ms. Merighi & Mr. Williams thanked Mr. Shrum for his time and stated they would be in touch after the meeting. Mr. Williams suggested having a long work session prior to approving Mr. Shrum’s Final Draft of said Long Term Plan at the next Cultural & Heritage meeting to be held on June 24, 2021.

Discussion of Renewal of American Association for State & Local History

Mr. Williams stated it was once again renewal time for the Commission's membership to the American Association for State & Local History (AASLH.) Staff recommendation was to approve \$118.00 for AASLH membership fees and Mr. Williams mentioned there was money set aside within the budget for it. A motion to approve \$118.00 for the American Association for State & Local History membership fees was made by Mr. Cagno, seconded by Mr. Dragotta, and passed unanimously by the Commission. Mr. Williams & Ms. Merighi thanked the Commission.

Special Request: Tri City H.O.P.E. – Juneteenth Event

Mr. Williams welcomed Jerry Young from Tri City H.O.P.E., who had sent a letter requesting support for the Juneteenth event to be held on June 19th at Landis Park. Mr. Williams explained, due to Mr. Young's organization not being a nonprofit, the support for the event would work through one of Mr. Young's partners and event co-sponsors, A Life Worth Living, a group run by John Fuqua. Mr. Fuqua sent a request and Mr. Williams responded back, via email, prior to the Commission meeting. Mr. Young explained, since 2015, his organization has held Juneteenth celebration community days: four events held in Bridgeton and one in Vineland at the Boys & Girls Club. Mr. Young stated, this year, with Juneteenth being recognized as a State holiday, Tri City H.O.P.E. were trying to up the ante a little bit for this year's planned celebrations. Mr. Young said they had taken on some partners this year, but were still in need of additional funding.

Tri City H.O.P.E. was planning to have guest speakers, entertainment for the kids, food for attendees, a live band. and most importantly, an educational component. Following a brief period of discussion amongst the Commission members and Mr. Young, Mr. Young was thanked for his presence on the teleconference call and was welcome to leave. A motion to support Tri City H.O.P.E.'s \$1,000,000 request for funding for their Juneteenth event was made by Marianne Lods, seconded by Sharon Yoshida, and passed unanimously by the Commission. Ms. Yoshida asked if Juneteenth was being recognized as a County holiday; Mr. Pisarski, Mr. Williams, and Commissioner Pearson offered to investigate into seeing whether a proclamation could be provided by the County Commissioners to recognize Juneteenth as a County holiday.

Commissioner Liaison Reports

Ms. Lods shared she had recently spoken with a representative at the Seabrook Educational & Cultural Center (SECC) who invited her to the Cherry Blossom Festival. Ms. Lods was unable to attend, but said from the pictures she saw afterwards, looked beautiful. Ms. Yoshida corrected Ms. Lods and explained the Cherry Blossom Festival was, instead, held at the Seabrook Buddhist Temple. It was agreed by all that this is a beautiful event held annually within the County. Ms. Merighi shared she attended the Vineland Regional Dance Company (VRDC) Spring Recital on April 25th and it was beautifully organized, flawlessly executed, and featured an ample recognition of the Cultural & Heritage Commission throughout their programming and within the program itself. Ms. Merighi stated all around it was a lovely event held outside at appropriate social distance. Ms. Merighi was, also, invited to the SECC's virtual meeting, which was attended by Ms. Yoshida, as well. It was said they were both very impressed as to how it was conducted, as well as the number of attendees on the virtual call from all across the Country. Ms.

Yoshida mentioned she believed Penny Watson was assigned to this committee. Ms. Watson added she would like to have a one-on-one conversation with Ms. Yoshida, who agreed she would like to do so, as well. Olive Doss said it was a little difficult for her to sleep after this meeting and had a familial connection to this matter, as well.

County Commissioner Reports

Mr. Williams mentioned that Commissioner Pearson was present on the call and asked if she had any additional comments on behalf of the County Commissioners. Commissioner Pearson stated she had no official comments at this time and thanked the Commission and County staff for their continued efforts.

Tourism Advisory Council/Recreation Commission Comments – Kimberly Gauntt

Kim Gauntt was not present on the afternoon's meeting/teleconference call.

Other Old/New Business

Ms. Watson inquired as to when the County might be going back to in-person meetings. Mr. Pisarski & Commissioner Pearson explained, while Governor Murphy was actively opening up some of the restrictions, the County Commissioners were still reviewing their policies. Mr. Pisarski stated that this related to all County facilities, including the County Fairgrounds, and there was an intent to re-open as soon as feasibly possible; however, Mr. Pisarski explained, there were personnel issues, policies, and procedures that had to be tended to, to ensure the County-wide re-opening was done safely and effectively for all involved. Mr. Pisarski had not yet been given a specific month in which they could have live/in-person meetings again, but as soon as he did, he would promptly let the Commission members know. Mr. Pisarski added all of the meetings coming out of the Cumberland County Department of Planning, Tourism & Community Affairs would be a hybrid format (live/Teams) from this point moving forward. Commissioner Pearson thanked Mr. Pisarski for being so specific regarding this matter.

Correspondence

Mr. Williams explained, included within the meeting packet was a letter of appreciation that Mr. Pisarski had written in support of the Cumberland County Courthouse Exterior Preservation Project regarding an application for funding from the New Jersey Historic Trust. Ms. Merighi thanked Mr. Williams for explaining this matter to the Commission.

Adjourn

Ms. Merighi stated, with nothing else to tend to on the agenda, she would like to entertain one more motion. Thus, a motion to adjourn the May 27, 2021 Cultural & Heritage Commission meeting was made by Mr. Dragotta, seconded by Ms. Watson, and passed unanimously by the Commission. Ms. Merighi wished everyone a safe and happy Memorial Day Weekend.