

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY CULTURAL AND HERITAGE  
COMMISSION MINUTES**

**April 27, 2023**

The regular meeting of the Cumberland County Cultural and Heritage Commission was held on Thursday, April 27, 2023, at 3:00p.m., via teleconference and/or in-person at The County Administration Building located in Bridgeton, NJ.

**Present:**

Robert Dragotta	(November 2023)
Michael Cagno *	(January 2028)
Suzanne Merighi *	(November 2023)
Marianne Lods *	(November 2026)
Maria Cerda-Moreno	(November 2025)
Penny Watson *	(August 2025)
Karen Barnett *	(August 2024)
Yogesh Thakur	(November 2026)

Commissioner Victoria Lods \*  
Commissioner Doug Albrecht

Matt Pisarski, Department Head/Director \*  
Omarey Williams, Shared Services Coordinator \*  
Wanda Riviera, Confidential Assistant \*  
Matt Horowitz, Recording Secretary\*

**Guests:**

Russell Swanson  
Rich Nichols, Executive Director, The United Advocacy Group  
Esaul Martin  
Lisa David-Hart  
Cassandra Avila Hernandez

*Note: Asterisk (\*) indicates members present at the aforementioned meeting.*

**Approval of Minutes – March 23, 2023**

Mr. Dragotta indicated, following Roll Call, that a quorum was met and would like a motion to approve the March 23, 2023 Cultural & Heritage (C&H) Commission meeting minutes. A motion to approve the March 23, 2023 meeting minutes was made by Ms. Lods, seconded by Ms. Merighi, and passed unanimously by the Commission.

**Special Request: United Advocacy Group**

Mr. Williams introduced Rich Nichols, the Executive Director of the United Advocacy Group (U.A.G.), who was present in-person. Mr. Nichols indicated his organization was located in

Downtown Bridgeton near Gallery 50 and had a small theatre within their building. It had hosted various concerts, plays, family movie nights, lectures, open mic nights, etc. Mr. Nichols explained the U.A.G. had recently developed a partnership with a local group called For The Whim Productions. Mr. Nichols said the local theatre group had put on two to four performances and had many more planned performances. Mr. Nichols was requesting a Special Request grant of \$1,000.00. Mr. Nichols said the Special Request was to help make the best of and better the U.A.G.'s theatre for For The Whim Productions and other similarly minded groups. Mr. Nichols mentioned various updates including lighting, sound equipment, soundproofing, production value, admission fees, etc.

Following a period of questioning between Mr. Nichols, Commissioner Lods, the Commission members, and staff, it was suggested the U.A.G. could be steered towards the Re-grant program in the fall, as well. Mr. Dragotta said he had a spare light board in his possession he would be willing to donate to Mr. Nichols and the U.A.G. A motion to allocate \$1,000.00 to the United Advocacy Group for their theatre productions was made by Ms. Merighi, seconded by Ms. Lods, and passed unanimously by the Commission.

### **Discussion of Mural Projects**

Mr. Williams set the stage for a group from the Bridgeton Gateway Community Action Partnership (B.G.C.A.P.) Esaul Martin introduced himself, as well as Lisa David-Hart and Casandra Avila Hernandez. Mr. Martin mentioned his group primarily worked within the Southeast Gateway Neighborhood across roughly a four-block radius in Bridgeton. Mr. Martin said there was 40-panel fence erected behind the Alms Center, which the B.G.C.A.P. wanted to decorate with a mural. It would feature positive affirmations, along with imagery from throughout the City of Bridgeton's rich history. Mr. Martin suggested a total project budget of about \$7,634.00 and said the B.G.C.A.P. was in the process of attaining additional grant funding sources.

Mr. Martin and Mses. David Hart & Avila Hernandez said various community groups, entities, organizations, etc. would each be doing their own panels in a paint-by-number style. Both Ms. Lods & Mr. Cagno urged the group to get paint and graffiti sealant, as well. Mr. Williams said the grant funding by the Commission could not be used for food and beverage costs and asked what specific amount the group was requesting. Mr. Martin said they would be requesting roughly \$1,636,00 from the Commission.

Ms. Barnett asked if they were using local businesses for supplies, as the Commission had previously suggested. Ms. David-Hart said she was using H.H. Hankins & Bro. Lumber and Home Depot as often as possible. A motion to approve \$2,500.00 for the Bridgeton Gateway Community Action Partnership was made by Ms. Watson, seconded by Mr. Cagno, and passed unanimously by the Commission.

Mr. Cagno asked about the Special Request form template the Commission had put together previously. Mr. Williams replied explaining that whenever he receives such requests, he does send said forms out to the potential applicant. Although, he did not receive these components back from Mr. Martin and did not want to push the agenda item back to next month's meeting. However, moving forward, Mr. Williams would be stricter and more diligent in getting these

necessary items back from Special Request funding applicants.

Russell Swanson from The Ave/Main Street Vineland shared a PowerPoint presentation entitled Seward Johnson: Art On The Ave. Mr. Swanson mentioned a \$10,000.00 check the Commission had previously awarded his organization for a mural project(s). He wanted to bring a series of sculpture art to the community for about six months throughout the 500-800 blocks of Downtown Vineland. Mr. Swanson outlined various opportunities to tie the sculptures into existing murals and local businesses. He also brought up a Jazz musician, who started The Christian Tamburr Sextet, who wrote, composed, and performed pieces of music to accompany the sculpture artwork. Mr. Swanson was asking to use half of the awarded \$10,000.00 toward the Seward Johnson sculpture project with the remainder still going towards murals. Mr. Williams clarified that the original \$10,000.00 was for interactive murals. Mr. Swanson said the previously selected locations had been problematic.

Mr. Cagno mentioned the idea of doing a County-wide public art program to not pigeonhole the Commission to simply doing public art as mural/murals only. He said it would be essential to develop such a program to help make these non-mural matters much more flexible. Mr. Williams agreed and said he would set aside money for a plan within next year's budget. A motion to allow The Ave/Main Street Vineland to move the funds awarded to their mural project to the Seward Johnson: Art On The Ave project was made by Mr. Cagno, seconded by Ms. Merighi, and passed unanimously by the Commission. Commissioner Lods suggested recommending Mr. Swanson utilize local musicians and composers if he did the Christian Tamburr Sextet musical component.

### **First Quarter Budget Review**

Mr. Williams quickly pointed out the Commission still had \$5,000.00 remaining to allot towards mural projects. He added the \$2,500.00 out of \$10,000.00 in Special Requests had been appropriated, so far. Mr. Williams explained that Teen Arts had been appropriated \$12,500.00 out of Promo for The Arts, but only \$11,000.00 had been spent. He additionally said \$1,500.00 had come out of the Line Item and only \$1,400.00 had been used, as well.

### **Recap of The 2023 Teen Arts Festival (April 4, 2023)**

Mr. Williams said Teen Arts was a great day with fantastic weather. He thanked Commissioner Lods for attending the first-year showcase presentation at The Levoy and Ms. Merighi for her help with the event on the day-of. Mr. Williams shared the committee would be doing a recap-/lessons learned meeting within two weeks. He thanked the Commission and County Commissioners for all of their help, support, and funding provided for the annual event. Commissioner Lods thanked Mr. Williams and the Commission for all of their great efforts relating to Teen Arts. Ms. Merighi echoed a similar sentiment and said it was a flawless day.

### **Artists Day 2023: Mauricetown RiverFest 2023 (SAVE THE DATE)**

Mr. Williams explained he had included a save the date flyer for Artists Day 2023: Mauricetown RiverFest 2023 and reiterated the event date was September 16, 2023. He said it was moved from the second to third Saturday in September because of its proximity to Labor Day Weekend.

Mr. Williams stated staff were working with Citizens United (C.U.) Maurice River and would be including trail walks and other assorted family-friendly programming and events that were not included in the past. He was in talks with the A.J. Meerwald to have them be in attendance, as well as East Point Light House and other satellite locations for programming. Mr. Williams said money would be given directly to the Mauricetown Historical Society for paid advertising to help increase the attendance numbers.

### **C&H Commissioner Reports**

Ms. Merighi explained the Seabrook Buddhist Temple had recently held their Cherry Blossom Festival, although, she was unable to attend. Mr. Williams said he was there, and it was a great well-attended event, as usual. Ms. Merighi had also spoken to Jackie Sando at the Clay College, who said they were working on an oyster program. Mr. Williams shared on behalf of Ms. Cerda-Moreno that All That dance Studio was doing well and were looking at adding a Spanish dance class into their repertoire of programming.

### **County Commissioner Liaison Reports**

Commissioner Lods echoed the sentiment that she was very impressed with the Cultural & Heritage Committee spearheading the Teen Arts Festival, keeping it going, and influencing other neighboring counties to follow their lead. Commissioner Lods said she mentioned this at the most recent County Commissioners meeting, stating that she was very proud of the work the Cultural & Heritage Commission continually does.

### **Planning Department Update**

Mr. Williams explained the Planning Department staff were already situated over in their new building at the 4-H Extension Center on Morton Avenue in Rosenhayn/Millville. He thanked the County Commissioners for having the vision to allow staff to go mover over to 4-H. Mr. Williams said this would be the last meeting held at the Administration Building and all future Departmental meetings would be held at the Extension Center.

### **Other Old/New Business**

Ms. Lods recommended the Commission members look up Brian Kutner's photographs taken on the inside of Potter's Tavern posted on Facebook and suggested they be used in promotional materials. Commissioner Lods said she saw Mr. Kutner's images and agreed they should be used in promotional material, as well. Ms. Merighi said she saw SNJ Today had done some coverage on the Teen Arts Festival. Ms. Riviera said Teen Arts was featured on Channel 6 Action News, as well. Mr. Dragotta shared the Bay Atlantic Symphony would be holding a concert on May 6, 2023 at 3:00pm at the Rowan College of South Jersey Cumberland Campus. Mr. Dragotta said Quinn Broadcasting had offered the Symphony one hour per month on air.

### **Adjourn**

Mr. Dragotta asked for a motion to adjourn the April 27, 2023 Cultural & Heritage Commission meeting. A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Lods seconded by Ms. Merighi, and passed

unanimously by the Commission. Mr. Williams, again, thanked everyone for their continued attendance, wished them a great month, and said he would see them all in May at the 4-H Extension Center.