CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS
ARTS COUNCIL
KATJANA BALLANTYNE
MAYOR

Somerville Arts Council Board Meeting Minutes
City Hall Annex conference room, 1st floor
50 Evergreen Ave.
Somerville MA 02145

Wednesday, February 14, 2024
6:30 pm

In attendance: Heather Balchunas, Emily Beattie, Joe Burgio, Becky Donner, Greg Jenkins, Matt Kaliner, Ada Ren-Mitchell, Andrea Read, Michael Rosenberg, Rachel Strutt

1. Community check-in

a) Ada: Facilitated Festival of Learning at MIT Media Lab
b) Becky:
- Don't F with Fab event was a big success on Tuesday, Feb 5 at the Warehouse XI space, 60 people in attendance, writing letters, making signs & templates
- Somernova has withdrawn their original proposal and will resubmit in 6 weeks to include affordable housing; Don't F with FAB now has a website (www.dontfwithfab.org)
- Rachel: Is this what created the flurry of letters from Esh Circus Arts?
- Emily: So far participation is heavily music-related; trying to mobilize other arts communities
- Heather: Vernon Street Studios invited Ethan to come speak, mobilized artists to come to the meetings
- Emily: How do we incentivize other artists to get involved? Personal contact seems to help

- Somerville zoning meeting tomorrow (virtual): Washington Street Studios is on the agenda

c) Andrea:
- Lloyd Schwartz is planning a reading by Somerville poets at the Armory on Sunday, April 28 at 5pm; Heather: Books of Hope program is up and running

d) Joe:
- Full turnout of dancers at The Hive on Superbowl Sunday; next year we should create a dance-centric Superbowl piece

e) Matt:
- Numbers are excellent for Somerville Open Studios with 299 registered so far; Registration peaked at 409 artists in 2014

f) Emily:
- Started working on a trailer for ArtBeat, inviting dancers to submit pieces
- Dancers are really using The Hive

2. Cultural Capacity Plan rollout brainstorm

- Greg: Does the plan show due process and does it clearly outline the process-oriented approach we used to create the plan?
- Michael: Does the Summary represent the feel of the overall plan:
- Greg: We could issue the whole document, or we could issue just the key recommendations & come up with some kind of teaser to solicit engagement & feedback from the community
- Ada: All of the information should be presented in digestible chunks, for instance, single-page infographics; The document is too expansive and many people come in with a lot of emotion and not enough information; turning it into a tarot deck and doing tarot spreads, like a deck of cards; more playful, more interactive better than a report; the current document doesn't really honor the conversations that the ambassadors had with community; digestible formats that work for both new people and those who've been involved in these issues for a long time;
- Emily: Would a tarot cards approach require a live, interactive component? Or would it be possible to use the cards and understand the scope of the plan by oneself?
- Becky: The layout makes it difficult to focus
- Ada: The difficulty has to do with differences in people's mental process and architectures
- Joe: The language is impenetrable & bureaucratic; Introduce the components with a narrative, e.g. tell a story about what the ambassadors have done & are doing; make maps and graphs; may want to reconsider some of the photos
- Becky: Even if it's not a deck, at least create some pages that could stand on their own
- Joe: The demographic breakdown is a question

- Ada: The diversity in Somerville is not just racial, includes also gender. The current demographic breakdown is a one-dimensional take on diversity.
- Michael: Demographic breakdown should include an expanded notion of diversity in terms of age, disciplines, education, etcetera
- Joe: Do we have information on who or how many consume what kind of art?
- Greg: To convey both the process and the results is difficult to do in a single document; All the outcomes that people want to see happen is currently in an appendix; How can we synthesize the process into the results? Could we put the Ambassador Community Conversations process at the end in an Apprendix?
- Emily: Do the strategies support people's concerns? Is there a way to pick out what came out of the conversations to create categories that better & more clearly address community concerns?
- Greg: Does it work to put actions in the front of the document? That may be too much information to convey out of context.
- Emily: How to create different versions of the document for different audiences – e.g. City Council; artists, community members, etc.; Greg: Do we have to build a whole new product (i.e. document)?
- Joe: What's the optimal way to communicate strategy? Heather: Best to communicate strategy through visual engagement; helpful to see where relationships happen and how ideas connect and cross over; Joe: That's a mind map; Becky: 8 pages of bold makes it hard to read the short version; How to create a simpler & shorter version that links out to a larger document?
- Emily: Can we gather a community group to ask how they'd like to see the plan?
- Michael: If the document is too complicated, it won't get used, even as a game
- Greg: We could do community workshops to help interact with the plan
- Rachel: We need to think about who is going to look at it; Adding some visuals would be nice; Put the key recommendations into context – what people would like most to know are the recommendations that have come out of the plan
- Michael: Can we get the information into one-pagers for each working group
- Ada: It's important to ask what we want people to do with this information. Is the goal for them to continue to be engaged in process?
- Greg: This is a document to be read. It may be helpful to have a one-pager about the work, and then to have community meetings focused on each topic. We want to make it easier to digest, but people will still have to read the report.
- Becky: Having something easily understandable will encourage the community to engage more deeply with the report.
- Heather: As a point of comparison, the Space & Zoning meeting on the 12th was effective. The presentation of complex zoning issues allowed the 60 attendees to walk away with more information.
- Becky: Attendees had more capacity to engage, and to engage others. The tool kit made the process as easy as possible. We could use that meeting as a model for other issues related to the SCC Plan.
- Rachel: The public may ask what is the likelihood that the actions recommended in the plan will happen? The public is not going to obsess over the document – they'll

be more interested in discussing the outcomes, so the document itself is in good shape.

- Ada: can help redesign/reformat the document. Greg, Ada, and Michael will have a meeting to discuss
- Ada can also discuss content marketing and clarity.
- Greg: Should connect Ada and Josh Sariñana, who gave a lot of helpful feedback on the current draft.
- Greg: The ambassadors are also an audience for the document, to report back to their communities.
- Emily: Is there any movement in City Council regarding the Cultural Trust?
- Greg: Cultural Trust would make a good working group
- Michael: We would have to get a Home Rule petition to create a Cultural Trust -- important to make it arts specific

3. Working Groups

a) New Board Members
- Greg: Does the board want to expand by one or two new members? We should include music.
- Joe: Should we also include nightlife? Who do we need on the board, and who would be bring skills as a community leader/organizer?
- Rachel: Ajda would be a great board member.
- Rachel: starting a Nibble Advisory Panel, will meet quarterly, have five people on it so far

b) Other working groups
- Space, Board Mission Statement, & LCC updates will report at the next board meeting