



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, March 13, 2024 | 6:30 pm

In attendance: Heather Balchunas, Joe Burgio, Yorgos Efthymiadis, Becky Donner, Ada Ren-Mitchell, Iaritza Menjivar, Rachel Strutt

1. Community check-in

- Becky: everyone go check out Yorgos' exhibit, and we should do more arts council field trips
- Heather: sent Joe the info for exhibits. There's a Michael that's interested in gallery spaces and vacant buildings, and understands it's a lot of work. He will meet with SAC Michael to chat more.
- Ada: worked with Michael and Greg to think about more visual ways to communicate the Cultural Capacity Plan.
- Rachel: First Nibble advisory meeting was fruitful and thoughts about lowering barrier to entry for people who don't have the funds to start a restaurant. Matt's thinking about a food cart program. Doing a mayor listing tour of arts and culinary spaces.
- Heather: trying to get more theater folks involved in aspect of art spaces.
- Becky: important for mayor to be more aware of and meet these folks and the spaces.
- Rachel: mayor will go to the Hive open house.
- Joe: Hive dance space is really nice now that sunset is later.

2. Report back from Community Meetings

InterCambio

- Rachel: tonight is penultimate session, Antonio has been doing great, encouraging the group to curate and own the space: Spotify playlist, and bilingual cooking class. They're going to Somerville Museum together to see an exhibit. Intern Jessica has been going to InterCambio. It was a lot of effort to find a space, and a lot of effort to

recruit non-English speakers. Usually recruit from English classes, hard to get a dozen people, used to have 30. But those who do come are really taking ownership of what they do together and having fun.

Somerville Open Studios

- Becky: registered her space so her other art space mates can join if they decide later.
- Rachel: Late people can also be on the SAC map but won't be on the SOS map.

LCC Celebration

- Rachel: decent turnout despite the schedule change. People were thrilled to be recognized. People were taking pictures of themselves in front of the slides laritza made.
- Yorgos: better space for it.
- Joe: it was a positive vibe and people wanted to get to know each other.
- laritza: people would just come in and sit down, how to get people to move around more?
- Joe: got to learn more about what people did in this celebration than last year, people were interacting more and it was a better feel and flow.
- Heather: people were probably not mingling because there was no bar.
- laritza: how to make it better next year?
- Rachel: people were doing a lot of mingling at the end.

Armory Meeting

- laritza: it was better than previous meetings. Topic was community spaces, more welcome because it was at Connexion. Felt a lot more organized, used feedback from first meeting. Large in-person crowd, and the conversation was more positive than the first meeting, so that's progress. Next one is March 26th at the high school.
- Heather: It's great to have it at different location, getting more people from different areas.
- Joe: Doing this at different parts of the city helps reduce bias.
- laritza: It felt very community-oriented. There were other groups coming and going and helping them break down and set up was really nice.
- Heather: It'll be great to have more spaces like that, that are more accessible and welcoming, serving multiple uses.
- laritza: As soon as people walked into the space, there's people already using the space in ways that are welcoming.
- Heather: all these available spaces (like the library), but may not always suit the needs.
- Becky: we need more spaces

Fab Overlay

- **Becky:** Initial Somerville proposal was withdrawn, but there will be one later. Community Benefits proposal is now happening in parallel. Shoot for the moon for what the community wants. 70 people showed up and it went well. Art Stays Here were there. ESH circus arts were doing a performance at the start to welcome people. There's another meeting Saturday at 1pm, to cover housing and parking and community center. It's important for more art voices to show up. Over 100 emailed letters about 321 Washington St zoning change are still being read by city councilors. Over 50 letters were from the ESH circus community, which is very organized, and the space means a lot to them. Don't F with Fab looks forward to more writing campaigns for sending letters to the city. It was an impressive turnout, and we need to keep up the momentum to influence SomerNova. Just like SomerNova's original proposal, we're also going to shoot for the moon for the community benefits.
- **Heather:** It's important to share small benchmarks (of things to do) for people who want to do something and not sure where to start. With Vernon St artists, there were letter templates that made it easy for them to start.
- **Becky:** yes, what's a 5-minute way to support? what's a 5-hour way to support?
- **Rachel:** There were quite a few artists from Washington St who wrote very moving letters.
- **Becky:** Owner of the building did not show up to the public meeting, and with the 100s of letters, it seems unlikely that the zoning change will pass.
- **Rachel:** Art Stays Here has done so much advocacy work, and people have put so much work into the efforts, can people get paid?
- **Heather:** They are a nonprofit with grant money, but that usually goes to running events.
- **Rachel:** Could PorchFest be a fundraiser for Art Stays Here?
- **Becky:** there can be power and community goodwill to not be paid by organizations. City councilors are pretty invested in the arts and FAB district as a whole.

3. Advocacy opportunities at spring events

- **Rachel:** What do we mean by this?
- **Joe:** will have presence at PorchFest,
- **Rachel:** have in the past put out charity support shout outs, but people feel like musicians should be paid. Lots of musicians do care about these charities.
- **Becky:** nice to encourage musicians to put out a tip jar or charity donation note. Venmo
- **Rachel:** Civic day, do we want to do something?
- **Joe:** Maybe "Hello Neighbor"?
- **Ada:** Maybe an art activity where strangers draw each others' faces for a minute?
- **Becky:** Don't F with Fab plans to have a presence at most of the spring events.
- **Joe:** How to increase outreach for PorchFest, there's a big drop-off around Lowell St. Less participation in East Somerville.

- Heather: People in East Somerville will go to Union Square because of the restaurants there. Doesn't get a lot of traffic around Winter Hill.
- Laritza: Bow Market gets a lot of business at the end.
- Ada: Combine Nibble food cart idea with PorchFest!!
- Yorgos: We need rave spaces, more nightlife spaces.

4. Subgroups report out

- Becky: Andrea and Becky had a final interview with Greg about Mission and Vision. Will send out a survey about the board to get everyone's input before sharing out findings from staff member interviews. Do the survey and we'll share out in the next meeting.
- Rachel: Idea with Andrea: Literary pub crawl with literary readings in unusual spaces like the Milk Row cemetery.
- Becky: No more items? Meeting adjourned!