

Bloomington Arts Commission
Minutes February 8, 2017

Present: Gabe Colman, Peter Jacobi, Abby Perfetti, Lynn Schwartzberg, Sally Gaskill, Francesca Sobrer, Michael Wilkerson; Sean Starowitz and Katie Skayhan.

The meeting was fist to order by Sally Gaskill at 5:02, the fist substituting for the missing gavel.

At that moment, there was no quorum and no one could remember what was in the minutes because it was a long time ago and far away so we agreed to approve the January minutes in March, as if we could remember them better then.

In the absence of the ailing treasurer (Martina Celerin) the report was that nothing was spent last month so please refer to the unread January minutes for more details. If frugality is a metric, we are doing well.

Chair's report: Wilkerson, Schwartzberg, Gaskill have all been reappointed until 2020. The rule is one can have two full terms plus the remainder of the term you fill if appointed in the middle of someone else's term. We are short one commissioner to replace the esteemed Jan Grant.

New members are found via an application process (by the City Council); at times there have been interviews when there are multiple qualified candidates. Mayoral appointments are at that office's discretion; at times the Commission has been consulted, as have staff in the past.

Sally suggested that we reach out to people we want to join and urge them to apply. We discussed some names, in a search for diversity and for someone else under 60 to keep Abby company.

Staff report by Sean Starowitz, who is well under 60: Press release for the grants program has gone out. We should "think differently" about the 1% program re the big projects in Trades District and Switchyard Park. Technology-based artwork could make sense, he gently suggested. We do not have to do an open call; we can curate an artist if we have someone in mind. A lively discussion ensued re curating vs open call, and we, like true moderate Midwesterners, agreed that the City should do some of each.

Yr secretary elected not to write down names that were proposed for future public artworks due to discretion and the desire for government secrecy in the Trump era.

Trades District might be a good place to do community festivals and programs due to its design (which we viewed onscreen – cool!). TASUS (high tech company) wants to be a stop on First Fridays. The area will have "curbless corridors," which is like the old Catholic concept of "meatless Fridays," but with better walkability and less fat. We looked at the designs and noticed ways that some of the proposed fixtures could be art projects. There is a survey on the site that could be filled out by each and every commissioner, suggested Sean Starowitz.

Similarly, Switchyard Park will have lots of opportunity for art. So we will all be thinking about this, and wondering how much money will ultimately be there to use for the arts, and what could have the biggest impact. As long as Martina is out we will not spend anything.

Sean also reported that he is on the City Bicentennial Commission, we will all be bicentennialing in 2018. We can think big! It could be a commission not necessarily a competition. Yr secretary heard the news that whiskey was passed around at the city bicentennial commission meeting, which made him insanely jealous as he sipped his aluminum-can-flavored sparkling water. On the plus side the whiskey has increased the cooperation between the city and the county on these matters.

Sean is working on a mural possibility for the 4th St garage, the back of the Buskirk-Chumley, and some other cool projects, including a teen workforce project with Rhino's. There will also be a mural on this nondescript limestone storage building on S. Washington St., making it no longer nondescript, as well as a groovy expansion of the existing mural at Building and Trades Park. It's an exciting array of projects.

What to do with Peoples Park? There will perhaps be a new way of revitalizing the murals in the park, perhaps a new large-scale mural. (Let's pay the homeless people to do exactly what they always do, except for the asking-for-money-from-passersby part, and call it a public art performance project, yr secretary quietly thought, keeping this ridiculous idea to himself.)

The Indiana Arts Commission has published an executive summary of a creative industries report, finding that there are a lot more self-employed artists in Indiana than in most places in the country. What does this mean? Hard to know – is Indiana a place where no one will hire an artist for a regular job and therefore our artists must be self-employed? Or, in the tradition of George Rogers Clark and William Henry Harrison, is it a place for rugged individualists who carve out their living piece by piece, disdaining the wage slavery that is more common on the latte-sipping East and West coasts? More research is needed. (Interjection by Sally: SNAAP has done the research.)

Sean described the city's working environment – reaching across departments in City Hall, trying to maximize the reach and potency of the arts. He also seeks to maximize professional development for artists he commissions to build works and create murals in Bloomington. It sounds like an exciting time in City Hall; fresh ideas, innovation, new partnerships are all happening.

Gabe Colman recommended the restoration of the faded mural on Kirkwood between Washington and Walnut. Gabe is also probably under 60 but given that he remembers the original mural, um. Yr secretary randomly remembered that the artist was called "Red Martha" back in the day, but couldn't summon the real name, though back in the 70s Red Martha would have been a perfectly acceptable real name. (NB: Gabe later put some serious facebooking

into this project, found the original artist, and began conversations toward getting this renovation going. Yay, Gabe!)

Abby recommended that we look further outside the downtown, and Sean showed sites of future murals on the East side. Meanwhile, back downtown, the “Stardust” mural on the former Smith-Holden building is caught in limbo between two owners, and the wall needs to be rebuilt. Sean urged commissioners to talk to property owners of other buildings who might want a mural. It would be great if the City were seen as jump-starting the mural craze, not controlling and managing and paying for it every step of the way.

At the I FELL building, Wednesday, February 22, 6 p.m., there will be a public information session about grants from the city, including the BUEA. What a party that’s going to be. (NB: Yr secretary attended, and it was a sizable, informative, enjoyable meeting, save for the sad fact that one could smell the workings of Rainbow Bakery down the hall, though the meeting was devoid of refreshments. People are so dedicated to the arts!)

Sally seized control of the meeting again and got us all into the review criteria for grant applications. Martina proposed simplification of the point system but not changing the wording of the criteria. Even though she was not present, everyone celebrated her genius.

Then, sadly, we began to discuss what the criteria actually mean and how we would interpret them. Francesca heroically provided sample rubrics! But now we have to adapt them to our criteria. This sounds like yet another job for Katie Skayhan! (jk lol when does she study hard to figure. How do we adapt a scholastic/performance rhetoric to a grant application?)

For a moment it felt as though the room had become a smoking ruin. But wait! Sally suggested that the Commission have more time for discussion of each grant so that we could modify our original notions/scores in light of comments by others. Discussion got rough. How do we get the Girl Scout cookies from Lynn over to here on the far side of the table? How do we have a unified approach despite our many differences as a diverse group of 60-something arts administrators?

Abby walked out, promising pie on Monday after the Malcolm Dalglish extravaganza at the BCT. (Yr secretary also attended that event, which was hard to describe but really cool if you’re in the right demographic, and which, Abby singing beautifully and not lying, ended with fresh apple pie. Would there be any left over for the next BAC meeting? Doubtful.)

Sean suggested a couple of commissioners per application to lead discussion on each grant, and some standards for what = how many points. We argued with some repetition about whether people should repeat themselves during the discussion. Eventually it was agreed that we would take this argument outside, not in a pugilistic way but in an electronic one, as suggestions would continue to flow back and forth to refine the grants process. Diligent commissioners, most!

Yr secretary continued to practice telepathy during a detailed discussion that he did not want to interrupt. Had he been successful, he would have willed the movement of the cookies, from Lynn's spot to his own, but alas! Perhaps he should invoke Rule 19? It worked for Mitch McConnell. Sean is going to bring a timer to the grant meetings! Seems harsh. Up to now we thought he was nice. Oh well. At least we won't have to have a grant meeting that lasts until midnight.

Yr secretary, still dreaming of a cookie, eyed Francesca across the table, trying not to blame her for her fellow Bloomington North teacher having assigned his son to build a replica of the Roman Senate House for his Latin class. But seriously folks, what is the pedagogical point here? That yr secretary ran into a fellow faculty member frantically seeking Roman Senate House building supplies at 8 pm the night before the project was due was little comfort. Teachers these days!

Sean agreed to summarize and give it all to Katie Skayhan to fix under his judicious supervision. He has recently served on some national grant panels and is willing to lend that perspective. So get going, Katie.

Rule 19 was duly invoked and we moved on to the strategic plan.

Martina had sent comments. Using those as a basis, we continued to carve up the remaining words of the draft. We accepted a bunch of her suggestions and not a few others. We weren't sure how directly we should say in our plan that the commission should be doing social media. We don't want to kill the already-overburdened Katie Skayhan so we agreed to tread lightly there. The commissioners want to be aspirational but also realistic. In all seriousness, a difficult but important balance to strike.

Sally has some more feedback and asked us for one more round of comments. Are there too many plans referring to other plans? Or could this be simpler, more elegant? We agreed to take one more look to get it just perfect. How was this work done before computers? What if a volcano erupted? Was it worth someone's time to completely retype the plan every time someone had an idea? Lots of us can recall those days, but prefer not. (Yr secretary teaches a unit on strategic planning every year and reminded himself that the value of the plan is not so much what's in it, but that all of us participated in its formation and are buying into what it promises that we will do as a commission. To most commissioners, the draft plan seemed solid, and both Martina and Sally should be praised –though they weren't because we were getting hungry – for their diligence in editing and proposing small but important changes to the drafts.)

Francesca is doing her **last ever** play at Bloomington North Feb 23-25, "Machinal." Sally then performs on Sunday with Voces Novae about General Lew Wallace, who killed a bunch of people and then wrote Ben-Hur. Yr secretary will be participating in a forum on March 1 about "The arts in the era of Trump" at SPEA and then sneaking off to England where he will negotiate exchange agreements and give a keynote presentation at which he is expected to explain the Trump administration to a bunch of nice academics in Manchester, England. How's that going to go? Sheesh.

There is so much going on in this brave little town. Sometimes it's amazing to think about. Subsequent to the meeting it feels incumbent on yr secretary to mention that Peter Jacobi is a community treasure. Hear me out on this. Yr Sec. attended the Joshua Bell concert on February 28, because, duh. He saw Peter there, as Peter is at most everything the Jacobs School does (Bell's concert was their 574th of the year.) The music literacy of this town is probably 4 times what it should be, pretty much solely due to Peter's excellent and tireless writing about it in the local newspaper. When is Peter Jacobi Day going to happen? And, if there were such a day, who would cover it for the newspaper?

Finally Sean turned off the projector and then people started putting on their coats, it being February and all, and so at the assigned hour of 6:30 pm, we headed out into the landscape our new President calls "American Carnage."

The next meeting will be March 8, with, thankfully, someone else taking notes.

Michael Wilkerson
Secretary