

Bloomington Arts Commission
Minutes
June 14, 2017
McCloskey Room, City Hall

Present: Emily Goodson, Francesca Sobrer, Gabe Colman, Lynn Schwartzberg, Abby Perfetti, Alain Barker, Peter Jacobi, Angelo Pizzo, Michael Wilkerson. Susan Sandberg, City Council President; five journalism students.

Abby Perfetti as vice chair of the arts commission of the “greatest city in America” called the meeting to order, using a pen as a gavel. Sally Gaskill, our most excellent chair, was said to be gallivanting in undisclosed locations, none of which were the room where the BAC met.

Five Journalism students were here to observe. To quote Conrad: “the horror, the horror.”

Sean gave the treasurer’s report: no change in funds, nothing spent, nothing gained.

The New Voices Opera final report was discussed. Consensus was that it was a great report but a few numbers were left out. Alain said it was the best performance ever by them, serious audience activity going on, the whole thing excellent, bravo bravo encore.

Sean showed slides of the newly installed Emily Wilson murals, on the South Washington utilities building and Sixth St. traffic circles. Commissioner Francesca Sobrer helped paint. Generally positive comments all around.

There was a new RFQ for People’s Park – new mural will basically be an artistic way of saying “welcome to Bloomington” vintage postcard style. Local artist: Eva Allen.

Justus Roe mural (tunnel on far E. 7th St.) will happen soon – one can see his video of doing it in progress. Lynn Schwartzberg talks about how he does it and what it’s like to see it. Rave reviews, inspired choice, spontaneously created. The mural will be immersive up to the ceiling and might involve some interactive lighting as well.

Peter and Gabe moved and seconded to use BAC funds to hire One World Catering to provide food for the grantee reception. Passed unanimously with Lynn Schwartzberg graciously hiding under the table.

This seems a good moment for yr secretary to thank Lynn, sincerely and utterly, for feeding us every month, almost. This is an act of thoughtfulness and sustenance that, no matter how creatively and sometimes critically portrayed in the minutes, is deeply appreciated. Typing this paragraph is making me hungry. Where are the Lemon Bars?

Back to Sean’s report: New City Website has launched! Ooh, Ahh was said by all as the glorious new site was shown on screen. Web 1.0, goodbye!

Alain moved to approve sets of minutes from two or three previous months, as we had (a) forgotten and (b) lacked a quorum to get this done earlier. Some of these yellowed documents hearkened back to February, but all were approved, pending the removal of typos.

Abby introduced our newest commission member: playwright Emily Goodson. She works for IU Optometry, and is married to Gabe Gloden, the managing director of Cardinal Stage. She writes plays, some of which have been performed by BPP. She also has two small children, who were cryogenically but temporarily frozen so that she could attend the meeting. She also has an accounting background, so look out, Martina!

We introduced ourselves to Emily and learned about each other in the process! Emily agreed to stay on the commission for the time being. We thanked Mayor Hamilton for appointing her.

Susan Sandberg came to talk about People's Park. She handed out a poem by an inmate at Monroe County Jail, indicating not only talent but also a desire to be at the center of the community, which to him is Peoples Park.

Susan challenged the arts commissioners to think about this park and see what artistic ideas we have. (There is a mayor-appointed safety commission to look at People's Park.) What kinds of changes could we make? Without taking away anyone's right to be in a public space? Yet downtown merchants are not happy...fighting, drug use, sex on the statuary, etc. "Homelessness" is a loaded word – being conflated with activity that has nothing to do with homelessness. It's the naughty and illegal behavior that Susan objects to, as well as the rough handling of the statuary.

Seminary Square park is also a problem area but the front-line concern is Peoples Park. Mayor's increased patrols are there to keep the peace.

The poem: "New Leaf, New Life," emanated from a group that provides service to addicts in recovery dorm. Susan teaches theater and music classes on Saturday mornings, as well as giving inmates an opportunity to write. She is a truly nice person, causing yrs truly to reflect on the paucity of his own service to the world. Is the world better off with or without him? What sort of service makes the most sense? Who can say? He will have another lemon bar and think of these things off-line.

Anyway, Kirkwood, the place, the name, the idea of it as the artery of Bloomington, was aspirational to the poet. He wants to belong where the heart of the city is. How do we redesign the park in an active way? Arts driven space, perhaps? Discussion ensued.

There will be a new report out by the city tomorrow. "Chasing Poverty Out isn't the Answer." Susan: City spends 300K on social service grants to nonprofits as well as its own funds. But will it ever be enough?

Solve problems, not just sweep them away, Susan Sandberg says.

Abby suggested that this is a pretty big problem for the Arts Commission! And you thought it would be a short meeting!

Angelo: Santa Monica did something similar – Urban Institute has done something on this.

Yr secretary was too busy typing all this eloquence to get the chance to offer his own partial solution, but authorship being ownership, he humbly suggests that the City recreate the original usage of People's Park, which was essentially a marketplace, un or little regulated, with spontaneous guitar and bongo playing, and hippies (these today would be punks and yupsters, and who knows who else) selling everything from homemade jewelry to zucchini to clothing.

Overall, we seem to agree, the point is to activate the space, to give it a purpose rather than just an unfortunately gathering ground for a single subgroup. (Yr secretary notes that this spot has been cursed ever since the City of previous administrations long ago cut down the giant walnut trees and created the present-day purposeless "plaza." He thanks the Mayor and all for trying to lift this curse.)

We agreed to think more deeply and have more discussion about this challenge from Susan Sandberg.

Bikes on Sidewalks? There was that too, a looming issue in the city, raised by someone, perhaps Susan, perhaps Gabe, perhaps the ever-biking Sean. This is also going to be discussed and it might be useful for the BAC to weigh in here, too.

(Yr secretary once lived in the leafy suburb of Lake Forest, Illinois, where bikes were encouraged on sidewalks outside the central business district and banned from sidewalks in the heart of downtown. This worked well and meant that kids on bikes were safer and parents more relaxed about letting their kids ride, so yr secretary says: let 'em use the sidewalk and avoid bad drivers like himself.) The bike issue is unresolved but input is welcome. Perhaps a new rule that all bikes should be sprayed orange.

Our Arts Project Grants celebration will be held in the Showers atrium June 28, 5:30-6:30. Going to see if Alex Crowley will speak. Mayor coming. (Spoiler alert: Alex wasn't there, Mayor spoke, food was terrific, people stayed and talked.)

The concern was raised that it's getting harder to get publicity in the paper, because the H-T has shrunk its staff to the detriment of the arts. Perhaps we need to think about how to spread the word.

Sean: Helpful to get more of the arts community out to the ceremony.

Sean wants to hire an independent consultant to review our grant process. Sean can spend his own money and hire someone, thus leaving us yet another month of projected Treasurer's Reports with no activity.

Abby: Voces Novae is going to do a musical version of Vonnegut's Requiem. Raising big money. Great idea. National excitement!

Alain: BLEMF went very well. Working with Early Music America on a big version next year. There is going to be a two-day conference the next day on Music, Business, and Peace – organized by both the IU Jacobs School of Music and the Kelley School of Business.

Francesca is going on leave for a while. Will she move to Spain? Just travel around? Sign up for Elon Musk's trip to Mars? We will wait and see.

September meeting has been pushed back to the 20th. Adjust your calendars.

Adjourned, 6:02 p.m. So much faster than Sally!