Minutes – June 28 – BRC on Arts and Non-Profits

Russ called the hybrid meeting to order at 12:02

Members attending in person: Russ Grazier, Robin Albert, Renee Giffroy, Jason Goodrich, Larry Yerdon, Kathy Somssich.

Members attending online: Barbara Massar, Beth Falconer, Martha Fuller Clark.

Also present: Information Officer Stephanie Seacord, Laura Johnson, Mayor Rick Becksted

The Mayor joined the meeting and expressed his interest in having this committee become permanent.

A motion was made by Jason, seconded by Renee and voted on to approve the minutes unanimously.

Russ reported on a proposal to consider temporary art installations at crosswalks all over the city to promote local and student artists and make Portsmouth more pedestrian friendly. The project could start small in outlying neighborhoods and if successful, spread throughout the city. There are limited funds available.

Robin feels the art should not be donated and would support the effort as long as there is funding for the artists. Renee suggests it not be just crosswalks and that themes could be developed. Jason supports bringing art outside for people to experience and referenced the Lego-Bridge in Wuppertal, Germany. He suggested an art project transforming the Information kiosk at Market Square into a lighthouse with QR code capabilities for event announcements.

Sen. MFC noted that the challenge would be to ensure quality and suggestion a committee to review standards and avoid controversies. Russ suggested the neighborhoods provide input and to what kind of art would interest the residents. He suggested connecting with Portsmouth400 for this project.

Barbara spoke of the Market Square Day logo contest and how they offer parameters and ideas of what the artists might do. She suggested the crosswalk project be started anywhere but downtown to test it out and avoid downtown traffic issues.

Russ suggested that funding could come from the city or ARPA funds.

Kathy, Renee and MFC volunteered to be on a sub-committee to discuss the crosswalk art project. Kathy will coordinate and will inform Russ and Barbara about any meetings.

A discussion about Portsmouth400 and how this committee could fit in followed. Stephanie reported that reins will be in hand by the end of July and a representative of Portsmouth400 will come and speak to this committee about their plans end of July or August.

Russ asked about whether AFTA (Americans for the Arts) will have another Economic Prosperity Study soon. Robin should report at the next meeting about the overdue AFTA study.

Larry feels this committee should play an active role in Portsmouth400. A book of photographs of 100 objects that represent the city's history is supposedly being planned.

A discussion regarding marketing Portsmouth as a destination followed. Whether marketing is a role of this committee is a question.

Ben Vancamp of the Chamber Collaborative added that the factor limiting marketing is funding. A members' cooperative funding idea never gained traction. The pandemic might have changed members' opinions. He asked if there are state funds that can be leveraged.

Sen. MFC stated that the first thing is to create a proposal to promote arts in the city with Nancy Carmer. This proposal should designate what is it we want to do and how much money is needed for a 3 year program.

Mayor Becksted stated that $300K was allocated for Artspeak for advertising over 3 years. He is interested in exploring a "roundup program," in which retail stores round up the bill to raise money for a specific cause, for example, the arts.

Russ suggested that we work with the city to promote ways of finding funding for artists in the community.

Ben Vancamp suggested that we form a small working group to investigate funding possibilities.

Barbara suggested a Request for Proposal (RFP) to look for partners to create marketing programs and generate grants.

Ben: The Chamber would rely on a professional outside marketing agency to develop a marketing program.

Larry supports the arts organizations pooling their resources to promote the area together. He thinks this committee could play a part in such a collaboration.

Stephanie: The Chamber's GoPortsmouth website already addresses the issue and is vetted. We shouldn't lose sight of what's out there.

Jason, Larry and Beth have volunteered to work on goals for marketing. Beth would like to identify funding streams to leverage this opportunity and work with the city, build long term revenue streams, and test our collaboration before the Portsmouth400 event.

A discussion followed regarding a Cultural Master Plan for the city which would be driven by City Council and adapted to the Master Plan including plans for the next 5 to 10 years after the pandemic.

Mayor Becksted: The pandemic has changed opinions on the city's thinking about functioning as one community. The Arts is what Portsmouth is all about and should be emphasized in its long-term planning.

Sen. MFC suggest putting the ideas of a new Cultural Plan before the city. Such a plan must be endorsed and overseen by the city council.

Robin supports an RFP about developing a public arts project. The city has a process to put art on public land. Russ added that developers should consider live/work space for artists in the community.

Barbara supports an effort to find out more about what happened to Artspeak and the funds left over after their dissolution. Nancy Carmer is noted as a good resource for this information.

Russ inquired about the progress of adding the PortsmouthNH.com link to the websites of our organizations. Two challenges have emerged: where to put the link on the website and having the staff to find the time to add the link. Russ hopes to get the link on all websites and will check up in 6 months to see if it's having an impact and if there's been any pushback. A check-in with PortsmouthNH.com to see from which websites the interest is coming is planned.

The next meeting is Monday, July 26.

Jason moved and Larry seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Russ adjourned the meeting at 1:05 pm.

Submitted by Kathy Somssich