

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, September 7, 2023. Meeting Minutes – In Person Meeting
3rd Floor, County Administration Building, 20 Grove St., Somerville, NJ 08876

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Commission President Rory Britt in compliance with the Open Public Meeting Notice Act, Chapter 231, PL 1975.

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Commissioners: Rory Britt, Donnetta Bishop-Johnson, Kathy Faulks, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Marge Sullivan.

Absent: Maritza Martinez, Edwin Scannell

Excused: Natalie Pineiro

Staff: Walter Lane, Kaitlin Bundy, Robert Meyer, Katie Himics, Tom Boccino, Josephine Taranto

Advisory Members: Aldo Adiazola, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Kathleen Palmer, Gale Skirkanish, Leslie Workman, Margareta Warlick

Absent: Hector Herrera

Excused: Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks,

Members of the Public: Barbara Beckley, Don Esposito

Commissioner Liaison: Melanie Marano

IV. Approval of June 1, 2023, Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

V. Correspondence

Marge Sullivan was given the floor and thanked the Commission, County and staff for their sympathy on the passing of her daughter.

VI. Staff Reports/Old Business

The following reports were made by Kaitlin Bundy:

Local Arts Program Grant. The Local Arts Program Grant (LAP) are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to primarily re-grant out to local non-profits and municipalities.

2023 Grant. Staff conducted interim Zoom conversations with all 15 re-grant organizations throughout the summer and met with the Commission's state representative from the Arts Council, which Commissioner Melonie Marano and Director Walter Lane also attended. Staff are finalizing the final report paperwork for all re-grant organizations to be sent out in late September.

2024 Grant. Staff received notice in late July of the Commission's 2024 LAP funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts in the amount of \$217,000. The Request for Applications (RFA) for the 2024 LAP grant was released on July 26th, and applications are due to the Cultural & Heritage Office on September 15, 2023, by 4:00pm. No applications will be accepted after that deadline. Two technical assistance workshops were held in August to help potential applicants understand the grant and the application process.

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C&H Staffing Update. Killian Mann has been hired as the Commission's new part-time Special Projects Assistant. Killian has a master's degree from Monmouth University, where she is also an adjunct professor in world history.

4-H Fair. The Somerset County 4-H Fair took place on August 9, 10 and 11 from 10:00am to 10:00pm. C&H staff and several Commission and Advisory members tabled in the county government tent providing the public with information about C&H and various arts and history non-profits. Staff additionally ran a number of demonstrations throughout the fair. Staff thanked those Commission and Advisory members that were able to help out during the fair.

Diversity Festival. The Somerset County Diversity Festival will be held on October 15, 2023, in Somerville. C&H staff are part of the committee that plans and executes the festival. A number of fun activities are being planned for the festival day, including bounce houses, face painters, arts and craft activities and live musical performances.

Middlebrook Symposium. The Commission is helping to fund the Middlebrook Symposium taking place on October 28, 2023, from 9:00am to 3:30pm at Raritan Valley Community College. Somerset County Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson will provide the opening welcome for the event. Registration can be found at <http://heritagetrail.org>.

C&H 40th Anniversary. 2023 marks the 40th anniversary of the formation of the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission. The Farm to Frame exhibit that was held in March and toured throughout the county this summer was used to highlight the Commission. Additionally, a small exhibit showcasing images of the founding Commission members will be on display at the County Administration Building in the 3rd floor display cabinets in October. Staff are additionally working to commemorate this anniversary at the upcoming Excellence in the Arts Awards ceremony in October.

The following reports were made by Robert Meyer:

CHPP Grant. The County History Partnership Program Grant (CHPP) are funds the Commission receives annually from the New Jersey State Historical Commission to primarily re-grant out funds to local non-profits and municipalities.

2023 Grant. Interim reports were due on June 19. Staff has received reports for all eight re-grantees. Staff submitted the interim report to the State, which was due on June 30. The 2023 final report will be sent out in late September. We encourage any special projects re-grantees to complete the report once their project has concluded so that the remainder of their funds can be released.

2024 Grant. Staff received notice in late July of the Commission's 2024 CHPP funding from the New Jersey State Historical Commission in the amount of \$87,750, with \$24,000 for operating and \$63,750 for re-grants. The RFA for the 2024 CHPP grant was released on July 26, and applications are due to the Cultural & Heritage office on September 15, 2023, by 4:00pm. No applications will be accepted

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Cooperative Marketing Grant. The Cooperative Marketing Grant are funds the Commission receives from the NJ Division of Travel and Tourism to market and promote the Commission's Heritage Tourism event, Journey Through the Past.

2023 Grant. Print ads have run in Bucks County Magazine, Edible Jersey, and the Hook Magazine. Digital ads with Edible Jersey and Hudson Valley Magazine are currently running.

2024 Grant. Staff submitted the application for the 2024 Cooperative Marketing Grant which was due on June 14. Staff expects to be notified of funding in late September or early October.

Gallery. The 2023 Senior Art Show opened on August 3 and will run through September 11. This exhibit celebrates the many talented senior citizens living in Somerset County. A closing reception for the participating artists will be held on September 12. Additionally, 15 pieces were selected by an independent judge to advance to the State Senior Citizen Art Show. Following the Senior Art Show will be the 2023 Journey Through the Past exhibit, with the third-floor display cases commemorating the 40th anniversary of the Cultural & Heritage Commission. The Farm to Frame traveling gallery ended on August 30th at the Montgomery Library and the Bernardsville Public Library. Over the course of the exhibit, we heard from both venue staff and visitors about how much they enjoyed the artwork and wished it could stay up for longer.

1770's Festival. Staff will be tabling at the Park Commission's annual 1770s festival which will be held on October 1, from 11:30am to 4:00pm at the Environmental Education Center in Lord Stirling Park. C&H has traditionally tabled at this event, as it is a great way to do a final promotional push for Journey with many members of the public actively attending the festival to get the booklets for Journey.

The following reports were made by Katie Himics:

National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) American Rescue Plan (ARP) Sub-granting for Local Arts Agencies Grant. Funds from the National Endowment for the Arts are intended to help support jobs in the arts sector, keep the doors open to arts organizations, and assist the field in its response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In June, staff prepared the semi-annual status report to the NEA, and the interim reports for the six funded organizations were due July 26th.

New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant. The Cultural & Heritage Commission has been awarded \$18,500 through the New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant to fund the design and development of a Docent Training Program. Staff are currently in the contract stage of accepting the Project Grant funds. This is the first year that Cultural & Heritage has been awarded the New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant.

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History on the Green. The second annual History on the Green event took place on Saturday, July 22, 2023, on the Courthouse Green in Somerville from 10:00am-4:00pm. This living history event focused on the Washington Rochambeau Pop-Up Encampment. This was a very successful event, drawing visitors to Somerville to learn about and enjoy Somerset County's Revolutionary War history and ended with a special parade and finale performance by the Massachusetts Middlesex County Volunteer Fife and Drum band. Staff received many thanks and good comments from participating organizations letting us know that they enjoyed the event's activities and connecting with the public.

Journey Through the Past. Staff are currently preparing for our upcoming 18th annual Somerset County Journey Through the Past, which will take place on Saturday, October 7, 2023, from 10:00am-5:00pm and on Sunday, October 8, 2023, from Noon-4:00pm. During this family-friendly history event, 30 historic sites across Somerset County will be open and free to the public. We are currently working with our Graphics department and Print Shop to create the guidebooks, activity listings, and trading cards for this year's event. You can visit www.SCHistoryWeekend.com to see the most up-to-date information about the historic sites participating and their tours, programs, and activities.

Excellence in the Arts. The Excellence in the Arts awards are dedicated to honoring those individuals and organizations demonstrating exemplary leadership and dedication to fostering the fine and performing arts in Somerset County. The Cultural & Heritage Commission received 7 nominations, which have been thoroughly reviewed by the Arts Awards Committee. Selected nominees will be notified in early September, and we will be hosting an awards ceremony towards the end of October to honor these individuals.

The following reports were made by Joesphine Taranto:

Historic Preservation Grant Program. The Historic Preservation Grant Program is part of the Somerset County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

2022 Grant. All contracts have been signed, and the first payment has been released.

2023 Grant. All recommendations from the Advisory Committee and Cultural & Heritage Commission will be brought to the County Commissioners for their review of the 2023 allocations in the coming weeks.

County Historic Preservation Projects:

Van Horne House.

Phase 3 of the Van Horne House restoration is set to start in the spring. The bid for contractors will go out in November. Phase 3 includes painting the exterior of the house, as well as the restoration of the west wing, window repairs, restoration of the back porch, and a new ADA accessibility ramp.

Van Doren-Howe House.

The Historic Structures Report has been completed by Connolly & Hickey Historic Architects; staff are waiting on its transmittal for review.

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First Dutch Reformed Church, Stained Glass Windows Project.

Phase IV work is being postponed until the spring. The glass is in stable condition and in no immediate danger.

County Court House, Façade Restoration Project.

The County Courthouse will be undergoing a façade restoration, which will include masonry repairs to the marble, addressing some spalling issues, as well as window restoration. County staff will be meeting with consultant Mills & Schnoering Architects in mid-September.

Lord Memorial Fountain

In July, the Lord Memorial Fountain was turned on after a three-year hiatus.

County Owned Historic Sites Assessment.

County staff are awaiting the completion of the Historic Sites Assessment from the consultants. Staff attended three site visits, one in Monmouth County, one in Ocean County, and one in Passaic County. Case studies included in the final report will be based on these site visits.

VII. New Business/Action Items

2024 Local Arts Program Grant Funding. The New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) awarded the Commission \$217,000 in Local Arts Program funding for 2024. The NJSCA does not divide this money specifically into regrant funds versus operating funds for the Commission. Kaitlin asked the Commission to discuss and make a motion on the max dollar amount they would like to approve to be considered for the 2024 re-grant program. The Commission discussed possible maximum dollar amounts. **Motion** to offer up to \$200,000.00 for the 2024 LAP re-grant program made by Kathy Faulks and seconded by Donnetta Bishop-Johnson, passed.

C&H Award Ceremonies. Over the past several years, to combat against Covid-19 and reduce staff stress levels, the Commission has moved both its Historic Preservation and History Awards and Excellence in the Arts award ceremonies to October to spread out Commission events. Currently October has become overly saturated with events. Kaitlin asked the Commission to discuss moving future award events back to late May. The Commission discussed the benefits of holding the awards ceremonies in May. During the discussion it was noted that May is National Preservation Month. **Motion** to move both awards ceremonies to late May made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest, passed.

Draft Long Range Plan. Commission and Advisory members were sent the draft Long Range Plan for review on August 18, 2023. Comments will be accepted on the plan from Commission and Advisory members until September 21, 2023. Staff will then synthesize all comments received into a chart indicating what changes have and have not been made. This document will be distributed to Commission and Advisory members prior to the October 5, 2023, Commission meeting, where a final discussion and vote will occur on this draft. Following approval of the Long Range Plan, the staff will

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move to begin the process of adopting the plan as part of the County's master plan, where an additional public hearing will occur prior to adoption.

VIII. Somerset County Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Liaison Melanie Marano

1. Commissioner Marano praised the Commission for obtaining a New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant for the Docent Training Program. She noted that there is a need for educated people at historic sites on a committed basis. The Docent Training Program will help sites and organizations keep their doors open to the public.
2. It was announced that the new library in Montgomery Township has a state-of-the-art archival machine for the preservation of documents, photos and more. The machine is open to the public for free. Commissioner Marano encouraged all Somerset County residents to give the machine a try.

IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Kathy Faulks announced the Ghost is Clear paranormal investigators, with special guest TV celebrity Bruce Tango, will present at the Abraham Staats House on September 9, 2023, at 6:30pm. Register with Eventbrite at <https://www.staatshouse.org>.

X. Advisory Committee Comments

1. Rikki Massand stated that the 2nd Story Downtown Somerville tour, held on June 11, 2023, and the reception at the Historic Wallace House, exceeded their expectations and hosted 68 people. He wished to acknowledge the help of Linda and Bob Barth, Marge and Dennis Sullivan, Natalie Pineiro, and Paul Soltis. Rikki also noted that the Montgomery Township Landmarks Committee brochure has been printed and is available to the public.
2. Leslie Workman announced that the Farmstead Arts Center will host "High Fashion, High Art, High Tea" on Sunday, October 1, 2023, from 2:00pm to 4:30pm. She also announced that performances of "Agatha Christie: A Murder is Announced" will be occurring on October 20, 21, 27, & 28 at 7:30pm and Oct 22 & 29 at 2:00pm. Tickets available at www.farmsteadartscenter.org.
3. Aldo Adriazola noted that fun events can be found at VisitNJ.com. Aldo also announced that the Branchburg Country Fair will be taking place on September 23. More information is available at <https://branchburgcountryfair.org/>.
4. Robert Grundfest noted that he types in Google "What to do this weekend" and finds all kinds of things to do. He recommended subscribing to local newsletters as well.

XI. Public Comments

There were no public comments.

Announcements/Other News:

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The next SCC&HC meeting will be via Zoom on Thursday, October 5, 2023.

XII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.
Adjournment 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

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