

SOMERSET COUNTY CULTURAL & HERITAGE COMMISSION
Thursday, October 5, 2023. Meeting Minutes – Hybrid Live/Virtual Zoom Meeting

I. Call to Order

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

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Commissioners: Donnetta Bishop-Johnson, Natalie Pineiro, Kathy Faulks, Robert Grundfest, Jonathan Hress, Maritza Martinez, Marge Sullivan

Absent: Edwin Scannell

Excused: Rory Britt

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

Advisory Members: Aldo Adriazola, Sean Blinn, Brian Faulks, Rose Kopf, Rikki Massand, Gale Skirkanish, Leslie Workman

Excused: Margareta Warlick, Kathleen Palmer

Members of the Public: Jessie Havens

Commissioner Liaison: Melonie Marano

IV. Approval of September 7, 2023, Minutes

Motion to accept the minutes amended to include the attendance of Aldo Adriazola and Gale Skirkanish made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Robert Grundfest. Passed.

V. Correspondence

Kaitlin noted that staff received a thank you note from Marge Sullivan for the Commissions' expression of sympathy for her loss. Staff also received the League of New Jersey Historical Society September newsletter and the Van Harlingen Historical Society's newsletter.

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. Final reports have been sent out to all 2023 re-grantees and are due back on January 12th, 2024. Staff encourages any special project re-grantees to complete the report once their project is complete so that staff can release final funding to those organizations. General operating support re-grantees must report on the entire calendar year before funds can be released.

2024 Grant. Staff received 21 applications for the 2024 LAP grant round, with requests totaling \$547,482.92. All applications have been sent to an independent peer panel, who will review all applications independently before meeting as the full panel to discuss the grants later this month.

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1770s Festival. Staff attended the Park Commission's 1770's Festival on Sunday, October 1st, 2023. The Staff thanked Kathy Faulks for helping during the event and for helping to promote Journey Through the Past.

Middlebrook Symposium. The Commission is helping to fund the Middlebrook Symposium taking place on October 28th, 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>. The County has also helped print the second round of informational postcards for the event and have asked all participating Journey Through the Past sites to display and promote the symposium.

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 to local non-profits and municipalities.

2023 Grant. Final reports have been sent out to all 2023 re-grantees and are due back on January 12th, 2024. Staff encourages any special project re-grantees to complete the report once their project is complete so that staff can release final funding to those organizations. General operating support re-grantees must report on the entire calendar year before funds can be released.

2024 Grant. Staff received 7 applications for the 2024 CHPP grant round, with requests totaling \$864,453.33. All applications have been sent to an independent peer panel, who will review all applications independently before meeting as the full panel to discuss the grants later this month.

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 in Bucks County Magazine, Edible Jersey, and the Hook Magazine and digital ads with Edible Jersey and Hudson Valley Magazine have run throughout the past months. Staff are working to finalize their payments.

2024 Grant. Staff were informed on September 20th that our 2024 grant was approved in the amount of \$12,450. This is an increase of \$2,400 from last year. Staff are currently working on preparing the contract for submission.

Gallery. The 2023 Journey Through the Past exhibit opened in the Cultural & Heritage gallery on September 15th. The third-floor display cases commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Cultural & Heritage Commission as well as the history of Somerset County. The next exhibit will be Pieced Together Quilters and will open on October 13th. On October 2nd, staff were informed of the winner for the State Senior Art Show. Somerset County artist Leokadia Stanik received first place in the professional print category. There were also six honorable mentions: Nick DeGaetano in non-professional acrylic painting, Alison Diner in non-professional pastels, Wayne Mathisen in professional

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acrylic painting, Ed Caravan in professional digital art, Terry Mayfield in professional mixed media, and Debbi Limoli in professional sculpture.

Journey Through the Past. 30 historic sites throughout Somerset County will be open to the public, free of charge, on Saturday, October 7th, from 10am to 5pm, and Sunday, October 8th, from noon to 4pm. For this year's Journey, we had print ads in Bucks County Magazine, Edible Jersey, the Hook Magazine, and the Star Ledger, with digital ads run through Edible Jersey, Hudson Valley Magazine, New Jersey Skylands, and the Star Ledger. Journey was added to several online event calendars, including those hosted by the Downtown Somerville Alliance and Somerset County Tourism as well as NJ Kids Online, NJ Leisure Guide, CentralJersey.com and Mommy Poppins. Journey Through the Past was also advertised on the digital billboard by the Somerset Patriots Ballpark. Promotional postcards were distributed to all 30 participating sites, all county libraries, the county senior wellness centers, hotels, and local farmers markets. Additionally, promotional material was handed out at this year's 4H Fair and at the 1770s Festival. The county's Public Information Office also sent out a press release and made social media posts highlighting the event.

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. This is the first year that Cultural & Heritage has been awarded the New Jersey Historical Commission Project Grant. Staff completed the contract stage of accepting the Project Grant funds, and a formal Request for Proposals (RFP) for consulting services was released on Monday, October 2nd. The RFP will be open for 30 days. The Commission will review proposals in November 2023, with the intention to award in December 2023, with a contract term from January 1st, 2024 to June 30th, 2024.

Diversity Festival. The Somerset County Diversity Festival will be held on Sunday, October 15th, 2023, from 12:00-4:00pm in Somerville. Cultural & Heritage staff are part of the committee that plans and executes the festival. A number of fun activities are being planned for this family-friendly, free festival day, including bounce houses, inflatable games, arts and crafts activities, face painting, a balloon artist, caricature artist, and live musical performances. We hope you will all join us at this year's Diversity Festival.

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. After thorough review of this year's nominations by the Arts Awards Committee, the Cultural & Heritage Commission notified the following 7 selected awardees: In the category of Arts in Education, Meghan Russo and Qing Yang; in the category of Arts in the

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Community, Lois Buesser, Shankhadip Chakraborty, American Theater Group, Downtown Somerville Alliance, and The Sieminski Theater. These individuals and organizations will be honored at an awards ceremony to be held on Thursday, October 26th, at the Sieminski Theater in Basking Ridge. Networking and light refreshments will be from 6:00-6:50pm, with the program beginning promptly at 7:00pm. We hope you will all join us in celebrating these awardees' contributions to the arts in Somerset County. Please contact us at CulturalHeritage@co.somerset.nj.us to RSVP if you are interested in attending.

The following reports were made by Josephine Taranto:

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

2023 Grant. All 2023 recommendations from the Advisory Committee and Commission will be brought to the County Commissioners for their review of the 2023 grant recommendations on October 10th, 2023.

County Historic Preservation Projects:

Van Doren-Howe House.

Staff met with the Somerset County Historical Society and Connolly & Hickey Architects for a project update on September 13th, 2023. Electricity has been restored to the house and the schematic plans for restoration are being prepared.

County Court House, Façade Restoration Project.

Staff met with Somerset County's Engineering team and Mills & Schnoering Architects to review the evaluation of the building's exterior. Proposed restoration includes masonry repairs to spalling marble and window restoration. Staff are currently waiting for cost estimates.

County Owned Historic Sites Assessment.

Staff have received a draft of the report, and it is being reviewed. It proposes several adaptive reuse suggestions, provides a maintenance toolkit, and a prioritization matrix.

VII. New Business/Action Items

Draft Long Range Plan. Commission and Advisory members were provided the comment log representing all of the comments received from Commission and Advisory members regarding the draft Long Range Plan. Staff asked the Commission if they had any comments on the chart. Kaitlin asked the Commission to put forth a motion accepting the plan. **Motion** to accept the Long Range Plan made by Marge Sullivan and seconded by Jonathan Hress. Passed.

Following approval of the Long Range Plan, staff will 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.

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VIII. Somerset County Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Liaison Melonie Marano

1. Commissioner Marano praised the Commission and Planning Team for the work done on the Long Range Plan.
2. Commissioner Marano thanked Cultural & Heritage for their contributions to a successful 1770s Festival. She noted that she is excited for this year's Journey Through the Past this coming weekend and the Somerset County Diversity Festival on October 15th, encouraging everyone to attend.

IX. Cultural & Heritage Commissioner Comments

1. Donnetta Bishop-Johnson announced that Frontline Arts is excited to host a visit of esteemed letterpress printer Amos Paul Kennedy Jr. at their studios from October 9th through October 11th. Making Good Trouble with Bad Printing with Amos Paul Kennedy Jr:
<https://www.frontlinearts.org/amos-paul-kennedy-jr-visit>

X. Advisory Committee Comments

1. Sean Blinn announced that the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a federal government agency, has released "Inspire! Grants for Small Museums." Applications are due on November 15th, 2023.
<https://www.ims.gov/news/ims-continues-support-museums-offering-six-grant-opportunities>
The Center for Contemporary Art opened a gallery titled "Kendra – A Celebration of Work by Contemporary Indo-American Artists" on September 30th. The Center will be hosting Artpalooza on October 13th. <https://ccabedminster.org>
Sean also announced that he wrote a chapter in an upcoming book titled An Accessible Past: Making Historic Sites More Accessible. It is edited by Heather Pressman, published by Roman and Littlefield and is expected to release in December 2023.
2. Leslie Workman announced that the Farmstead Arts Center's "High Fashion, High Art, High Tea" was a very successful fundraiser. She noted that "Agatha Christie: A Murder is Announced" will be performed on October 20th, 21st, 27th, and 28th at 7:30pm and October 22nd & 29th, at 2:00pm. Tickets are available at www.farmsteadartscenter.org. The Farmstead is also looking for a marketing director.
3. Aldo Adiazola noted that the Branchburg Country Fair has been rescheduled to October 22nd and will be held at White Oak Park, 235 Baird Road, Branchburg, NJ 08876.
<https://branchburgcountryfair.org>
4. Rose Kopf noted that the Dr. John Vermeule House is open for tours the third Saturday of the month from 10:00am to 12:00pm and will be hosting a Revolutionary Housewives of New Jersey event on October 14th, 2023. <https://www.gbhsnj.org/historical-houses>

XI. Public Comments

1. Jessie Havens noted that The Zion-Wertsville Bridge (aka the Rock Brook Bridge) in Hillsborough and Montgomery Townships received reinforced concrete arch liner with concrete fill for the two stone arch spans, reinforced concrete relief slab for the steel stringer span, and steel tube railing as part of a rehabilitation project to repair damage done by Hurricane Ida.

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Announcements/Other News:

The next SCC&HC meeting will be via Zoom on Thursday, November 2, 2023.

XII. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn made by Jonathan Hress and seconded by Maritza Martinez. Passed.
Adjournment 8:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Faulks, Secretary

DRAFT

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