

Meeting of the Arts and Cultural Commission

May 20, 2024

In Conference Room A at Portsmouth City Hall

Attending: Emma Stratton, chair, Ken Goldman, vice-chair, Jeffrey Cooper, secretary, Theresa McDowell, Jessica Dickey, Eli Kaynor, Karen Rosania, Robin Albert Lehman, Genevieve Aichele, City Councilor Kate Cook, Catherine Saarela by Zoom,

Representing City Staff – Sean Clancy

Prior to the meeting Emma Stratton circulated descriptions of three workgroups as decided upon by the leadership team based upon the dot voting at the April 29 meeting.

1. **Communication**
2. **Collaboration and Resources**
3. **Diversity**

Along with a meeting schedule for the upcoming year, being the third Monday of each month at 1 PM. Conference Room A will be reserved until 2:30 each month.

Minutes from April 29 were approved unanimously,

The meeting opened with a brief check in question, followed by the “Burning Issues” portion of the Agenda.

Karen Rosania reported on the status of a proposed zoning ordinance to allow in-home artist studios to be used for art classes. The ordinance creates 2 categories

- By right to hold classes of two students at a time, with no employees
- By Conditional Use Permit for up to 6 students and one employee

Councilor Cook noted that for classes up to 6 students the CUP is easier to achieve than a Special Exception which is required by the current ordinance, that it is awarded by the Planning Board rather than the Zoning Board.

The Planning Board has recommended passage, the first reading at the City Council is to be held the evening of this meeting, with opportunity for public comment, and second reading is to be held June 17 which will include a public hearing.

Motion was made, seconded and passed unanimously:

- To authorize Karen Rosania to write a letter on behalf of the Commission in support of the proposed change to the zoning ordinance.

Jeffrey Cooper introduced members of Portsmouth Makers Space, - Jeff Gunz, Peter Boyd and Neil Rudnick - who described the challenges currently facing that organization.

- Makers Space is a non-profit organization very active in the Seacoast Community. They provide art and craft educational programming, workshop and studio space to over 200 members

- They are funded wholly by membership fees with no support from the City or any other benefactor.
- They have been housed on Morning Street for the past 12 years, but their lease which is ending in 2 ½ years is unlikely to be renewed due to several challenges with the building, thus they are actively seeking a new location, whether by rental or by purchase.
- They currently have 9000 SF, which would be sufficient in their new location.
- Note that while they have a 2 ½ year timeline, the actual move would require at least a year thus the pragmatics are that they will need to resolve a new arrangement in about 1 ½ year.
- Karen Rosania asked if the experience of other NH Makers Space's offered a model that could be followed. In Nashua, the City itself has provided a space.
- Eli Kaynor pointed out that a lot of people in Portsmouth are unfamiliar with Makers Space, that increased visibility would be helpful in garnering support for any action the City might take.
- Genevieve Aichele suggested that Makers Space write a letter to the Commission outlining their needs with suggestions as to ways we can help, and that the letter would be appropriately directed to Workgroup 2 to explore ways the City can be of assistance.

Emma Stratton updated the Commission on the status of negotiations regarding the topic of solar panels in the Historic District. Currently the City Council is considering a proposal to remove jurisdiction over solar panels from the HDC. The HDC and the Planning Board have crafted an alternate plan to clarify the guidelines by which the HDC would consider solar panels, and this revised language would need to be approved by the Council as an amendment to the language currently proposed.

Motion was made, seconded and approved unanimously

- To authorize Emma Stratton to write a letter on behalf of the Commission in support of the position of the HDC and the Planning Board, and their amendment regarding solar panels in the Historic District

The first reading for the solar panel ordinance is at the June 3 City Council meeting

Councilor Cook updated the Commission on redevelopment of the South Meeting House, which is currently vacant. Two groups have expressed interest.

- VFW
- A neighborhood group which would like to see the building used as an arts space.

The building would need approximately \$500,000 in upgrades to meet occupancy codes, plus a significant annual maintenance cost. The City is planning to issue an RFP for re-use of this property, but at the moment has no timeline.

Emma Stratton updated the Commission on formation of the workgroups. Everyone is to send her their first and second choices for workgroup assignments within the next week. Assignments will be circulated the following week. Groups will have an opportunity to organize at the June 17 meeting.

Groups will be expected to meet on their own schedule between Commission meetings and report on their activities.