

Napa County Arts & Culture Commission (NCACC) • Meeting Minutes
Special Meeting • October 20, 2008 (4-6pm)

Napa County Transportation & Planning Agency (NCTPA)
707 Randolph Street, Suite 100 • Napa, CA 94559

Commissioners Present: Chair, Lee Block (Napa), Judith Caldwell (Yountville), Yvonne Henry (Calistoga), Debra Lee Hodge (American Canyon), Diane Damé Shepp (Napa County), Jon Lail (At Large), Margrit Biever Mondavi (At Large)

Staff Present: Kristina (ACNV), Kate Demarest (ACNV)

Absent: Sue Wollack (St. Helena), Eliot Hurwitz (NCT&PA)

4:00pm: Meeting Called to Order, Adjourned 5:20pm

I. Introduction (Lee Block)

NCACC Chair, Lee Block, described this special meeting as a means of identifying those areas in the arts and culture arena that are not being supported and needs that are not being met. The Commissioners are interested in understanding what problems the NCACC should address. Each Commissioner introduced him or herself to the members of the public in attendance.

II. Public Comment

Nick Cann: Nick has been a professional artist since 1965 and is a current member of ACNV. Nick noted the importance of elevating local arts and artists in the Valley. He feels that not enough people in Napa know about local artists. In his own case, Nick does work in LA and across the country but very little locally. Nick observed that Napa wineries seem happy to promote artists from outside the area and even bring international art into the valley but, although there are many professional artists here in Napa, the wineries don't seem to be familiar with them. Nick believes that over time Napa could become another Santa Fe. It would require developing a more 'artistic' scene, including things like public art, combined with advertising outside of the Valley. Commissioner T Beller observed that this effort would benefit from a partnership with the Destination Bureau.

Nick is also participating in the ACNV Arts Education program. He had no prior experience with teaching art to children but the response from the students has been fantastic. Nick reported that student's grades went up by 3% last year because of the incorporation of art in the classroom. Commissioner DLH remarked that it has been her experience that art in the classroom helps improved a child's self-esteem.

Kathy Lund: Kathy is an emerging artist and the part-time Open Studios coordinator for ACNV. Kathy reported that despite the 21 year history of Open Studios, there is still no dependable outside funding for the program. Each year, ACNV staff must solicit funding from a multitude of sources in the Valley. Even though visitors from all over the Bay Area attend Open Studios, there is no support of the program as part of the destination strategy. Commissioner Yvonne Henry asked how other locations fund their programs. Kathy noted that she and other ACNV staff will be meeting with Open Studios coordinators from around the Bay Area to discuss things such as sources of funding.

Yvonne Henry also questioned whether existing city or county ordinances present a hindrance to artists. Kathy noted that St. Helena requires that artists obtain a permit in order to have their studios open to the public during the two weekends of the tour. This year the St. Helena City Council waived the fees normally associated with this permit.

Margrit Mondavi suggested that developing a large-scale arts festival akin to Sausalito could be used to bring in revenue to support not only the OS program but the arts sector as a whole. Such a festival would also elevate the awareness of the arts in Napa.

Kathy voiced her strong feeling that art is the individual expression of a person's inner truth. At this point it is critically important that as many political organizations as possible make a clear statement of the importance of the arts not only to our community but in life as well. Kathy envisioned a community arts center that would provide space for all disciplines and activities – plays, singing, literary, artist workshops. Such a place could also provide facilities for ACNV.

Kerry Smith: Kerry raised the issue of zoning regulations as they pertain to artists. There is only one zoning area -- commercial limited -- that permits art studios and galleries. Kerry also noted that regulations for agricultural preserve districts allow for the display of but NOT the sale of art. This affects wineries located in agricultural preserve districts. In general regulations that are not friendly to artists have been developed without any input from the artists and are based upon invalid assumptions. As an example, some regulations are designed to keep Napa from turning into a Disneyland with posters and t-shirts. This assumes that there is no difference between fine art and tourist souvenirs. The artist community has long been invisible and without representation.

Commission Chair Lee Block thanked Kerry for all the information she presented. It sheds light on an issue between politicians and artists. Commissioner T Beller voiced her interest in establishing a sub-committee to focus on these artist-specific issues and act as an artists advocacy committee. The Commission will serve as a bridge between artists and the political community.

Lowell Downey: Lowell moved to Napa from San Francisco 15 years ago. He and his wife have a long history with the arts in San Francisco but he decided to move to Napa to build his own theater company. Lowell shared some of his experiences within the art world:

- SF Mayor Agnos commissioned a study that showed 1 out of 11 jobs in SF is arts-related. Recognizing the importance of the arts to the community, the Mayor then built his budget based upon that study.
- Artists throughout the country have a long history of building communities in areas that aren't popular only to watch as these areas then become gentrified and artists are priced out of the communities they built.
- It is important to provide justification for supporting the arts as a separate entity. In Napa's case this would mean support of art without a straight connection to wine and food. Commissioner T Beller agreed that art should be independently supported but noted that it makes economic sense to piggyback with existing wine and food promotions.

Lowell commented that his recent experience with the public art commission for the new parking garage was very negative. Although he had experience bringing public art to San Francisco, he was not invited to present to the committee and felt locked out of the process. Lowell stressed how important it will be for the NCACC to provide direction and guidelines as to how the public art process will work to bring art to the community. He described a policy in other locales that requires artists to include neighborhood input into any public art design. It is mandatory that an artist interview neighbors to understand what the community wants.

Commission Chair Lee Block noted that ACNV is currently conducting an economic impact study of the arts in Napa and will publish the results of that study when they are available.

The NCACC closed the public comment period with a few comments:

- Yvonne Henry expressed appreciation of the willingness of all attendees to come and share information that will help the Commission move forward more quickly.
- Diane Damé Shepp clarified that, although they work in partnership, the NCACC and ACNV are different and independent organizations.
- T Beller noted that the NCACC will focus on establishing consistency across the County.
- Lee Block encouraged everyone to attend the regular monthly NCACC meetings.

III. Commission Discussion

The Commissioners discussed the zoning issues related to the arts. Some items of note:

- Are there things being done in other communities that make them more attractive to artists? These could include special services or support.
- Would it make sense to approach the owners of downtown buildings to push them to allow exhibitions in the windows of empty buildings?
- There is a definite need for advocacy on behalf of artists where government zoning regulations and permit requirements are concerned.
- Jon Lail would be interested in information on how other cities, such as Walnut Creek and Sausalito, handle permit issues. He noted that CA regulations, including handicapped parking and restroom access, along with insurance requirements make it almost impossible to legally work out of a home.
- Other Bay Area communities have developed live-work space. Locally, Sawyer Tannery in Napa is being redone as live-work space and some requirements, such as handicapped parking, are being handled through common property areas. These types of regulations are harder to comply with in a private residence.
- Judith Caldwell is familiar with Rick Walter, a Walnut Creek lawyer, and she is willing to call him with questions or invite him to a meeting to discuss these issues.

Yvonne Henry announced that she would be attending a political forum in Calistoga and wanted to know if there were any questions the Commissioners would like her to ask the candidates. Commissioners discussed a number of areas including support of a % for art program, funding of arts education in the classroom, and the candidate's willingness to work with the NCACC to achieve specific goals. Diane Damé Shepp will develop and email to all the commissioners 6-8 specific questions for candidates that can be personalized for each community.

Kristina Young of ACNV will bring list of parties who expressed interest in working on a large-scale festival or arts advocacy. She will also bring a copy of the ACNV action plan for the Community Cultural Plan. Lee Block observed that the Arts Council is constitutionally better at implementing programs while the NCACC is better at building bridges to the political establishment.

Kristina handed out the ACNV executive summary of public art and benchmarking study as background before art consultant, Chandra Ceritto comes to present at the next NCACC meeting.

Meeting adjourned 5:20