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Arts & Culture Meeting #9

January 31, 2022, 4:00PM | 2 hours

Documented by: Ayanna Watkins

ATTENDEES

- Aaliyah Christina
- Clevan Tucker
- Henry Wishcamper
- Jeremy Dunn
- Kim Lewis Jay
- Lynn Basa
- Maritza Nazario
- Peter Vega
- Anezka Gocova
- Peggy Stewart
- Kevin Corbett
- Alicia Alexander
- Enrique Morales
- Jarol Rendon
- Julia deBettencourt
- Kristin Larsen
- Max Grinnell
- Rose Olea
- Rachael Smith
- Sophie Chishty
- Melanie Wang
- Cathy Breitenbach
- Gabriela Jirasek
- Jennifer Ligaya
- Julie Burros
- Krystal Amevor
- Natasha Tarpley
- Wisdom Baty
- Alison Zehr
- Vanessa Stokes
- Erin Harkey



MEETING GOAL

To further discuss successful and challenging moments taking place within the arts and culture realm and develop 3-5 potential policies per objective that align with the future needs of the city.

WHERE WE ARE

Step 1

We Are*Setting the Stage*

Step 2

We Have and Need*Develop A Policy Toolkit*

Step 3

We Will*Set Policy Framework***KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- 1 | Participants discussed all opportunities to improve the arts and cultural climate in the city, such as increased funding and support for creative workers.
- 2 | We Will Chicago is in the process of formatting policies that center communal trust building, power shifting, and equitable investing.
- 3 | We Will Chicago's Arts and Culture Pillar dedicated a great amount of time to discussing the wants and needs of under-resourced communities across the city.

CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS

“So kind of asking the tough questions, the uncomfortable questions that Vanessa [Stokes] and others have said throughout our conversation about that equity piece, entrepreneurial piece, and also the artistic creative endeavors.”

Max Grinnell | Historian and Urbanologist

“I have seen so much PSA on COVID and getting your vaccination. And I was thinking, why can’t they do that for We Will? I think it is just as important; it’s policy. This is like the long haul, you know – like really looking forward.”

Vanessa Stokes | Artist-Organizer

“Chicago is extremely segregated, and so what goes on on the West Side – if you don’t really travel over there – and what goes on the South Side and North Side ... it’s not really streamlined in a way that makes sense.”

Wisdom Baty | Artist-Organizer

“At the same time, fix the infrastructure so people feel safe that live here, first and foremost. But then also people who want to come to see these art and cultural events, fix the infrastructure, fix CTA. Some of these stations on the West Side are atrocious.”

Vanessa Stokes | Artist-Organizer

NOTES

- We Will Chicago, a three-year, citywide planning initiative under Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, aims to encourage neighborhood growth and vibrancy while addressing social and economic inequities that impair Chicago's legacy as a global city.
- "The Arts and Culture Pillar [of We Will Chicago] is intended to provide a planning framework that celebrates and enhances Chicago's vibrancy for the creation and appreciation of artistic works."
- Public comments to date have involved the following themes:
 - The need for an organized, citywide assessment of cultural facilities to help understand neighborhood inequities
 - Additional public and private funding to support professional artists and arts students to ensure diversity within the City's economy
- Recently, the Arts & Culture Pillar held community engagement events throughout the city. The team is currently in the process of building out potential policies that will better all communities in the city.
- Rachael Smith began by introducing herself and the network, the consent speech, and today's agenda.

Communications Update

- Rachael Smith highlighted that feedback from the public has prompted the pillar group to adjust their wording and language in order to make communications more accessible. Example of communications update:
 - Before: "How can we ensure that artists and cultural organizations actually contribute to the life of all Chicago communities?"
 - After: "Engage artists and cultural organizations to advance the quality of Chicago communities."
- The Arts and Culture Pillar has received a lot of positive feedback on their work thus far.

Community Partner Updates

- Kevin Corbett announced that their original plans in January were canceled due to the COVID-19 omicron variant. They are planning to reschedule all activities to a later date.
- Maritza Nazario also had to reschedule an in-person, Spanish-language event due to the weather and omicron surge. She has sent out two emails to the We Will Chicago team but has not received a response.
- Representatives from Chicago Cultural Alliance and My Block, My Hood, My City were not present to provide updates.
- Before moving forward, Gabriela Jirasek mentioned that resources were available in Spanish for anyone that may need them.

Guest Speakers: Vanessa Stokes and Max Grinnell

- Vanessa Stokes has been a cultural artist-organizer for a while, beautifying vacant spaces across the city. Originally from Lakeview, she now lives in the Austin neighborhood on the West Side. As her work expanded, she joined forces with local organizations and the city to create an outdoor event space called POPCourts! As Stokes spoke, Rachael Smith shared visuals from the POPCourts! opening event. Stokes also spent some time discussing community engagement challenges.
- Similar to Vanessa Stokes, Max Grinnell's line of work combines entrepreneurship and art to ensure more equitable, creative spaces are available. He shared about two innovative organizations:
 - Black-Owned Bos., a network that uplifts Black entrepreneurial spirits in Boston launched by Jae'da Turner.
 - Starlight Square, an outdoor civic commons created in a parking lot in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in response to the pandemic.
- A common theme in this conversation is the need to bring more outdoor events and spaces to the city.
- Artist-organizer Wisdom Baty mentioned that such events should be held across the city, and not just in certain areas.
- Stokes agreed with Baty and said she believed that holding the City accountable was essential regarding communication, outreach, and transportation infrastructure.
- Gabriela Jirasek of the City's Department of Planning and Development said the City is working to establish an outreach team and expects to begin the hiring process for a community engagement coordinator in March.

Policy Presentation

- The policy presentation, which will help guide We Will Chicago in formulating essential policies for the city, highlights "policy levers" organized in different sectors. Those sectors include: funding and direct provision, rules and regulations, research and exploration, information and support.
- When refining policies, We Will Chicago believes participants should consider whether they want to tackle a short-term or long-term (five to ten years) issue.
- Lastly, We Will Chicago voiced the importance of establishing equity-oriented policies. Those policies should consider the following:
 - Historical context
 - Community input
 - Explicit racial equity policies
 - Language strength and clarity

Breakout Discussions

- Participants went into breakout rooms (this Documenter was in the second breakout room) to brainstorm policies related to the following guiding questions:
 - Guiding Question 1: How can we support creative workers to ensure resiliency and diversity, recognizing that past support has not always been equitable?
 - Objectives:
 - Develop a variety of monetary and technical support systems for creative workers.
 - Incentivize and regulate standards for creative workers.
 - Decrease barriers to access grant funding and other resources for individual creatives.
 - Employ artists to advance the City's community improvement agenda.
 - Centralize access for capacity and other technical assistance resources for creative workers.
 - Guiding Question 2: How can we reimagine support for cultural organizations to realize a sustainable level of investment that is equitably allocated and driven by the community?
 - Rachael Smith facilitated and began by reiterating the norms and objectives for this space. She read all sections aloud while presenting the working document on the screen. Some of the objectives came from other cities that have successfully implemented similar policies.
 - Objectives:
 - Increase and diversify types of funding available to support equitable investments in communities.
 - Increase resources for culturally responsive and locally-driven programming.
 - Improve grant-making and community outreach process to increase transparency, remove barriers, and attract new grantees.
 - The group read through the working document and shared their thoughts. Below are a few topics that were heavily discussed:
 - Multi-faceted spaces
 - Community-driven spaces
 - Providing resources and mentorship
 - Decentralizing funding
 - Simplifying government processes

Closing

- After an hour in virtual breakout discussions, the full group reconvened to go over next steps and share final thoughts.

RESOURCES**STARLIGHT SQUARE**

[Outdoor civic commons space in Cambridge, Massachusetts, mentioned by Max Grinnell](#)

WE WILL CHICAGO POLICY TOOLKIT

[Graphic with instructions for writing policies and examples.](#)

POPCOURTS!

[Information about POPCourts!, which Vanessa Stokes worked on with partners to turn into an outdoor space for activity, gathering, and commerce](#)

BLACK OWNED BOS.

[A company that amplifies, incubates and supports Black-owned businesses in Boston, mentioned by Max Grinnell](#)

ARTS AND CULTURE | WE WILL CHICAGO

[Pillar webpage](#)

NEXT STEPS

- The next We Will Chicago Arts and Culture meeting will be held February 22, 2022, from 4-6 p.m.
- Between now and the next meeting, We Will Chicago plans to integrate all additional feedback into the notes already produced.
 - Attendees had a grace period to provide any other feedback or information before submission.
- Participants were told the next meeting would be a continuation of what took place today – work on forming equitable policies. In addition, the use of information from the current phase will be used to frame the next.