

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPECIAL EVENTS

City Council Budget Hearing – November 5, 2020

Remarks – Commissioner Mark Kelly

Thank you, Chairman Dowell and Council members for the opportunity to discuss the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE). 2020 has been an unprecedented and very difficult year, but despite the global pandemic and a significant reduction in this current year's budget, our mission has remained the same: to lift up Chicago's creative sector – always through a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion lens – and to showcase the peerless cultural life of our city.

Guided by the leadership of Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, my team and I have worked with you on a wide range of projects this year – including arts relief; outdoor dining permitting to support the restaurant industry; markets that increase access to fresh and healthy food; public art; youth and community arts initiatives; virtual events honoring our diverse and legendary music scene; and the resurgence of Chicago's TV and film industry – one of the largest and most diverse in the U.S.

In March, at the start of the coronavirus outbreak, DCASE stepped up immediately to assist with the City's COVID-19 response. At various times, 60% of our staff has been redeployed to help with food and PPE distribution, testing sites, volunteer management, media and other critical tasks – and 38% are currently redeployed full- or part-time. We led efforts to provide new, industry-specific guidelines for museums, movie theaters and other venues. We managed to save \$23.7 million in our current budget to offset the dramatic decrease in our revenues. And we quickly pivoted our programming to produce over 100 free, virtual events (including 24 artist takeovers of the Mayor's Instagram, concerts, dance lessons and cooking demos) as well as 6 drive-in movies and 21 community meals – drawing a total audience of 1 million people.

I'm pleased to share a few more facts and figures – a snapshot of DCASE, by the numbers:

- In January, Mayor Lightfoot appointed 29 new members to our Cultural Advisory Council – a diverse group of Chicagoans representing a broad cross-section of arts genres.
- We launched the 2020 Year of Chicago Music – now extended through 2021.
- In 2020, the Mayor increased our Cultural Grants Program budget from \$1.7 to \$2.7 million, and an additional \$2.1 million has since been allocated due to COVID-19 – through our own fundraising efforts and City support. We awarded 362 grants to organizations and artists – 55% of whom are BIPOC compared to just 35% in 2016.
- In April, we joined the Mayor, Governor and Arts Alliance Illinois to launch the “Arts for Illinois Relief Fund,” which has distributed \$5.9 million from private donations to Chicago artists, nonprofits and venues – bringing our total year-to-date arts funding to \$10.7 million.
- Our Chicago Film Office worked closely with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and industry stakeholders on guidelines for resuming TV and film production.
- We mobilized a special team to manage new Expanded Outdoor Dining permitting – working with Aldermen and SSAs to issue 250 permits supporting 419 restaurants to date.
- Our Chicago City Markets program delivered more than 40 markets to wards across the city.
- We unveiled new public art at parks, libraries and police stations – and on the Riverwalk. And, thanks to grant funds, our Public Art team supported the creation of 10+ social justice murals in South and West Side communities in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder.

- Working with the Department of Planning and Development as part of the INVEST South/West initiative, DCASE launched a new Artist in Residence Program in 4 pilot communities: Auburn Gresham, Austin, Englewood and New City/Back of the Yards.
- We worked with the Mayor's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team to create 21 artist-designed PSA billboards for communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- At the Mayor's urging, with CPS and Parks, we assembled a Memorial and Monuments Assessment Project committee of 29 individuals to reevaluate the City's public art collection.
- DCASE embraced the launch of the City's new "My CHI. My Future." youth initiative – producing virtual concerts, a teen arts summit and our annual Rising Star Honor Roll.
- DCASE partnered with Parks to bring 68 free cultural events to 56 neighborhood parks for 6,288 residents – plus 75 virtual programs with 31,000+ views to date.

Looking forward to next year, Mayor Lightfoot and DCASE along with members of the local music industry will continue 2021 as the "Year of Chicago Music." This citywide, year-long focus on music will lift up Chicago as a world music capital – launching a new brand for Chicago music and a marketing campaign, presenting free music programming downtown and citywide, providing financial grants to musicians, advocating for local venues and clubs, and supporting music education. In addition:

- Despite a 49% cut to the Department's overall 2021 budget, our Cultural Grants Program will remain intact – providing a minimum of \$2.7 million in much-needed financial support to artists and organizations citywide, thanks to the unflagging commitment of our Mayor.
- The Chicago Film Office will continue to strengthen our TV & Film industry as a key component of the Mayor's economic recovery strategy. (Filming in 2019 resulted in an economic impact of \$560 million, and 51% of local crew hires were women or minorities.)
- We'll work closely with Choose Chicago on tourism recovery efforts. We're excited to welcome more visitors back to Millennium Park – the No. 1 attraction in the Midwest.
- Owing to the realities of a "pandemic budget," Taste of Chicago and the Chicago Air & Water Show are not funded at this time – resulting in a potential savings of nearly \$9 million. Regardless, DCASE will produce a robust calendar of free cultural events – including reimagined festivals; House and Gospel music, Blues and Jazz concerts in Millennium Park; and ¡Súbelo! (turn it up), a Latinx music celebration as part of World Music Festival.
- In restoring the Chicago Cultural Center and partnering with Chicago Park District and Chicago Public Library (CPL) to animate 15 neighborhood cultural centers, we'll transform "The People's Palace" and strengthen the city's cultural ecosystem supporting local artists.
- We will collaborate with Aviation, Planning and Development and CPL to bring more public art and cultural programs to our visitor hubs, creative districts and neighborhoods.
- We'll strengthen our Markets program, increasing access to fresh and healthy food across the city, reopening Maxwell Street Market and launching a new art store ("Buddy").

Our revenues are built on visitors returning to Chicago, so when our hotels begin to increase occupancy, we believe those tax revenues should enable DCASE to revive the cultural life of our city. We fully expect that DCASE will be appearing before City Council again, asking for additional funds to do what we do best: producing cultural events and supporting artists. After our City has conquered COVID-19, we expect to play a major role in Chicago's economic recovery.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.