

Visitor's Cultural Commission
Minutes of Meeting of April 11, 2011
Century Station Training Room
6:00

Called to order at 6:03

Present: Becker, Brown, Collins, Mellone, Hunt, Bellaver, Ainsworth

Absent: Chapin, Manthei (arrived at 6:08 PM during St Charles Singers Presentation)

Also Present: Chris Minick

Motion by Hunt to appoint Anne Becker as Chair of the Commission Second by Bellaver

Voice Vote: All Aye –

Absent: Manthei

Motion carries

Discussion of application process. Chair Becker thanked Kathy Mellone for spearheading the effort to compile the new application. The Commission members were very pleased with the new questions and application process. Much more meaningful data can now be compiled relative to the positive economic impact that events sponsored by the VCC have for the City.

Group Presentations then began:

6:06 DVD Presentation from St Charles Singers:

There was discussion of concert promotion, particularly in conjunction with Hotel Baker Program on May 14 and the SING program in conjunction with FV Repertory. Additionally, the group presented promotion ideas for their events and how the singers help to promote the St Charles area in terms of their purchases, rental of office space, and programs in conjunction w/Hotel Baker. The Singers listed 1500 non-St Charles residents as attendees or participants. This serves as evidence of their efforts to promote outside the STC community. DVD presentation focused on education, local and external promotion and programs, etc.

Discussion also centered around foundation income, computerization and promotional efforts, DVD production expense, radio promotion and spots, E-Blast (1600 e-mails were sent). There was also discussion of fees for the Mozart Journey, SING Program and promotional brochures

6:20 FV Repertory:

Brief Intro about the group and efforts

FVR is a non profit; they have a \$1.5 million budget comprised mainly of 70% ticket sales and 30% fundraising efforts. For 11/12 FVR is requesting \$15,000 for year round programming; this amount is an increase from last year due to the inclusion of year round programming as opposed to the Summer Film Festival

Discussion of:

- Educational component for students,
- Subscription Series
- Music Series
- Comedy Series
- There is a performance every weekend

FVR serves or impacts 48,000 people annually. They also have subscriptions (1320) coming to Main Stage. St Charles has the most subscribers (25%) Most are coming from within 20 miles Visitors are utilizing local establishments. Based on data gathered in conjunction with Pheasant Run, the group was responsible for 12,000 dinner and brunch packages at Pheasant Run in 2010, 675 room nights at Pheasant Run and 400 groups on school days. 9000 people came thru the door in 2010.

The Collider Program Summer Theater Program was discussed. Scientists and playwrights collaborate and discuss science and technology and are developing a script for dramatic reading. It is a pilot program to see how it works.

Discussion ensued about the gathering of the demographic information. It was noted that the group is able to use Ticketmaster to gather demographic information due FVR's relationship with Pheasant Run.

Subscription pricing and its place in FVR's fundraising efforts were also discussed, It was noted that more fundraising revenue could be gleaned if the price was higher.

FVR's financial statements were a topic of significant discussion, particularly the negative equity and net losses. FVR rep indicated that the debt and negative financial performance primarily resulted from start up costs and he noted that FVR is incurring less debt each and every year. They do have a payback plan. They pay a yearly lease for space at Pheasant Run. FVR will provide more information in this regard.

Discussion of the Summer Festival was held and it was noted that the elements are coming together nicely.

6:40 Preservation Partners

It was noted that the group finished last year with surplus and the Commission members were impressed with this result. The request for funding is also 5.7% of budget. This was noted and impressive to the Commission. The Commission members place high emphasis on budget awareness. Funds are necessary for projects and programming.

Discussion was held relative to the Docents and Durant Houses and the Fabyan Forest Preserve. Kathy at CVB directs bus tours to Frank Lloyd Wright house in Fabyan FPD

A photo presentation then followed.

Discussion of the Beith House, its history, progress, and current status were discussed.

Subsequent discussion centered on the Judd Mansion and its history and current state. It is the desire of the Preservation Partners to preserve the house. Discussion of incompatible infill and adapting historic buildings to new uses was held at this point.

Discussion of Community rooms and old public buildings. It was noted that many historic buildings and houses are now being adapted to "Community Rooms," especially old libraries. Is this a potential use for this house? Is a Children's Museum feasible there? The Preservation Partners favors some sort of community brainstorming session for potential uses.

Went out of order

7:00 Fox Valley Concert Band:

There was discussion of the Band's plans for upcoming year

Connection with Norris Center was noted as a key improvement over prior years. NCAC is now the group's "home venue." The Band now has a "respectable" home for performances where people take them seriously. It was noted that this has made performances more expensive to undertake - there is a small charge at Norris due to the funding of staff.

An overview of projects was given. It was noted that the Band's concerts are free to the public. The Band's main fundraiser, the Gala was discussed. It was noted that this year's event grossed \$67,000.

The Band has more than 80 members who are auditioned in an effort to promote the next generation of musicians, middle and HS students are auditioned. If qualified they perform with the groups for one or two shows. The student is given a stipend if successful.

Wredling Middle School Band was the band featured through the annual program.

The Band has many concerts locally in STC and at parks especially. Celebration of soldiers abroad and the concert with STC Park Dist in conjunction with the July 4 festivities was noted.

The Band's promotion of dining and outings at local establishments was also noted.

Discussion of concert fees was discussed. It was noted that these revenues are stipends from supporters in advance of performances. It was also noted that the Band does not sell tickets but does take freewill donations at concerts. They typically will “pass the hat” and anyone wishing to make a donation is welcome to do so.

The Commission discussed the fundraisers and the fact that the Band is self supporting. Continue to want to be free and freewill donations. This is the purest form of music and sharing the arts and culture. Commission likes the Gala especially. All of these were noted as strengths and positive items relative to the Band’s request.

7:15 Steel Beam Presentation:

Discussion of programs, marketing efforts, Facebook, Twitter, free social media. They do not pay for advertising/marketing. They would like to work more on group sales. Staffing would help in this regard. The staffing would provide assistance with marketing and that would help sell more seats.

The group has 275 performances throughout the year. Would they consider reducing the number of performances and spend some more resources for marketing? Would this help? They do 6 individual shows to keep the production costs as low as possible. The key is selection of shows to produce. How do they choose the shows that sell out? Comedy is good and tends to sell tickets; drama is more of a challenge. It becomes a balancing act of producing different styles of performances with what will be popular and sell tickets.

Children’s programs: A Grant from a local family essentially funds the children’s programs and promotions (Stage Presence). SB donates one performance per year to a local charitable organization such as CASA, etc. This effort shows children that they can make a difference in the arts and in the community through their efforts and talents. SB also provides opportunities for schools with no or limited dramatic resources or programs. Children’s programs are very competitive. Most schools have scaled back in this environment/economy.

Focus for \$20,000 requested will be on marketing with the funding from the VCC. The funds would likely be spent on a marketing employee/staff member.

It was noted that the community organizations appreciate the charitable donation(s) of proceeds from the performance each year.

7:38 Fine Line:

2010 was a year of transition: the group had significant retirements. 2011 is year of opportunities. They have expanded the HS program this year. The students fire pots - it is part of the school program and field trips.

The group currently operates under a special use permit. They went before Kane County Board to request a modified special use permit. They were able to buy a small sliver of property for a driveway through donations. Once the driveway is constructed, the group will be able to take benefit of the modified special use permit. This may allow for weekend programs at Fine Line.

Over the past few years, the group has brought HS students from all over the metro area. They have serviced about 275 students. They will be participating in the Rolling Down the River Business To Business event. They will be promoting their corporate program each year.

Discussion was then held relative to the calendar of events:

- Volunteer Fair upcoming this week.
- Open House
- Uncommon Threads
- Christmastime at the Fine Line
- Many well know artisans and craftsmen/women will be appearing at Fine Line this year.

Other items noted:

- They advertise and do artist profiles with FV Magazine
- They were awarded an Arts Council Grants they have not received funding from State.
- They do charge a small materials fee for Teacher Institute Day
- They offer math and art opportunities
- The internet and website expenses are for maintenance and upkeep on the website and domain registration

The Commission members viewed the group's financial management as a positive and it was noted that a surplus was generated. There is a future deficit budgeted due to some extraordinary expenses related to capital/road/signage to avail themselves of the modified special use permit. The group plans to pay off program/road/etc/ over two year period.

7:52 Heritage Center (Out of Order)

The group noted that it had done several things this year. The Historic Book Club and partnerships were mentioned as was the anniversary celebration with Park District at Hotel Baker last year. Continued partnerships with Chamber of Commerce and DSCP, particularly the Hop on the Bus Tours were also noted.

School programs and 3rd grade classes were discussed as ongoing programs of the HC.

JR Historical Society monthly was discussed. It is a monthly program and encourages students to share what they have discovered about the community, the Heritage Center and its missions, etc. The ages are 8-13 and the program is open to any STC school

student. The program encourages interaction between the schools and emphasizes making connections and friendships with others from different STC schools.

The center also links with HS student volunteers to help with office work (especially data entry work) as part of the community service project for graduation requirements.

Mailing advertising/expense was discussed. The Commission suggested targeted e-mail rather than postal mailings. It was noted that the group has e-mail addresses for roughly 1/3 of its members. Many do not care to use e-mail although HC does ask them for address. The HC does do blasts for fundraisers, gift shop sales, promotions, etc.

HC intends to incur professional fees for hiring consultants for exhibits and to maximize exhibit and collections storage space.

It was noted the HC gave the Dunham Hunt House to the City approximately one year ago, June 1, 2010. It was noted that the Center was expending approximately \$15,000 annually for upkeep of DHH. This action has reduced the operating expenses of the HC by approximately \$15,000.

8:03 Union Latina:

UL is not planning a festival or event in 2011. They want to concentrate on fundraising this year for the 2012 event. It was noted that the funding allocation that they received for 2010/2011 was to plan for a 2011 event. Therefore, they will return the funds to the City. They did present the checks back to the VCC / Minick. The VCC will re-allocate this funding as part of the 2011/2012 allocation process.

Discussion was held relative to the 2010 event. The date was October 2. The Cultura Festival was not advertised on the marquee until 2 days before the event and therefore exposure was a problem. Regardless, approximately 250 people still attended. It was noted that this represents many fewer people than when the Festival was in Potawatamie Park. However, having the show inside the Arcada theater puts much more emphasis on the artist and the performance. It was felt that the quality of the show was better at the Arcada.

The next Festival will also be held at the Arcada (2012). UL is anticipating that they will commit to utilizing the Arcada again after VCC gives decision on sponsorship. UL believes that the Festival worked better at the Arcada. They want to work with Onesti to have a menu for food at future events. Additionally, they would prefer that the Festival take place on Saturday as this allows for longer hours.

They would like to work heavily on fundraising this year for the 2012 event. They want to have a better budget for the 2012 event. They anticipate a one day (Saturday) Festival in 2012. They also would like to have more professional performers next year and make that the focus of the event. All of the groups anticipated to perform are within

commuting distance of the City of STC. They are mainly from Aurora, Hanover Park, and Chicago.

There was discussion about the possibility of tracking the numbers of attendees from outside the Community. It was noted that currently this is not possible. It was noted that having this type of data will make funding the event much more feasible. Several methods of obtaining this type of data were discussed. Having this data would help us to justify funding from the City Council and VCC if we could quantify the numbers of people coming from outside the community.

UL currently has a large volunteer contingent. Motivation and keeping them active is a constant activity and challenge. They have an actively engaged group of about 25. Ticket sales and methods of selling tickets to the Festival were also discussed.

Prior to the meeting, representatives from the Norris Center for the Cultural Arts had indicated that they would not be seeking funding from the Vcc for the 2011/2012 year. Discussion was held regarding the Norris Center's letter and it was read for the members present. Mr. Collins stated that the Norris Center is in a state of reorganization because the School District has taken over the facility in terms of scheduling. Therefore, the Center has decided not to request funding for this year. They cannot commit to the programs and/or scheduling that will be available. It was further noted that the Miss Illinois pageant will be held in southern Illinois. They will not be at the Norris Center this year.

Discussion was then held relative to the amount available to fund the groups for the 2011/2012 year. The base allocation is \$80,000. Additionally, there is \$17,500 for the unused allocation for the Norris Center and \$1,300 from the Union Latina that were not used from the 2010/2011 allocations. This amounts to total of \$98,800.

There was discussion about how to proceed with the funding and the additional amount of money available for 2011/2012. Essentially three options evolved:

1. Allocate all \$98,800 to groups during 2011/2012
2. Allocate the "base" amount of \$80,000 and retain the \$18,800 as a "reserve"
3. Allocate \$80,000 + ½ of the unused allocations (\$9,400) during 2011/2012 with an expectation that the same amount could likely be allocated (given no change in City funding) in 2012/2013

After much discussion about the benefits and detriments of each strategy, consensus was reached to follow the third strategy. The main reasons that the group focused on this strategy are:

- It respects the financial constraints that the City is under and allows for a perceived increase in funding levels for groups receiving funding without asking the City for more money.

- It levels out the amount of funding allocated long term as compared to re-allocating the \$18,800 in one year then having funding reduced back to the "normal" level (which is currently \$80,000) in the next fiscal year.
- In 2-3 years, the economic conditions might be better than they are currently.
- It allows time for a gathering of sufficient data to quantify the revenue impacts of the City's decision to promote arts and culture via the Cultural Commission funding allocation. The Mayor directed the group to quantify its impacts to the community prior to requesting an increase in the funding allocation.

Minick was asked to confer with Townsend to make sure that this approach was acceptable from the City's point of view. Minick said he would follow up and report to the members via e-mail.

It was also noted that the VCC members were impressed with data compiled and the numbers assembled by the groups. Chair Becker indicate that she would like to create some charts that show the true economic impact of the support of the arts has on the community. She further indicated a desire to present this information to the City Council in support of a request for more funding for the Commission.

Next meeting was set for Monday, May 9, 2011 at 5:00 PM in the City's Century Station Training Room.

At this point a motion for adjournment was made by Bellaver and seconded by Ainsworth

Voice Vote: All Aye the Motion Carries

Meeting adjourned at 9:17.

Minutes prepared by Minick