

Watertown Public Arts and Culture Committee Meeting

Monday, August 26, 2024, 6 pm

In attendance: Swati Biswas, Barbara Epstein, Matt Hannah, Liz Helfer, Archy LaSalle, Roberta Miller, Dawn Scaltreto, Jay Wilson, WCAC

1. Opening Inspiration – Dawn Scaltreto spoke on the history and meaning behind the creation of the Mosesian Center for the Arts and how it connects to our current arts scene. In 1997, the Arsenal Army Materials and Testing Lab was reverted to the town. Roberta Miller was on the Watertown Arsenal Development Corporation, the Town of Watertown's working group that was tasked with purchasing and converting the property to mixed use/private sector development. Dawn Scaltreto, Barbara Epstein and Sally Young were all among the early prime movers in spearheading the grass roots effort to create a space for the arts on the property, in part to give the Watertown Children's Theatre a home and space to perform, but also with a broader vision to create a real center for the arts. They wished for a space that would have visual arts classes for adults and children, gallery space and exhibitions and other art activities. The small grass roots group continued to grow, and by 2005 were able to raise over \$7 million dollars to build out the space. They became a 501-C3 corporation, and Barbara Epstein was the first chair of the board. The New Repertory Company became the tenant and performed their professional productions in the 380 seat main stage and 100 seat black box, and countless other performing arts groups used the spaces. The building of the arts community through this effort has continued to pay off by making Watertown a more prosperous and desirable community to live in, attracting commerce and enriching schools. It took a space made for creating weapons of war and transformed into a place for creating and celebrating the arts spirit. Watertown has become a noted artsy place to live and work in the greater Boston area. The Public Arts and Culture Committee has become a strong branch of development where we can do many projects that continue to foster the arts in this city. The pandemic was particularly hard on the arts center and other arts groups, and New Rep went out of business under the stress. Roberta Miller served as the Executive Director of the arts center in the past and did the job very well. Recent challenges with raising operating funds and building back the essential audiences to keep the center thriving resulted in the current Executive Director to be let go. Roberta Miller will reprise her role as Executive Director while a search for a qualified replacement is sought.
2. Approval of June Minutes – Minutes by Liz Helfer. Archy Moves to accept, Barbara Seconds, all in favor and motion passes.
3. Subcommittee and Project Team Reports
 - a. Outreach (Matt)
 - i. Monthly PACC Arts Bulletin – Has been sent out, reformatted slightly to streamline a bit.
 - ii. Watertown Arts Market – About 1200 people estimated to have come through, down about 200 from last year. Vendors were thrilled, tons of positive feedback, Swati says that the volunteers were wonderful! Barbara appreciated the photos. The Festivals and Programs grant we received from

- the MCC sent out a professional photographer. Arsenal Park has better parking, and it should be open by next summer to house WAM.
- iii. We have a request to be Supporter of Indigenous People's Day on October 13 from the Pigsgussett Initiative. We didn't want to confuse people by being a "Sponsor" which implies a financial commitment, and it is suggested that we call it being a "Supporter" if we are not financially supporting the event by calling ourselves a "Supporter" instead for this and other similar requests that we entertain. We do not financially sponsor unless it is a program developed by us. We receive requests, but we are not a funding organization. If a program fulfills our Mission, which this program does, then we will be willing to endorse and publicize the event. We need to be clear about our mission and what we do choose to endorse and support, and clear on what is a supporter and what is a sponsor. Dawn and Archy both feel this should be written in our documents. Endorse may be better wording. We are looking for language that is clear when we are not fiscally supporting. We are going to deal with this event individually, then determine the policy. Barbara moves we support, second by Jay, unanimous approval.
 - iv. Edible Watertown – Russ Cohen will be doing a Wild Edibles Workshop and Dara Cheek will talk generally about "Spirits", the kind you drink! She has created a workshop that teaches about creating infusions to include wild plants to create delicious spirited beverages. There will be an individual flyer for both. We will do a Facebook event for each.
 - v. River of Light promotional activity coming up in October. There will be three different kinds of workshops, teacher training on Friday, October 18, Large Scale Artists Workshop on the weekend, the 19th & 20th, and 2 community workshops on Monday the 21st. Teacher Training will be for the WPS arts teachers, they will be prioritized. It will be first come/first served for the workshop (which may be 10 people). We want to keep it open to people who are not on this committee.
- b. Governance and Funding – We are seeking \$3 – \$5K from the WCC to support us
 - c. Murals – We have received some proposals for the Gorky Musal Project, and the call closes September 15. There are 7 so far and several more may have been received since then. The proposals thus far have been very high quality, and a few professionals, several people who are nearby. Some have commented that there is not enough money for such a large scale project.
 - d. Community Sculpture Walk – Liz shared her screen with the info for the call for art for the Community Sculpture Walk. We will not decrease the \$2K stipend, but may wish to increase, which we have the option to do. Dawn asks would we consider retaining some of the artworks already on display to opt to keep them on additionally. There are still two unused pads. Swati asks about language in the proposal that highlights safety of the installations. Archy says we should finish with that acceptance at the discretion of the committee. Liz will also add a place for additional collaborators' information. Archy and Erin are on the subcommittee with Liz, and will work out the wording. Dawn moves to move forward, second by Barbara, unanimous decision.
 - e. Edible Watertown – The summer garden internship ends this week. All students had a great time, they built a shed and did botanical drawings among other activities. The MAPC grant is wrapping up with the two workshops. There will be a site visit by

- MAPC on Wednesday, October 9, at the WMS garden, where we will talk about the artwork created. Sally Young and Judy Fallows will be there, and leading the group in a botanical drawing exercise. Jay talked to a parent who gushed about the program and how much their student enjoyed the experience. We are going to request an extension so we can spend the entire amount of money allotted. We spent frugally so this could help buy more tools or extend the program for one more year. So far 5 Expert Pairings applications have been received, and the call will close Sept 15. Barbara requests that we start the meeting on the 23rd a little earlier with some pizza for everyone.
- f. River of Light – The workshop weekend will be Oct. 18 – 21st. Barbara will join us with criteria for the artist's workshop. We are hoping to have the event in January at the Mosesian Center for the Arts. Alternatively, the event may be at Saltonstall Park, with indoor festivities at the Boys & Girls Club, which may be under construction. We are looking at January 18 as the date, around 4 as the sun is setting.
- 4. Old Business
 - a. Summer Concert Series – Fatal Flaw is scheduled for this Wednesday, Watertown's own punk band, with Squeezebox Stompers scheduled rain date on September the 4th.
 - b. Our September 23 meeting will be in person.
 - 5. New Business
 - a. Faire on the Square will happen September 21, noon to 5, we have face painting, possibly tie dye. Contact Liz to sign up. This is the 25th anniversary of the event.
 - b. Mosesian Center for the Arts - Roberta will be stepping in as the interim executive director, for likely 6 – 9 months as Darren will be leaving. The 4th Monday of PACC meetings may conflict with Roberta's meetings at the MCA. The center is very understaffed and will need to lean on the community. Roberta sees herself as the bridge to the future, and she is excited to be that champion to lead us into a stronger and more exciting future!
 - 6. Visitor Input – No visitors tonight.
 - 7. Archy has a final comment. While some people were flummoxed by the online application, he wants everyone to submit!
 - 8. Adjourn – Barbara moves to adjourn at 7:25 pm, second by Archy, unanimous vote to adjourn.