



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES
FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – August 17, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The regular monthly meeting of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) was called to order at 5:37 p.m. on Monday, August 17, 2026, in a virtual format via Zoom in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

ROLL CALL

Members present:

Gretchen Wharton – Vice Chairperson

Reggie Van Lee – Chairperson

Kymber Menkiti

Cecily Habimana

Demetrius Butler

Janice Kim – Treasurer

Cora Masters Barry

Julianne Brienza – Secretary

David Steadman

Members Absent:

Hector Torres

Carla Sims

Maggie O’Neil

QUORUM

A quorum was established.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Chairperson Van Lee delivered the Land Acknowledgment.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted by unanimous consent.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT:

The Commission recognized DC-based artist Joel Bergner as its grantee highlight. Mr. Bergner discussed his work creating large-scale public murals and his practice of engaging young people and community members directly in the design and creation of public art. He noted his participation in several Commission-supported programs, including Color the Curb, Fellowship Grants, MuralsDC, and the new Fresh Paint program.

Mr. Bergner highlighted projects in Deanwood, Silver Spring, NoMa, Los Angeles, and internationally. He also discussed Artolution, the nonprofit organization he co-founded, which uses collaborative arts programming to support social inclusion, community well-being, livelihoods, and public awareness in communities around the world.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chairperson Van Lee opened the public comment period. Johnny Peace had registered to provide public comment but had not joined the Zoom meeting or responded to staff communications at that time. The Chair indicated that Mr. Peace could be accommodated if he joined later.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Executive Director Aaron Myers reported on the Commission's efforts to expand public awareness of its work beyond grantmaking, emphasizing CAH's broader role in supporting the District's creative economy, connecting residents with cultural experiences, creating platforms for artists, and demonstrating the contribution of arts and humanities to education, community well-being, and economic opportunity.

Mr. Myers announced that CAH would co-host the Culture Quest Kids Fest: STEAM and Creativity Lab at Deanwood Recreation Center on August 29 in partnership with the Mayor's Office on African American Affairs and the DC Department of Parks and Recreation. He also highlighted the closing celebration for Rip, Tear: Collage as Critique, which attracted more than 150 attendees.

Mr. Myers reported on the Commission's partnership with WHUT, the Mayor's Office on Women's Policy and Initiatives, and the Mayor's Office on Caribbean Community Affairs for a screening of *A Mother Apart*. Due to strong attendance and community response, a second screening was scheduled for September 3.

The agency continued discussions with Fair Chance regarding development of the Business Arts Council, with support from the DC Chamber and Restaurant Association Metropolitan Washington.

Mr. Myers also discussed completion of the strategic planning process. Opportunity Consulting had synthesized extensive feedback from grantees, arts and humanities professionals, organizational partners, government collaborators, and District residents. The Executive Committee reviewed the plan on August 12, and the Full Commission was being asked to consider the 2026–2030 strategic plan framework for approval.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Grants Committee | Gretchen Wharton, Chair & Nakita Chambers, Supervisory Grants Management Specialist

Commissioner Wharton reported that grant managers continued reviewing FY26 interim reports so that second payments could be approved and the fiscal year efficiently closed. The agency had received authorization to move forward with Large Capital Project grant awards and was preparing the necessary paperwork and purchase orders.

For FY27, all grant opportunities had closed except Large Capital Projects, which would open in the fall. Staff were orienting panelists and facilitating grant panels, and additional panelists were needed. Commissioner Wharton emphasized that panelists are now compensated and encouraged members of the community to participate.

FY27 award announcements were expected by mid-October, with Arts Fellowship awards expected at the end of October. The Grants Committee and staff were also reviewing the agency's grant funding philosophy, workload demands, budget fluctuations, and possible changes to better support the community.

Commissioner Wharton further announced preparations for the annual grants revamp process and stated that Councilmembers and Council staff would be invited to observe the process so they could better understand how grant programs are evaluated and why additional resources are needed. Chairperson Van Lee and Commissioner Masters Barry emphasized the importance of stronger year-round Council engagement and communicating the Commission's impact beyond the annual budget process.

Public Arts | Chair, Carla Sims (absent) & Karyn Miller, Public Arts Manager

CAH Public Art staff reported that the Public Art Committee met on August 4. The department was completing FY26 projects, closing requests for applications, beginning FY27 panels, conducting maintenance and conservation activities, and developing the FY27 Public Art Work Plan.

The DC Art Now 2026 exhibition was scheduled to open September 10 at the I Street Gallery and serve as the Commission's kickoff to Art All Night activities. Five panels had reviewed 320 eligible Art Bank applications, with finalists proceeding to in-person review.

Updates were also provided regarding Color the Curb, Fresh Paint, Public Art Building Communities, Art Bank installations, and conservation efforts. The department was supporting restoration of the Paul Robeson Living Timeline mural on U Street, assessing priority murals identified through earlier condition reviews, evaluating existing Color the Curb murals, and pursuing conservation work for an Amy Sherald work in the collection.

The FY27 Public Art Work Plan would expand data tracking, tailor program strategies, and explore artist pipeline development, peer-to-peer learning, and mentorship opportunities. Community feedback sessions were scheduled for August 27.

Finance Committee | Janice Kim, Chair & Brandon Saunders, Resource Allocation Officer

Commissioner Kim reported that the Finance Committee met on August 14 and characterized the agency's fiscal position as positive despite budget interruptions earlier in the year. She recognized the Resource Allocation team for keeping the agency on track.

Brandon Saunders reported that the Commission's FY26 budget totaled approximately \$45.76 million, of which approximately 84.4% had been committed, with approximately six weeks remaining in the fiscal year. The remaining funds primarily reflected Large Capital Projects, certain grants, administrative expenses, operational contracts, programming, and anticipated year-end transactions.

Mr. Saunders reported that the agency expected expenditures to continue through the remainder of the fiscal year and that several grant and administrative program lines were approaching full expenditure. He also discussed development of a Resource Allocation glossary intended to make financial terminology more accessible to commissioners and the public.

Art Education Committee | Hector Torres, Chair (Absent) Andrea Brown, Arts Learning Coordinator

Arts Learning Coordinator Andrea Brown reported that the Arts Education Committee met August 11.

Washington, DC had been selected to host the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies Professional Development Institute, with the Arts Education peer group scheduled to convene

October 5–7. Representatives from all 50 state arts agencies and six U.S. territories were expected to participate.

Ms. Brown also announced the upcoming Poetry Out Loud cycle. DCPS and DC public charter high schools were invited to participate. The poetry anthology was scheduled to become available September 1, with regional competitions tentatively scheduled for March 5, 2027 and national finals on April 28, 2027.

The Arts Education Department supported seven interns during the six-week summer program. Intern Taylor Banks presented her project, “Ways to Engage with Creativity in Every DC Ward,” a 36-page guide identifying free and low-cost libraries, community art spaces, and public art experiences throughout the District. The guide includes a citywide map and QR-code functionality.

Executive Director Myers stated that staff would work with OCTO and the communications team to make the resource publicly available and updateable. Commissioners also suggested promoting it at Culture Quest and Art All Night.

Community Advisory | Chair, Cecily Habimana & Grace Allen, Special Advisor

Commissioner Cecily Habimana reported that the Community Advisory Committee met July 24 and recognized summer intern Taylor Banks for her contributions.

Grace Allen presented the Culture and Community quarterly report, reviewing the history and development of the Commission’s community-centered work and its efforts to integrate equitable review, language access, community awareness, culturally focused programming, outreach, training, partnerships, and direct engagement into agency operations.

Ms. Allen discussed the agency’s demographic survey and efforts to better understand who CAH reaches and where additional engagement is needed. She highlighted the second annual Go-Go series and other community pop-ups as examples of programming that connects culture, community, artists, and local businesses.

The Culture and Community team also planned to continue highlighting DC culture through Art All Night, including partnerships with libraries and community spaces to amplify hand dancing and other distinctly District cultural traditions.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS | 2026-2030 Strategic Plan

Governance Committee Chair and Commission Secretary Julianne Brienza introduced

Opportunity Consulting's presentation of the proposed strategic plan. She explained that the Governance Committee had shepherded the planning process on behalf of the Commission, working with the consultants and staff to review drafts, shape community engagement, and provide opportunities for commissioner input.

Dr. Lyndsay Brown and Anannya Sharma of Opportunity Consulting summarized the planning process, which began with a needs assessment in January 2026 and included surveys, focus groups, community meetings, interviews, document review, commissioner and staff visioning sessions, and a formal public comment period in July.

The plan was designed to serve as the Commission's "North Star" through 2030. CAH's mission and vision remained unchanged. The planning process identified CAH's core statutory role as a grantmaking agency while recognizing five complementary roles: capacity builder, broker/connector, convener, champion, and curator.

The plan established seven guiding principles, including transparent communication, elevating the value of arts and humanities, honoring DC's creative and cultural identity, amplifying collective impact, responsible stewardship of public resources, centering community and expanding access, and grounding decisions in data.

The plan established four strategic goals:

- Awareness: increase understanding of the essential role of arts and humanities in Washington, DC.
- Grantmaking Impact: invest strategically through equitable, transparent, and outcomes-driven grantmaking.
- Leader and Convener: strengthen DC's creative ecosystem through collaboration, convening, connection, and partnerships.
- Excellence: strengthen CAH's internal people, systems, governance, and organizational culture.

Opportunity Consulting explained that implementation would include establishing baselines and targets for key performance indicators, producing a stakeholder-friendly strategic planning report by September 30, developing an FY27 annual implementation plan, establishing internal implementation routines, and regularly reporting progress to commissioners, grantees, community members, and the public.

Commissioners expressed support for the plan and emphasized the importance of moving from planning into implementation.

RESOLUTION | ADOPTION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

Commissioner Brienza moved:

“Be it resolved that the Commission adopts the strategic plan as presented.”

Chairperson Van Lee conducted a roll-call vote. Commissioners Habimana, Butler, Wharton, Kim, Brienza, Menkiti, and Steadman affirmatively voted in favor as clearly reflected in the transcript. The Chair announced that the Commission had a strategic plan and would move forward with implementation.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business items were introduced.

ADJOURNMENT | Reggie Van Lee, Chairperson

Chairperson Van Lee announced that, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:06 PM. The next Full Commission meeting will be held on Monday, September 28, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.