



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES

FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – March 23, 2026

CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities (“CAH” or “Commission”) was called to order at 5:31 p.m. on Monday, March 23, 2026. The meeting was held virtually pursuant to the Open Meetings Act and livestreamed on the Commission’s YouTube channel.

ROLL CALL

Reggie Van Lee, Chair
Gretchen Wharton, Vice Chair
Janice Kim, Treasurer
Julianne Brienza, Secretary
Maggie O’Neill
Carla Sims
Demetrius Butler
Kymber Lovett-Menkiti

Absent
Hector Torres
David Steadman
A quorum was present.

A quorum was present.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA AND PRIOR MINUTES

There being no objection, the agenda for the March 23, 2026 meeting and the minutes from the February 23, 2026 regular meeting were adopted by unanimous consent.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Chair delivered the Commission’s land acknowledgement recognizing the ancestral lands of the Nacotchtank and Piscataway peoples.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT

Presenter: Shana Oltmans, International Spy Museum

Key Highlights:

Her program is entitled “Spy With Me”, for individuals with dementia and care partners. Expanded from virtual to in-person programming across DC and reached 176 participants across 5 locations. Show touched Wards 1, 3, 7, and 8 with partnerships via Iona Senior Services & East of the River

Socialization Hub. Used 3D-printed artifacts and interactive storytelling. Demonstrated high engagement and therapeutic impact, especially among typically non-participatory individuals.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public commenters present despite multiple attempts to call speakers. Comment period closed without testimony.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT | Aaron Myers, Executive Director

A. Agency & Operations

- Performance oversight hearing completed (Feb. 11)
- Budget oversight hearing date pending
- Archivist position filled (Stephanie Hinton)

B. Community Engagement

- Spring meet & greet at Woolly Mammoth Theatre
- Transition to Submittable grants platform
- Reminders issued regarding DIFS profiles and compliance

C. Programming

- April: Jazz Appreciation Month campaign
- April 24: Second Chance Month open mic (with Mayor's Office of Returning Citizens)

D. Grants Administration

- 1,030 purchase orders issued (88% of awards processed)
- Continued improvements in efficiency
- Large Capital Grants completed panel process; recommendations presented for Commission vote

E. Strategic Plan

- Phase 1 stakeholder engagement completed:
- Interviews, focus groups, surveys (400+ participants)
- Next steps:
- Governance Committee review
- SWOT analysis
- Continued engagement through summer
- Timeline extends through July

F. Upcoming Exhibition

- "Finders Keepers" opens April 2
- Focus: sustainability and creative reuse

G. Eaton Workshop Partnership

- 6-month pilot launching April
- Benefits for grantees:
- 7 co-working desks
- 80 hours of creator space access
- Framed as response to artist space concerns beyond grant funding

PUBLIC ART COMMITTEE REPORT | Carla Sims, Chair

Commissioner Sims reported on recent Public Art Committee activity, including a meeting held in the prior week. The Committee continues to focus on program delivery, collections management, and public-facing accessibility of DC's public art assets.

Key updates included:

MuralsDC Coordination:

The Committee reviewed current MuralsDC priorities and discussed alignment between mural programming and broader neighborhood-based cultural activation. Emphasis was placed on ensuring murals are both artistically strong and community-responsive, particularly in neighborhoods experiencing development pressure.

Art Bank Program Progress:

The Committee discussed continued implementation of the Art Bank program, including acquisition strategy, artist inclusion, and placement logistics. Commissioners emphasized the importance of ensuring that Art Bank reflects diverse artistic voices and is accessible to District agencies and the public.

Collections & Digital Access (ArcGIS / eMuseum):

Staff presented updates on improvements to digital tools, including mapping and cataloging systems that allow the public to better access and understand DC's public art inventory. This includes coordination with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer to enhance usability and transparency.

Operational Structure:

The Committee is utilizing smaller working groups and targeted sessions to move projects forward efficiently between formal meetings. Commissioners discussed balancing this approach with Open Meetings Act compliance and maintaining transparency in decision-making.

Commissioners underscored that Public Art remains a key public-facing entry point for CAH's work and a critical tool for placemaking and economic development.

GRANTS COMMITTEE REPORT | Gretchen Wharton, Chair

A. Grants Committee

Overview

- FY26 Large Capital Projects Grant (first cycle)
- Purpose:
- Facility acquisition/improvement
- Stability and displacement prevention
- Requirements:
- \$1M+ property value
- Ownership or long-term lease

Application Summary

- 23 applications received
- 22 eligible
- 1 ineligible (compliance issue)

Panel Process

- 8 panelists
- 2-day panel (4 hours/day)

- Bias training + orientation
- Individual scoring + group discussion
- Commissioners observed but did not participate

Funding Recommendation

- Top 3 ranked applicants funded at ~94% of request
- Total allocation: \$3,474,390

Notable Policy Mechanics

- Small capital awards deducted from large capital awards
- Awards subject to budget availability
- Debrief meetings available after 60 days

Vote on Grants Recommendations

Motion: Accept staff recommendations (Wharton)

Second: Butler

Roll Call Vote:

- Sims – Yes
- Masters Barry – Abstain
- Butler – Yes
- Wharton – Yes
- Kim – Yes
- Brienza – Abstain
- Lovett-Menkiti – Yes
- O'Neill – Yes

Result:

Motion Passed

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE REPORT | Julianne Brienza, Chair

The Governance Committee met on March 12, 2026, to review key policy and process updates.

- **FY27 Guide to Grants:**
Proposed updates will improve accessibility (including ADA standards) and clarify how applicants demonstrate community engagement and public benefit, while maintaining the current grant scoring structure.
- **Public Comment Transparency:**
Materials submitted by public commenters will now be shared with all Commissioners in advance, improving transparency and enabling more informed review.
- **Strategic Planning Timeline:**
The Committee confirmed major milestones for the agency's strategic plan, culminating in a full Commission vote on August 17, 2026.

Next Meeting: April 9, 2026

FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT | Janice Kim, Chair

Commissioner Kim provided updates related to financial oversight and budget positioning.

Mr. Fernandez presented the monthly financial update, noting that overall spending remains consistent and on pace with the prior fiscal year, particularly within the grants budget. He attributed this stability to improved internal processes for structuring grants, DIFS, and issuing purchase orders.

Grants Spending

- Grant expenditures are tracking almost identically to the same point last fiscal year
- Approximately 19% of the grants budget remains, with significant upcoming disbursements expected
- Anticipated increases in outflows tied to:
 - Large Capital Grants
 - Color the Curb program
 - Juried Exhibition Grant (reinstated this fiscal year)
 - Systems and allocations are already in place, allowing funds to be released efficiently upon grantee compliance and paperwork completion

Administrative Budget

- Administrative budget currently at 61% expended, averaging approximately 8% monthly spend
- Recent expenditures were primarily concentrated in personnel services (salary-related costs)
- No significant recent contractual/vendor expenditures noted

Operational Improvements

- Staff are exploring ways to accelerate payment distribution, particularly for panelist/reviewer stipends (gift cards) in advance of FY27 review cycles
- Updates to financial reporting structure were implemented to improve clarity and transparency, including grouping detailed accounts within broader categories

Outlook

- CAH is expected to maintain a strong and efficient spending pace through the remainder of the fiscal year
- Increased activity anticipated in the grants category as major programs are finalized and funds are deployed

PUBLIC ART COMMITTEE REPORT AND VOTE

Key Updates

- New Registrar/Archivist: Stephanie Hinton
- Background: Howard University; University of Manchester
- Replacing late Ron Hubbertson

Art Bank Program

- FY26 launch: April 13
- Planning underway for 40th anniversary (Fall 2026)
- Exploring historical acquisitions category

Exhibitions

- “Inside Out: Dignity and the Art of Seeing”
- Featured incarcerated artists (DC Jail & Lorton)
- Strong community engagement (schools, advocacy orgs)
- High benchmark set for social justice-focused exhibitions

RESOLUTION & VOTE

The Public Art Committee presented program updates and a funding recommendation for the Color the Curb Grant Program.

RESOLVED (Sims): That the Commission adopt the Color the Curb funding recommendations.

Vote on Grants Recommendations

Motion: Accept staff recommendations (Sims)

Moved by Chair.

Roll Call Vote:

- Sims – Yes
- Masters Barry – Yes
- Butler – Yes
- Wharton – Yes
- Kim – Yes
- Brienza – Yes
- Lovett-Menkiti – Yes
- O’Neill – Yes

Result:

Motion Passed

NEW BUSINESS

The Chair announced that the next regular Commission meeting will be held on Monday, April 20, 2026, at 5:30 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:41 p.m.