



DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES
FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – November 17, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

The regular monthly meeting of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) was called to order at 3:00 PM, Monday, November 17, 2025, in a hybrid format at 200 I Street SE and via Zoom in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

ROLL CALL

Members present:

Gretchen Wharton – Vice Chairperson

Reggie Van Lee – Chairperson

Julianne Brienza – Secretary

Janice Kim – Treasurer

Hector Torres

Cecily Habimana

Maggie O'Neil

Demetrius Butler

David Steadman

Members Absent:

Kymber Menkiti

Carla Sims

Cora Masters Barry

QUORUM

A quorum was established.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Vice Chairperson Wharton delivered the Land Acknowledgment.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

The agenda was adopted by unanimous consent.

GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT:

Artist: Tanya Paperny – Literary and Visual Artist / Zine-Maker

Ms. Paperny shared that she has been a D.C. resident for nearly twenty years and has received multiple Artist Fellowship grants from CAH. She described how CAH funding has supported her basic needs, enabled her to carve out dedicated creative time, and encouraged her to take her practice

seriously. She highlighted her evolution from community organizing and nonfiction writing into zines and visual collage, including recent work combining Russian-language literary collage, self-translation, poetry, and visual art. She expressed deep gratitude to CAH while also offering feedback that application and payment communications can feel jargon-heavy and that payment delays of several months can be challenging for working artists.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One member of the public, Mr. Edwin Barno of Chili Papaya Entertainment, registered for public comment. Staff checked the virtual waiting room; Mr. Barno was not present when called. Public comment concluded without remarks.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Highlights:

Executive Director Aaron Myers provided updates on staffing, national arts policy engagement, budget context, and grants and programming.

- Director Myers introduced incoming Communications Director, Ms. India Wright, who will join CAH on December 1, 2025, following service at the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs. Ms. Wright briefly addressed the Commission, expressing her enthusiasm for supporting storytelling at the intersection of arts and culture as a D.C. native.
- Director Myers reported on attending the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA) Executive and Deputy Director Summit in Omaha, Nebraska. He highlighted growing national interest in ArtRx/"arts on prescription" models, including early data from Massachusetts and other states indicating reductions in anxiety and depression and increased self-reported creativity. He noted that several states are using tobacco and opioid settlement funds to support such programs and indicated an interest in pursuing similar innovations in D.C.
- Director Myers announced that Washington, D.C. will host the larger NASAA convening in 2026, bringing state arts agency leaders and staff to the District. He emphasized that the convening will showcase D.C.'s arts ecosystem and generate positive economic impact for local hotels, restaurants, and the broader service sector.
- The Office of Budget and Planning has issued CAH's FY27 mark at \$44,352,000, excluding any fund balance. The figure represents a cumulative decrease of approximately \$402,034. Mr. Myers noted that while this is a reduction, staff believe it can be managed without unduly harming core programs. Work is underway to understand impacts across personnel, non-personnel, and grant programs.
- Large Capital Projects: The Large Capital Projects Grant remains open, with applications due Wednesday, December 17, 2025, at 10:00 PM. Commissioners and the public were encouraged to direct questions to Senior Grants Officer Terrell Johnson.
- Grants Revamp Meeting: The annual Grants Revamp Meeting will be held Friday, November 21, 2025, led by the Grants Committee Chair, to review community feedback and potential changes to CAH's grantmaking processes.
- Events: Director Myers highlighted a flurry of November events, including a Commissioner and staff social at Bluejacket following the meeting; a program in the I Street Gallery; the FY26 grantee

welcome reception paired with Umbrella Art Fair’s friends-and-family reception; and CAH-hosted panels at Umbrella Art Fair exploring “How Can DC Use Art as a Lever of Economic Development” and “Creating Value and Legacy.”

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Grants Committee | Gretchen Wharton, Chair & Terrence Brown, Grant Manager

Grant Manager Terrence Brown presented FY26 Small Capital Projects funding recommendations on behalf of the Grants Committee. The Commission received 87 applications and staff recommended 71 projects for funding, an approval rate of approximately 82%. The total recommended funding amount was \$4,475,416. Staff noted increased short-term and modest-scale proposals, continued reliance on digital submissions, and persistent inequities in access to dedicated arts spaces in some wards, particularly Ward 7.

Following discussion, a motion to approve the FY26 Small Capital Projects funding recommendations as presented was made and seconded. The motion passed by roll-call vote.

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

Finance Committee Chair Janice Kim, joined by staff, reported that despite recent budget reductions, CAH has been able to release award notifications and process agreements for FY26 approximately five to six weeks earlier than in the prior year. Staff credited the improved timelines to internal efficiencies and strong grantee responsiveness in submitting paperwork. Additional detail on expenditure rates by program will be provided as entries post in the District’s financial systems.

Public Arts | Chair, Carla Sims and Karyn Miller, Public Arts Manager

Karyn reported that the Public Art team is closing out FY25 grants while onboarding FY26 grantees and finalizing the 2026 Public Art Work Plan and the ongoing public art mapping project. Major updates included the Art Bank program, which issued 68 awards and 54 decline notices, and the continued success of the DC Art Now exhibition featuring 57 works by finalists, accompanied by artist talks and a December 11 closing focused on emerging women artists. She also highlighted upcoming FY26 Art Exhibition Curatorial Grants, including *Inside Out: Dignity and the Art of Seeing* opening January 15, 2026, and an April exhibition titled *Finders Keepers* with 15 artists working with found objects. Additionally, the Dried Exhibition Grant Program’s call for proposals for *Rip, Tear, Collage Critique* is open through December 1, 2025.

Miller also updated the Commission on the Public Art Building Communities Program, including a recent dedication event with Logan Circle Community Association and the onboarding of FY26 grantees: Hamiltonian Artists, Shawnee Shi, and the NoMa BID. She reported completion of FY25 Color the Curb projects and launch of the FY26 program, now expanding to include a high school, with its RFA released that day. She introduced Fresh Paint DC, a revamped mural program coordinated with BIDs and city economic partners, expected to fund 3–4 sites in its pilot year. Finally,

she noted progress in collections management, including 30 active artwork loan requests, a sculpture repair near Nationals Park involving an insurance claim, and expanded partnerships with DC Public Library. The team is also piloting the new Submittable grants system for smaller programs before wider rollout.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business raised for discussion.

NEW BUSINESS

Under new business, Vice Chairperson Wharton offered a reminder about the Commissioner and staff social at Bluejacket following the meeting, noting that staff participating outside of their regular hours could utilize flex or compensatory time in coordination with supervisors. No additional new business items were introduced.

ADJOURNMENT | Gretchen Wharton, Vice Chairperson

Vice Chairperson Wharton announced that, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:04 PM. The next Full Commission meeting will be held on Monday, December 15, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.