



**DC COMMISSION ON THE ARTS & HUMANITIES**  
**FULL COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES – October 20, 2025**

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular monthly meeting of the Commission on the Arts and Humanities (CAH) was called to order at 5:31 PM, Monday, October 20, 2025, in a hybrid format at 200 I Street SE and via Zoom in accordance with the Open Meetings Act.

**ROLL CALL**

Members present:

Reggie Van Lee – Chairperson  
Gretchen Wharton – Vice Chairperson  
Julianne Brienza – Secretary  
Janice Kim – Treasurer  
Hector Torres  
Carla Sims  
Cecily Habimana  
Cora Masters Barry  
Maggie O’Neil  
Demetrius Butler  
David Steadman

Members Absent:

Kymber Menkiti

**QUORUM**

A quorum was established.

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Chairperson Reggie Van Lee delivered the Land Acknowledgment.

**ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

The agenda was adopted by unanimous consent.

**GRANTEE HIGHLIGHT:**

1) Marcus Wells (musician)

Thanked CAH and commissioners for support; noted the path from “rocky road” to strong collaboration; praised go-go as DC’s signature sound and cited a positive experience performing at Sycamore.

2) 2) McAlister Clabaugh (Washington Urban Debate League – WUDL)

Reported WUDL received CAH funding for the first time after three years of applying. Program details: 11th year of operations; growth from 6 schools / ~100 students / 1 staff to ~90 teams / ~900 students / 7 staff; free participation (no fees), with multiple tournaments, adult judges, and round-by-round feedback; alumni return as coaches and staff. Credited panel service and staff feedback for improving their application; aims to reach ~2,000 students in 10 years.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Abdur Rahim Muhammad (Hung Tao Chao Mei Leadership Institute) signed up for comment; staff attempted to confirm presence on Zoom, but the speaker did not appear; public comment concluded without remarks.

## **DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

Highlights:

- Desk Audit / Equity Review: CAH completed a DCHR pilot desk audit; 16 grade increases recommended by DCHR, with 4 additional actions identified by CAH; HR (Denise Jackson) processed 40+ audits in ~5 months. Chair underscored that ~40% of staff received some increase; no downgrades; commitment to fair process and continued transparency.
- Staffing: Offer extended for Public Affairs Specialist (pending decision).
- FY26 Award Announcements: Waiver process delays resolved; award notifications sent Friday, Oct 17; CAH resumed normal activity with OCFO.
- Strategic Plan Procurement: Began May 2024; OCP set not-to-exceed at \$120,000 after budget discussions; vendor identified by OCP awardee announcement pending; plan funding identified in current budget despite FY25 waiver impacts.
- Grants Communications: Award communications and next-steps guidance sent to applicants; commissioners will receive template language for constituent inquiries.
- Exhibition: DC Art Now at I Street Gallery through December 12; commissioners encouraged to visit and promote.
- Conflict of Interest (COI): All COI forms submitted for FY26; forms will be (or already are) posted publicly on the website; Chair emphasized transparency and recusals to maintain integrity given commissioners’ arts affiliations.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Grants Committee | Gretchen Wharton, Chair & Terrell Johnson, Grants Manager**

- FY26 Cycle: Award notifications sent Oct 17; 1,014 grants awarded (excluding capital projects).
- Agreements Due: Friday, Oct 31 deadline for grant agreements and documentation.
- Budget Context: Agency decreased \$5M over two years; GOS decrease of \$1.3M this year; fewer grantees or lower rates in some lines.

- Capital Projects (Small): 87 applications (vs. 94 prior year); paneling (5 panels) concluded Oct 17; vote at November Commission meeting.
- Large Capital Projects (CPO): Opens Wednesday, Oct 22; closes Dec 17, 2025; facility threshold \$1M valuation/purchase or ≥30-year lease.
- Workshops & Support:  
 FY25 Final Report workshops: Wed, Oct 22 @ 12 p.m. and Thu, Oct 30 @ 4 p.m.  
 FY26 Paperwork Orientation: Thu, Oct 23 @ 2 p.m. (+ more sessions to be added online)  
 DIFS help: Wednesdays @ 11 a.m. (standing)  
 Live Chats: Fridays @ 2 p.m. starting Oct 31  
 Contact grant managers or see website for details.

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

- Waiver changes lifted some submission burdens for core operations. Current slides covered Admin categories (personnel and key contracts like Xerox and IT software), and Public Art project codes; expect significant activity beginning this week as entries post to DIFS/PATS; greater movement and updated balances next month. Emphasized transparency on expenditure rates by program as project codes finalize. Leadership reiterated the consequences of the 1% growth cap and urged coordinated advocacy highlighting arts' economic impact.

### **Arts Education | Hector Torres, Chair & Andrea Brown, Arts Learning Coordinator**

- Meeting: Oct 14 summary of FY25 activities.
- Poetry Out Loud: Reached ~8,200 students across 9 schools; Nyla Dinkins represented DC nationally; expanded to 3 new schools; deeper DCPS partnerships planned.
- Summer Internships: 9 interns across arts education, grantmaking, public art, communications, events; alumni now placed in art-sector roles and educational opportunities.
- FY26 Grants: >\$1.1M to 55 grantees; projected reach ~20,274 youth via school and community programs.  
 Priorities (FY26): Expanded support for students with disabilities and ELL learners; year-round youth poetry initiatives; strengthened educator networks and teaching-artist development using data-driven strategies.
- Commissioners urged to attend Poetry Out Loud; staff will calendar events earlier to boost attendance.

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Brief logistical note referencing budget impact (e.g., refreshments) and moving to close pending items; none raised for discussion.

### **NEW BUSINESS – VOTING**

- FY26 Committee Meeting Dates -- Presented by Secretary Julianne Brienza (full list read into the record across Arts Education, Community Advisory, Finance, Governance, Grants, Public

Art, and Executive committees; with a note to revisit Nov 11 Arts Education due to holiday) were approved by a unanimous vote.

- Art Week DC – Special Committee Extension Resolution -- Extension to continue work aimed at 2026–2027 timeframe was approved by a unanimous vote.
- 2025 Strategic Plan Resolution -- Confirms an extension while the forthcoming plan is finalized; plan to cover mid-FY26 through mid-FY2029; priorities include broadened definitions of community/culture, post-pandemic sustainability, thriving arts ecosystem, and arts as an economic driver; affirms compliance with NEA state partnership requirements was approved by a unanimous vote.

## **ADJOURNMENT** | Reggie Van Lee, Chairperson

Chairperson Van Lee announced that, there being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:24 PM. The next Full Commission meeting will be held on Monday, November 17, 2025, at 3:00 p.m.