Minutes

Committee for Antiracism and Equity Meeting
May 24, 2024
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Metro Southeast Facility
1417 Murfreesboro Pike
Nashville, TN 37217

Committee Members: Chair Commissioner Tré Hardin, Commissioner Heather Lefkowitz Teree McCormick, Ellen Gilbert, Fathiyah Shepard-Suso, Lydia Yousief

Metro Staff: Dr. Coleman, Josiah Golson, Claudia Lawhon, Chuck Beard, AJ Dykens-Hodapp

A. Call to Order and Recognize Group Norms & CARE Purpose Statement
   a. Chair Commissioner Hardin called the meeting to order at 10am, welcomed the room, read the land acknowledgement, and read the group norms and purpose statement.
B. Public Comment
   a. No Public Comments
C. Approval of Meeting Minutes: 2/14/2024
   a. ***A motion was made to approve February 14,2024 meeting minutes by Community Member Teree McCormick and seconded by Commissioner Lefkowitz.***
D. CARE introductions with Chair Hardin
   a. Commissioner Hardin introduced himself as one of the newer Commissioners and a former Metro Arts employee. He said that he is excited for what CARE can do as a committee and expressed his appreciation for the members. He welcomed Dr. Paulette Coleman as the interim Executive Director and opened the floor for other introductions.
   b. Ellen Gilbert introduced herself – director of Global Education Center and one of the original members from the Art team.

c. Teree McCormick introduced herself – she is an arts advocate, former member of the Art team. She expressed that she is glad CARE is able to meet again.

d. Commissioner Lefkowitz – a member of the Arts Commission and also expressed that she is very glad CARE is back.

e. Chuck Beard – staff member, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity in his role to work with other teams and collaborate with CARE

f. Fathiyah Shepard-Suso – arts coordinator, director of the World AfriCultural Community Project

g. Lydia Yousief – director of the Elmahaba Center in South Nashville

h. Josiah Golson – RA&E manager, expressed gratitude to be sharing space with the members again.

i. Dr. Coleman – introduced herself as interim ED

E. Action/Discussion Items

a. Review CARE Guidelines/Scope

i. Chair Hardin said that although there is work to do, he wants to start with these action items to ground the committee. His goal for the meeting is to determine how we move forward together.

ii. Josiah suggested to take it section by section in the guidelines

iii. Chair Hardin suggested it would be helpful to start by looking at the Art team materials in the packet for the history/context of CARE and how it fits with the mission of Metro Arts.

iv. Josiah wanted to put on the record that staff has met individually with members and Chair Hardin and had discussions about the Art team and history of CARE and how those early goals translate into action from the Commission and invited the committee members to speak to what may be missing from what CARE is able to put into action/operation and what could be added to the bylaws to support that. Community Member Teree McCormick said the purpose of the Art team was to hold the Metro Arts agency accountable for policy change and action to be more inclusive and center the community and address areas of resource restrictions in order to give the arts community a better chance to thrive. She explains that the Art team worked hard to create cohesion among the group and assess the current standing of the agency. They put together a report canvassing the arts ecosystem and Metro Arts engagement with it. She personally felt the Commission did not themselves understand what it really meant to intentionally dismantle a governmental agency inherently infused with supremacy and racism. The report was never fully acknowledged by the Commission. She recommended reviewing the report with what has been done recently to see where the gaps are. She feels that the new Commission members are more receptive to the questions and information gather around antiracism but is not confident they fully understand the work that needs to be done.

v. Community Member Lydia Yousief agrees that the Commission is not ready or willing to commit to equity work and mentioned the MHRC report and the disparity in funding. She said that the triumphs in the CARE guidelines from June 2020 are minimal and does not accurately represent the history of Metro Arts. She asserts that the funding disparity needs to be front, and center and we will not get to equity or justice in the work without it. She asked about holding the Commission accountable. She again raises the disparity in funding, saying that the Commission members did not vote to fund primarily white organizations accidentally. She wants the redistribution of funds to be clarified and codified in the CARE guidelines. Community Member Yousief also raised that we need to define “equity”.

vi. Chuck asked about what the vision was from the Art team for holding Commission accountable. Community Member McCormick responded and said the method was to deliberate then bring recommendations to the Commission. She said one of the biggest barriers was lack of alignment with the Commission in terms of a definition of equity and what that looks like.

vii. Community Member Ellen Gilbert brought up the stories they collected and compiled from artists and arts organizations. She said a common theme was a barrier to funding, specifically because organizations could only request a percentage of their budget. They looked at the Thrive program and how it could be more equitable. She mentioned that they used to have a co-chair from the community members on the committee, but previous staff had done away with that. Community Member Gilbert additionally raised that they were planning to review the employee standards from HR. They made recommendations but they were not met with understanding from the Commission.

viii. Chair Hardin read from the guidelines about the make up of the committee and committed to clarifying things for the next meeting and revisit having a co-chair. He said the first step is defining equity and having something he can take to the Commission. He said he wanted to make sure he was hearing the community members correctly and is thinking about next steps.

ix. Commissioner Lefkowitz asked about if the committee has reviewed the codes and regulations from Council and the charter and how we could advocate for equity to be baked in. She also raised that the Commission has been saying they need to review the bylaws, but it has not been carried out.

x. Community Member McCormick explained that the Art team had more autonomy and did not have Commission members on the team. They requested to have more involvement from Commission members and that ultimately resulted in CARE being chaired by a Commission member and they were constricted by the rules of the Commission.

xi. Community Member Fathiyah Shepard-Suso said that she is still trying to figure out what CARE is doing and what the impact is. She asked what power CARE has when it comes to the Arts Commission and the discord in the community that involves the Arts Commission and how to have more power behind the recommendations.

xii. Chair Hardin pointed out that other committees such as the Public Art Committee have more clear steps and we need to clarify that with CARE over the next few meetings, so we have actionable and tangible outcomes. He expressed wanting to have more of a voice for CARE with the Commission and encouraged attendance and the voices of community members.

xiii. Josiah Golson said there are three common themes and needs that have emerged: shared understanding and sense of history, a definition of equity that is shared, clear, and operational, and addressing the limited authority CARE has and what accountability from the Commission would look like.

xiv. Community Member Ellen Gilbert said that she thinks the Commission members need to be involved in helping define equity, so they have a better sense of the work and processes. She raised the training they all had together in the past and how the 3-day training was helpful for everyone.

xv. Community Member Yousief wanted to push back on that, stating that there are existing definitions of equity, and it is not in CARE's capacity to train Commissioners that have voted against equity. She mentioned that transparency from the Commission with the arts community can go a long way. She also said she does not want CARE to overreach – she does not think CARE should be involved with staff as much as that is under HR, should not be involved with human rights issues those are within the scope of MHRC. She said instead the scope should be narrowly focused on hearing community members and relaying those needs to Commission.

xvi. Community Member Gilbert disagreed, stating the Commission members are also serving the community and need to be trained. Community Member Gilbert and Community Member Yousief continued discourse around CARE's best use of time and the involvement of the Commission.

xvii. Chair Hardin raised the importance of unlearning and that somehow some way the Commissioners are educated.

xviii. Community Member Yousief explained why she does not like trainings and expressed concerns about Commission members co-opting the language of antiracism to do the opposite.

xix. Additional conversation regarding accountability for the Commission, transparency, and expectations for the committee continued.
xx. Commissioner Lefkowitz raised her previous question regarding codes/standards that the Commission could be accountable to.
xxi. Chair Hardin read section 1.3 and 1.4 of the guidelines. He asked if the committee agrees with the scope as outlined and what specific steps the committee can take to achieve those things. Josiah asked if the scope addresses the engagement and outreach with the community could be clarified and operationalized in those sections.
xxii. Community Member Yousief agreed with putting the definition of equity between 1.3 and 1.4 would align well. She also raised that the scope addresses the relationship between CARE and the Commission. Additionally, she suggested the community engagement piece be further discussed in the next meeting, but the meetings need to be more accessible to community members. Community Member Gilbert said that they used to meet in the evening but because of staff they switched to daytime. Chair Hardin said it would be helpful to have a regular schedule and that having accessible meetings is part of our equity work.
xxiii. Tessa Ortiz Legal suggested that in terms of sharing information and keeping historical documents available to everyone, a SharePoint folder would be more helpful than a Google Drive. Tessa also suggested having those documents accessible on a page of the website.
xxiv. Community Member Gilbert raised how we can advocate to change the bylaws so that Thrive can continue to fund individual artists and find systems within the legal scope of Metro that are sustainable and equitable.
xxv. Community Member Shepard-Suso asked if they are doing edits on the guidelines and Chair Hardin responded that it is something we can add to the agenda for the next meeting and that historically CARE has reviewed policies and made recommendations.

b. Revisit goals for CARE
c. Discuss onboarding
   i. Chair Hardin said we need to review the reports and create a packet of documents before we bring new members in.
   ii. Community Member McCormick asked the new members what would have been helpful to them when they joined the committee. Community Member Shepard-Suso said having more historical context and a more concrete understanding of the purpose and mission of CARE. Community Member Yousief echoed that, adding she would like to have a drive/digital access to the guidelines and past reports. She added that meeting with staff sooner would have been helpful to ask questions. Community Member McCormick added that a next step would be to compile the documents into a drive. She asked how far back they want the history to go. Community Member Yousief said it is always best to include as much as

possible. Community Member Shepard-Suso asked for a thorough overview, so she does not have to review all of the documents but that they be accessible if needed. Josiah said that staff has been reviewing the documents and can compile a drive. Community Member Yousief requested a Table of Contents be included and some type of color coding. Commissioner Lefkowitz asked for visual representations, summaries, videos, to make it more accessible for people.

   iii. Chair Hardin said that at the next meeting we could compile a list of onboarding action items that can be added to the guidelines – compiling a drive of resources with a table of contents, including overviews and visual content, having an official meeting with staff. He mentioned that he will be working with staff to create the agenda for the next meeting and opened the floor for additions to the list.

d. Discuss next meeting & planning

   i. Chair Hardin identified the theme that the meetings need to be more accessible for community members – not meeting during the morning. He asked what time of day would be helpful (Chuck mentioned checking with Camille before deciding). Community Member McCormick asked if they are restricted to meet at Metro Southeast. Chair Hardin said they previously met at community centers and libraries. Tessa Ortiz from Legal interjected that it has to be a Metro owned property. Community Member McCormick said that Art team used to meet at other locations in the community around 5:30pm and that it was also more accessible for community members. Chair Hardin raised that the regularity of the meetings is not clearly defined, raising that it could sync up with Commission meetings. Commissioner Lefkowitz said that she would like the meetings to align with Commission meetings but not be limited to.

   ii. Community Member McCormick asked about talking in between meetings and how we can address that. Chuck mentioned the online platform and Tessa said Metro Legal opined it was only for Council and there were no platforms or legislation regarding platforms for Boards and Committees to use. She said she will double check if they can meet with only one Commissioner and how the Sunshine Laws apply to Community committee members.

   iii. Community Member Gilbert raised that Art team members met one on one with Commission members and that it was effective. Chair Hardin offered to meet with the committee members one on one before the next meeting.

   iv. Community Member Yousief suggested that CARE meet once a month and staff set a consistent day such as the last Friday of every month at 5:30 or 6pm. Chair Hardin said for the next meeting we can send out a Doodle poll and at the next meeting decide on a more regular schedule and try to align with the Commission meetings. Commissioner Lefkowitz mentioned that Council meets the first and third Tuesday night and Community

Member Gilbert raised that if we plan to meet at community centers we need to be mindful of the hours they are open.

v. Community Member McCormick asked to circle back to the question around authority, what real power CARE has, and how that can be addressed. Commissioner Lefkowitz asked if the question could be framed in a way that she could write about it as she thinks through the question. Josiah said, “what does power in the context of CARE look, feel, sound like?” He spoke about thinking about areas in the scope that have not been tapped into yet or thinking backwards from what it would look like for CARE to be empowered and what it would take to get there.

F. Staff/Commission Report
   a. Updates on staff and programming
      i. Community Engagement event “Coffee Talk” in June

G. Adjourn
   a. Meeting was adjourned at 11:56am