
THE COSTA MESA ARTS COMMISSION

APRIL 3, 2025
6:00 P.M. – OFFICIAL MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER by Chair Ochoa at 6:00 P.M.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE by Commissioner Ford.

ROLL CALL

☒ = Present ☐ = Absent

Commissioners	City Staff
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Charlene Ashendorf	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Svs. Director
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fisher Derderian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brendan Ford	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Monique Villasenor, Recreation Manager
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Erica Lucia	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ashley Thomas, Sr. Recreation Supervisor
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alisa Ochoa	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Laura Fautua, Executive Assistant
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Allison Mann	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kathia Viteri, Office Specialist II
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Debora Wondercheck	

PRESENTATION:

- DIRECTOR OF ORANGE COAST COLLEGE FRANK M. DOYLE ARTS PAVILION**
Dakota Noot presented.
- THE CITY OF COSTA MESA'S POET LAUREATE IN CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL POETRY MONTH**
Poet Laureate, Danielle Hanson, presented.

PUBLIC COMMENTS – [correspondence received](#)

Mark Kaufman: Founder and publisher of a local arts magazine and studios, and a 24-year Costa Mesa resident, spent 34 years promoting the arts in Orange County as a fine artist, actor, editor, and publisher. Kaufman advocated for financial assistance to local arts would uplift all creative sectors and stressed that Costa Mesa must actively promote itself as a true “City of the Arts”.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Wondercheck: Highlighted *Imagination Celebration*, a county-wide arts event for children and families in Orange County. The celebration features various arts events every weekend throughout the county, making it an excellent opportunity for children to become exposed to the arts.

Commissioner Ashendorf: Spoke about muralist Alicia Rojas’s presentation at the Norma Herzog Community Center and her mural “Voices, Faces of Women” on Baker Street. Also shared information of the Costa Mesa Playhouse production of *Uncle Vanya* and encouraged support for local theater. Shared experience from visit to the Costa Mesa library where she saw a photo of the City’s Poet Laureate.

Chair Ochoa: Thanked City Council for their warm welcome of the Poet Laureate Program at Tuesday's Council meeting and shared a councilmember’s suggestion for integrating poetry into the city's landscape. Chair Ochoa also congratulated Danielle Hanson for her

presentation, expressed excitement about supporting her work, and acknowledged Dakota Noot for providing valuable updates on OCC's mentorship and exhibition programs.

CONSENT CALENDAR

1. MINUTES

03/06/2025 Arts Commission Draft Minutes

Commissioner Ashendorf requested amendment corrections to the adjournment to reflect Chair Ochoa.

No public comment.

MOTION/SECOND: Commissioner Ashendorf motioned to approve the amended minutes for March 6, 2025/Seconded by Chair Ochoa.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Ashendorf, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Lucia, Commissioner Mann, Commissioner Wondercheck, Vice Chair Derderian, Chair Ochoa

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried: 7-0

MONTHLY REPORTS:

1. ARTS SPECIALIST REPORT

Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist, presented.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. ARTS GRANT PROGRAM REVIEW OF GUIDELINES

Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist, presented.

Commissioner Wondercheck emphasized the importance of supporting a wide range of art forms, including theater, dance, visual arts, and instrumental music. She expressed concern that the current \$2,500 grant amount might not significantly impact larger organizations and suggested limiting eligibility based on an organization's budget size. Commissioner Wondercheck believed this approach would better serve smaller groups that operate within and serve the Costa Mesa community.

Vice Chair Derderian reflected on the current \$20,000 arts funding allocation and suggested raising the maximum grant award from \$2,500 to \$5,000 to create a more meaningful impact. He emphasized the need to support organizations operating within Costa Mesa and discussed the importance of possibly limiting grants to smaller organizations rather than large, well-funded institutions.

Commissioner Ashendorf noted that some smaller grant recipients from the previous year had successfully generated strong public participation, highlighting the value in supporting smaller organizations with growth potential.

Commissioner Wondercheck agreed and emphasized considering the number of individuals impacted when awarding grants.

Chair Ochoa raised a concern about organizations receiving consecutive grants.

Commissioner Wondercheck provided experience of reoccurring grant application processes.

Commissioner Mann suggested possibly implementing a pause after consecutive awards to prevent dependency, while also expressing a desire for increased funding to support larger projects in the future.

Public Comment:

Jim Fitzpatrick: Expressed frustration that only \$20,000 was available for arts funding, arguing that Costa Mesa has a spending prioritization problem. He criticized the grant limit as inadequate for supporting artists and suggested more creative approaches. Fitzpatrick urged the commission to advocate for a significantly larger arts budget.

Chair Ochoa made a motion to amend the eligibility to limit the number of the size of the organization.

Commissioner Wondercheck added to the motion that applications be limited to organizations with a budget of \$750,000 and less.

Commissioner Lucia voiced her concern to support a motion that may limit applications based on their organization's budget without evaluating budgets. Highlighted the focus should be on improving its effectiveness as it's still a new program. She also expressed interest in discussing the positive outcomes organizations had achieved with the grants and the impact they had made in Costa Mesa. Supported staff suggestions of commission establishing what type of organizations to support, volume of their events, and their program consistencies.

Vice Chair Derderian built on Jim Fitzpatrick's suggestion by proposing that the grant application guidelines encourage matching funds. He reflected on this year's grant applications, were focused on public engagement and education, and expressed a desire to also prioritize grants that directly support the creation of new art. He also suggested raising the maximum grant award from \$2,500 to \$5,000 to better support both community programs and individual artists, and invited further discussion from the commission on this idea.

Commissioner Ford requested there be a focus on grant accessibility and that there be a fair distribution of the grant money.

MOTION/SECOND: Vice Chair Derderian moved to raise the maximum amount limit of grants for this program to \$5,000/Seconded by Commissioner Ford.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Ashendorf, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Lucia, Commissioner Mann, Commissioner Wondercheck, Vice Chair Derderian, Chair Ochoa

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried: 7-0

Commissioner Wondercheck suggested that the grant program place greater emphasis on accessibility, particularly for Title One schools and students with limited access to the arts.

Chair Ochoa inquired for clarification regarding an individual artist grant.

Commissioner Ford supported Commissioner Wondercheck's focus, stressing the importance of exposing as many people as possible to a wide variety of art forms and emphasized that ensuring a fair distribution of grant funding across visual and performing arts should be a key consideration to broaden community engagement with the arts.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. APPROVAL OF ARTS GRANTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024-25

Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist, presented.

Vice Chair Derderian praised the Dance Arts Academy for their strong grant proposal and inquired whether the organization had already established communication or agreements with the schools, or if they planned to secure participation after receiving the grant funding.

Public Comment:

Jim Fitzpatrick: Encouraged the commission to "dream big," explaining that through public records request he confirmed the city had \$400,000 in cannabis tax funds accrued. He urged the commission to advocate for a larger arts budget, suggesting they fund more projects at higher amounts, rather than being limited by the current \$20,000 allocation. Fitzpatrick encouraged the commission to build consensus, involve the community, and bring forward a stronger funding proposal to the City Council to make a meaningful impact on the arts in Costa Mesa.

Shawn Wehan: Founder and promoter of Songs in the Canyon, and chairman of the Givsum Foundation, thanked the commission for previous funding support. He also offered the Givsum Foundation's fiscal sponsorship services to help more artists access funding, highlighted the high costs involved in hosting events like Songs in the Canyon, and emphasized that increased grant funding would help sustain and expand community arts programming.

Jesse Fortune: Founder and owner of Location 1980, shared that his gallery has supported local artists and the community for 15 years, including hosting high school art shows and providing workshops and classes for kids and adults. He emphasized the importance of recognizing and supporting individual artists, not just organizations, and thanked Vice Chair Derderian for acknowledging the local artists' contributions. Fortune expressed a desire for funding assistance.

Nancy Warzer-Brady: Community Engagement Director for Backhausdance, thanked the commission for their previous grant acceptance. She explained that their new proposal, Dance for Joy and Well-Being, aimed to align with the city's master plan by providing accessible, intergenerational dance programming for seniors, caregivers, and veterans at the Costa Mesa Senior Center. Brady emphasized that dance and the arts serve as a natural prescription for health and healing, supporting memory, cognition, and overall well-being.

Harley: Founder of Brain and Body Music Studio, shared that their mission is to provide accessible arts engagement opportunities that promote healing and community connection. While reviewing the grant guidelines, Harley noted a gap in programming for working-class individuals, particularly those aged 18–30 and adults over 30 without children. Harley emphasized the importance of creating intergenerational spaces where people can safely express themselves, build relationships, and find common ground through the arts.

Nadine: From The Art Spread thanked the commission for their grant, sharing that it allowed them to serve over 150 community members and guide over 70 participants in creating their own art, regardless of ability. She suggested the city consider waiving or reducing facility rental fees for grantees, as space costs can consume much of a small grant budget.

Mark Kaufman: Urged the commission to develop a long-term strategy to visibly promote Costa Mesa as the “City of the Arts,” suggesting more prominent signage and infrastructure to build recognition and lasting impact.

Frank Gutierrez: Former Chair of Cultural Arts, encouraged the commission to move beyond simply issuing small grants, comparing them to temporary fixes. He urged creating a sustainable arts economy where artists can consistently earn a living through community-supported events and structures.

Commissioner Ford suggested that offering reduced or free rates for city property use seemed like an easy opportunity and asked if any policies were already in place regarding that.

Staff provided information relating facility rental fees.

Commissioner Ashendorf clarified that different rates exist for nonprofit and for-profit organizations.

Commissioner Wondercheck proposed exploring the creation of a separate grant specifically for individual artists, rather than only nonprofit groups.

Commissioner Mann requested information on grant funding and budgets.

Vice Chair Derderian expressed appreciation for the applicants, particularly Backhausdance on supporting often overlooked groups like seniors.

MOTION/SECOND: Vice Chair Derderian motioned to approve the recommendations from the selection committee for Fiscal Year 2024-25/Seconded by Commissioner Ford.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Ashendorf, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Lucia, Commissioner Mann, Commissioner Wondercheck, Vice Chair Derderian, Chair Ochoa

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried: 7-0

2. ARTS AND CULTURE MASTER PLAN BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-26

Mr. Gruner presented.

Commissioner Lucia asked about the difference between the projected revenue from Measure Q intended for funding the Arts and Culture Master Plan and what the City Council has had to allocate to cover any shortfall, questioning if it related to the number of cannabis permits issued.

Commissioner Ashendorf praised Ms. Garner for significantly expanding arts programs and exhibition spaces, and agreed with Mark Kaufman's point that \$2,500 budgeted for promoting the "City of the Arts" brand was likely inadequate, urging the commission to revisit this during the next budget cycle.

Commissioner Wondercheck suggested exploring whether funds allocated for an installation could be used for a prominent "City of the Arts" plaque.

Vice Chair Derderian raised questions regarding the commission's formal powers and responsibilities, asking staff for clarification on how they could actively make budget recommendations for arts and culture funding.

Public Comment:

Jim Fitzpatrick: Thanked staff for clarifying the budget situation. He explained that Measure Q was originally intended to provide additional funding for arts initiatives, not to replace or subsidize general fund expenses, and urged the commission to actively advocate for correcting this approach. Fitzpatrick encouraged the commission to make a formal motion to study and recommend greater funding to the City Council.

Seema Mishra: CEO of Vivace Designs, introduced her LA-based art and design company, which focuses on storytelling and uplifting local communities through public art. She emphasized the importance of art as a means of building city identity and community engagement and noted that Costa Mesa's current public art funding was very low compared to other cities aiming to brand themselves as cultural destinations.

Mishra encouraged the commission to invest more heavily in public art to truly fulfill the vision of Costa Mesa as the "City of the Arts".

Michael Che Romero: An artist based in Los Angeles, spoke passionately about the transformative power of public art and placemaking. He emphasized that public art is more than decoration; it is a declaration that tells the stories of communities, fosters belonging, heals, and celebrates culture. Romero described how art in public spaces invites reflection, conversation, and connection among all people, creating equity and turning ordinary spaces into meaningful, shared environments that unite and inspire communities.

Vice Chair Derderian asked for clarification regarding the Arts allocated budget and inquired about ways to increase the arts budget such as, public fundraising or other efforts to help supplement funding, or if the commission was limited to what was allocated through the regular city budget process.

Chair Ochoa advised commission to engage with their city council member who appointed them.

ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER MEMBER & STAFF COMMENTS

Vice Chair Derderian shared an idea inspired by the upcoming America 250 celebration, suggesting that Costa Mesa create a series of murals throughout the city to reflect on its history and community identity. He proposed murals along highlighting local historical elements alongside contemporary themes. Derderian encouraged exploring public-private partnerships to fund the project, involving local businesses and community members, and cited the new Chick-fil-A mural as an example of how art could enhance public spaces.

Chair Ochoa announced that Newport Mesa Unified would be hosting their Senior Showcase at the Norma Herzog Community Center.

Sr. Recreation Supervisor, Ashley Thomas, emphasized the importance of continuing to foster community ideas and noted that the upcoming phase of master planning would be crucial for prioritizing projects and securing funding. She encouraged the commission and community stakeholders to actively participate in the master plan update over the next year to help advocate for resources and bring larger, ambitious ideas to fruition.

ADJOURNMENT Chair Ochoa adjourned at 7:59 PM.