



## CITY OF OAKLAND

### **Cultural Affairs Commission Meeting Minutes Monday, January 27, 2025 5:30 – 8:00 PM**

**Members in Attendance:** Vanessa Whang (Chair), Jim Santi Owen (Vice Chair), Jennifer Easton, Ilana Lipsett, Mandolyn “Mystic” Ludlum

**Members Absent:** Olaywa K. Austin (excused), Kev Choice (excused), Ebhodaghe Esoimeme, Michelle Mush Lee (excused)

**Staff in Attendance:** Raquel Iglesias, Lex Leifheit, Pamela Mattera, Kristen Zaremba

**Guest Speakers:** Mama Celeste, co-founder and executive director of Oaklash, and Britney Davis, Assistant City Clerk

#### **Call to Order/Roll Call**

##### **1. Welcome**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Whang at 5:54 PM. The meeting did not meet quorum, so no votes took place.

##### **2. Land Acknowledgement + Official City of Oakland Love Life Acknowledgement**

Chair Whang read the Land Acknowledgement and Commissioner Ludlum read the City's [Love Life Acknowledgement](#).

##### **3. Artist/Grantee Spotlight**

Mama Celeste of nonprofit arts organization Oaklash, a Cultural Funding Program grantee, presented the history of Oaklash and their vision for the future. Oaklash was founded in 2018 and is still the first and only drag festival in the Bay Area.

##### **4. City Clerk Informational Presentation – Board and Commission Regulations**

Chair Whang welcomed Britney Davis, Assistant City Clerk, and Krystal Sams, Legislative Recorder – Elections & Political Compliance, who presented on the importance of timely filing of Form 700s. Commissioners must take an oath of office with the City Clerk office before attending and participating in public meetings to be in compliance, and they must submit a Form 700 upon assuming or leaving/separating office (within 30 days of either) and annually on April 1 while a Commissioner. Form 700 is also known as a Statement of Economic Interest or SEI; it's a public form

to identify financial interests and any conflicts of interest. Sams walked through completing the form. Davis then shared how to file the form and explained how they enforce filing.

## **5. Public Comment**

One comment was entered. Natalia Neira, a cultural worker/writer/curator/cultural strategist/Grassroots Artists Advocacy Program 2024 Advocacy Fellow, introduced herself and her work to the Commission.

Commissioner Lipsett asked Chair Whang to confirm that members of the public can volunteer to serve on the Cultural Affairs Commission's ad hoc and other committees related to communications, advocacy, etc.; Chair Whang affirmed.

## **6. Interim Cultural Affairs Manager Report**

Lex Leifheit, Interim Cultural Affairs Manager, introduced herself and thanked the Commissioners for their work engaging their community members around the value of arts and culture. Leifheit used her time to describe the Division's work since November 2024 and where it is heading in light of the budget shortfall and declines in state and federal funding. She spoke about deploying the resources available (funding and staff knowledge); offering expertise, experience, and objective perspective (more short-term projects and information requests); and cultivating resources and opportunities. At the behest of Chair Whang, Leifheit also provided an update on the Cultural Affairs Manager job search (not yet posted, pending Fiscal Year 2025-26 budget approval) and the Coliseum sale (pending).

## **7. Cultural Program Updates**

Raquel Iglesias, Cultural Funding Coordinator, shared that she has taken over as the staff contact for the Just City Cultural Fund, a partnership with East Bay Community Foundation and Akonadi Foundation. Ongoing work of Funding Program staff includes participation in the Arts Loan Fund, conducting site visits with grantees, researching how other cities create sustainable revenue sources for arts and culture funding, looking for fundraising opportunities, and supporting the Cultural Affairs Commission. She noted the Special Cultural Affairs Commission meeting on February 10: quorum will not be required to hold the discussion on funding scenarios to disburse approximately \$200,000 from TOT funds and subsequent recommendations from Commissioners.

Kristen Zaremba presented an update on Public Art. Tyrone Carney Memorial Park is moving forward; plans will be shared later this year. Mosswood Park Community Center is under construction and the team is in the midst of artist selections. The "Shifting Topographies" artwork in the BART entrance/alleyway 19<sup>th</sup> Street is damaged beyond repair. This project utilized redevelopment dollars, which no longer exist, therefore de-accessioning is now being recommended to the PAAC. The Public Art Plan is being finalized to be presented to City Council with a request to appropriate funds that have accumulated, tentatively scheduled for March. Chair Whang requested that the plan be presented to the Commission.

## **8. Preview of Amendments to Ordinance 13561**

Chair Whang presented a preview of the proposed amendments to Ordinance 13561, which will be discussed as an action item at the next regular Cultural Affairs Commission meeting on April 28, 2025. There are procedural suggestions for change: standing committees to be approved by the City Administrator instead of the City Council, move from having the Mayor appoint the Chair of the Commission to having the Commission elect the Chair, changing the terms for Chair and Vice-Chair

to two years, and establishing quorum. Changes were discussed by the Commissioners without dispute.

#### **9. Cultural Affairs Commission Chair Update**

Chair Whang shared a reminder about producing the virtual City Council Candidate forums. She will be reaching out to the coalition that produced the Council forums to see if it would be possible to host additional forums for the upcoming mayoral and District 2 elections on April 15, 2025. She reiterated the importance of getting to know the new City Councilmembers, especially given budget cuts and the need to make the case for the arts and cultural sector in this moment.

A discussion about candidate forums followed. Chair Whang will follow up with Commissioners separately since the election is before the next regular Commission meeting.

#### **10. Commission Ad Hoc Committees**

Commissioner Lipsett provided an update on advocacy and communications work. The focus towards the end of the year was on budget advocacy: a number of action emails were sent to the Commission's listserv of 1,100. This resulted in 103 direct emails to City Council members advocating against budget cuts. She posed an open question about how to engage the community in the work moving forward.

Commissioner Easton provided an update on the policy and investments committee. The group has met once to look at opportunities for engagement. A brief discussion on sales tax followed.

Commissioner Ludlum plugged CA for the Arts' social media advocacy assets and wondered if something similar might be possible for the current moment.

Chair Whang suggested asking new Councilmembers what community input is most effective for their own work and how to best communicate with them.

#### **11. Open Forum**

No comments made.

#### **12. Announcement & Acknowledgements**

Vice Chair Santi Own acknowledged the passing of Zakir Hussain, a classical Indian music virtuoso, an innovator in a wide range of musical genres, and Bay Area resident.

Commissioner Easton recognized colleagues in the Los Angeles area in the aftermath of the wildfires.

Commissioner Ludlum sent healing energy to Viveca Hawkins, an artist who recently suffered a stroke.

#### **13. Adjournment**

A motion to end the meeting was made by Commissioner Lipsett, seconded by Vice Chair Santi Owen.

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 PM.