



CITY OF OAKLAND

Cultural Affairs Commission

Meeting Minutes

Monday, July 28, 2025

5:30 – 8:45 PM

Members in Attendance: Vanessa Whang (Chair), Jim Santi Owen (Vice Chair), Kev Choice, Jennifer Easton, Michelle Mush Lee (arrived 6:15 pm), Ilana Lipsett, Mandolyn “Mystic” Ludlum

Members Absent: Olaywa K. Austin (unexcused)

Staff in Attendance: Josie de Mira, Pamela Mattera, Kristen Zaremba

Guest Speakers: Bebe LeGardeur and Khalilha Haynes, Strategic Planning (Planning and Building Department); Cristy Johnston Limón, Deputy Director of Economic and Workforce Development; and Ashleigh Kanat, Director of Economic and Workforce Development

Call to Order/Roll Call

1. Welcome

The meeting was called to order by Chair Whang at 5:35 PM.

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

Commissioner Ludlum read the Land Acknowledgement and Commissioner Choice read the City’s [Love Life Acknowledgement](#).

3. Actions on Special Orders of the Day

Chair Whang presented Commissioner Choice with a Mayoral Proclamation in recognition of his service on the Cultural Affairs Commission and Commissioners expressed their appreciation of his service. A motion to amend the order of the agenda to postpone recognition of Commissioner Lee until after her arrival made by Commissioner Easton and seconded by Commissioner Lipsett.

4. Public Comment

Public comments were entered by Roberto Bedoya, Ayinde, and Ustadi Kadiri.

5. Action Item 1: Approval of Minutes from April and May

Motion to approve meeting minutes from April 28, 2025, and May 19, 2025, made by Commissioner Choice and seconded by Vice Chair Owen.

Ayes: Choice, Easton, Lipsett, Ludlum, Santi Owen, Whang
Absent: Austin, Lee

The motion passed.

6. Discussion Item: Oakland General Plan Phase 2

Bebe LeGardeur, Planner II, and Khalilha Haynes, Planner III, both of the Strategic Planning team in the Planning and Building Department, provided an overview of Phase 2 of the General Plan Update. LeGardeur shared the definition of a General Plan and noted that racial equity and inclusive engagement are key components of the Oakland Plan. The Phase 2 Update kicked off in fall 2024 and is expected to continue through 2026; the team developed a robust community engagement plan to achieve more inclusive engagement with a focus on learning from Oakland's most impacted residents such as communities experiencing negative environmental impacts, communities of color, and youth. A survey will open from July 30 – September 24 for feedback on preferred options for development. Phase 2 Elements to be updated include: Land Use and Transportation Element (LUTE); Infrastructure and Public Facilities Element; Open Space, Conservation, and Recreation (OSCAR) Element; and Noise Element. Discussion questions addressing the role of arts and culture in the General Plan Update were presented to the Commission.

Commissioners inquired about additional opportunities to provide substantive feedback, current references to arts and culture in Phase 2 documentation, buy-in at the Council and Mayoral levels, case studies from other cities, and the success of the Phase 1 Update. Commissioners also emphasized implementing arts and culture in each element, engaging with artists currently addressing climate resilience, and referencing the work of the California Creative Corps. An additional discussion point encouraged positioning arts and culture at the forefront of new industries/economic engines in the City. Haynes shared that 10,000 residents were engaged in the Phase 1 Update and can participate in the Phase 2 Update by joining the General Plan Advisory Committee or Community Advisory Subcommittees and by completing the survey. She also noted that there will be a public education campaign shared via social media and on IKE digital kiosk billboards and buses. Chair Whang thanked LeGardeur and Haynes for their presentation and indicated that the Commission is interested in engaging with and supporting this work by selecting a representative for the General Plan Advisory Committee, and possibly supporting further with subcommittee work.

7. Return to Special Actions on the Day

Chair Whang presented Commissioner Lee with a Mayoral Proclamation in recognition of her service on the Cultural Affairs Commission and Commissioners expressed their appreciation of her service.

8. Public Comment

Public comments were entered by Carlos Uribe, Roberto Bedoya, Ayinde, Latanya, Ted Russell, and Diane Sanchez.

9. Discussion Item: Economic Development Action Plan

Cristy Johnston Limón, Deputy Director | Business Development Manager for the Economic and Workforce Development Department, presented the draft five-year Economic Development Action Plan (EDAP) to the Commission, focusing on how arts and culture are embedded in the strategy. She provided a high-level overview of the strategy, its guiding framework, goals, and key actions for feedback and reflection in preparation for presentation at the Community Economic Development

Committee meeting on September 30. The EDAP is a direct result of two years of listening and conversation and will be adjusted in real time. The plan recognizes that arts and culture are Oakland's competitive edge, and its fifth stated goal is to amplify Oakland's social and cultural activities.

Johnston Limón asked Commissioners for specific feedback on the following questions regarding the EDAP: are artists and cultural practitioners reflected, does it capture what's most vital, and are there identifiable gaps?

Commissioners highlighted the work needed around reinforcing the narrative that arts and culture are core to the City's values and an explicit component of the business economy and ensuring the EDAP is made legible through plain writing (ie. no jargon) and language that resonates with the cultural sector. They advocated for a clear communication plan to demonstrate that these suggested strategies will uplift historically marginalized individuals and communities. Commissioners encouraged dialogue around the expanding creative economy and modes of cultural expression like collectives, cultural expression through food, etc. Additional suggestions included placing arts and culture as the first goal on the list, centering the well-being of Oaklanders as the most critical piece of the strategy, incorporating more data points about the revenue that arts and culture generates in Oakland, and thinking more expansively about stakeholders; most of those currently listed are people or entities who already have power.

10. Economic and Workforce Development Department Update

Ashleigh Kanat, Director of Economic and Workforce Development, provided an update on the department and opened by thanking the commissioners for their efforts in the restoration of the Cultural Affairs Manager position. The Manager position will be posted in August and open for six weeks; she hopes to have someone in the seat by the end of the calendar year. Kanat then plans to staff up the Cultural Affairs Division with the input of the new permanent Manager.

She next addressed the work of the Division, noting that with budget and staffing shifts, there have been and will be some changes. These changes include the fiscal and relational stewardship of cultural facilities and an increased focus on cultural districts. The Department has engaged a consulting team to think more deeply about a framework and resources for cultural districts with conversations in community an integral component. In partnership, Cultural Affairs and Special Events will work to develop a program to leverage Fairs and Festivals as levers for economic development and cultural expression. Kanat does not see a lot of potential for cultural grantmaking over this biennial budget but hopes to build that back in over time, pointing to the success of the Oakland Arts & Culture Pooled Fund.

11. Open Forum

Comments were entered by Latanya, Natalia Neira, and Ayinde.

A motion to extend the meeting by 15 minutes made by Vice Chair Owen and seconded by Commissioner Easton. The motion passed.

12. Cultural Program Updates

Pamela Mattera, Assistant Cultural Funding Coordinator, shared a brief update, noting that she has been working on the Oakland Arts & Culture Pooled Fund and on Organizational Assistance grant

contracts. These \$6,500 grants will be disbursed beginning next week. She also shared a sample of press clips announcing the Pooled Fund on July 16.

Kristen Zarembo, Public Art Coordinator, shared that she and Josie De Mira, Assistant Public Art Coordinator, have been working towards artist selection for a public commission at DeFremery Park. A community-based selection panel recommended awarding the commission to Vanessa “DJ Agana” Espinoza. She also highlighted that two artists recruited to the qualified pool as a result of the Cultural Strategists-in-Government program, Shogun Shido and Isadora Gullov-Singh, were selected for private commissions in Oakland, representing the first permanent projects for each artist.

13. Announcement & Acknowledgements

Commissioner Easton acknowledged the loss of Oakland visual artist and teaching artist Raymond Saunders. Chair Whang acknowledged the loss of Greg Morozumi, co-founder of EastSide Arts Alliance.

14. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Choice, seconded by Commissioner Lee.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.