

Minutes of the Hightstown Cultural Arts Commission Meeting
Wednesday, January 21, 2015
7:30 PM
Caspersen History House 102
Peddie School

People Present

Ann Marie Miller
Frank Rivera
Kim Boknoski
Catherine Rodrigue
Barbara Harrington
Sue Howard
Jonathan Shahn
Adam Welch
Kat Liao
Eduardo Garcia (guest)
David Miller (public)

Adequate notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, pursuant to Public Laws of 1975, Chapter 231. Said notice was advertised in the Trenton Times and Windsor-Hights Herald, as required by law, and is posted in the Borough Clerk's Office.

Adam moved to approve the previous meeting minutes. Kim seconded the motion. Ann Marie introduced Eduardo, who was instrumental in converted the West Windsor Firehouse into an arts center. She shared his biography and welcomed Eduardo to the meeting.

Eduardo Garcia said he will give a brief history. He suggested progress is slow in developing a local arts commission. He shared the story of the creation of the arts council in West Windsor. He noted that it's important to start doing things right way: performance at local malls, gallery space, e.g., make themselves visible. Eduardo said the Arts Council had a base amount of money from the start: there was a financial base for them to hire a professional like himself. He said he had a group of folks handling programming. His role was to work on the firehouse project. He said there was a township administrator who liked the idea, and he and Eduardo were able to work together. That said, Eduardo said people opposed converting the firehouse into an arts center. Eduardo said they finally finished what they needed at the township level. As luck would have it, Trader Joe's moved in and brought tax revenue with it. Eduardo's objective was to open the building and establish programming. Eduardo said they repeatedly established the importance of the art council: they offered classes, for example.

Eduardo said they focused on quality classes and added staff. After two years, they reached a point where they could hire someone full-time. He said that person was also responsible for fundraising.

Eduardo said it was easy to raise money for the building, not so easy for operations. Eduardo said the Hightstown Council seems to be where it was several years before his arrival. He

suggested the group start by deciding what it wants to happen. He said the firehouse conversion was easy. He said raising money for programming is a harder sell.

Questions followed: did he have the support of local libraries. Eduardo said yes. Frank asked about multiple v. single venues. Eduardo said a single venue is probably best. Eduardo said it's important to have quality work: the curator has to be good. Eduardo said it was important for membership to grow. Sue asked about the level of the classes. Eduardo said most classes were for children, though adult classes were offered as well. Eduardo said the camp populations exploded, filling a need. Camps became a revenue stream and helped attract membership. Eduardo said the decision early-on was to have it be a non-for profit separate from the West Windsor government. Eduardo said they never got any money from the township.

Eduardo said the Center is financed through donations and earned income. Frank suggested this is a model Hightstown might follow. Eduardo agreed that would be a good start, e.g., to work with existing facilities. Adam said he thinks the council members and mayor support this. Sue suggested the firehouse might provide a space for us for musical and theatrical productions.

Eduardo said the West Windsor Arts Council always paid the artists. He spoke to the importance of a value statement.

Eduardo asked Kat to speak to the Off the Wall exhibit. She explained how it operates. Ann Marie mention a similarly themed 10x10 exhibit. Frank asked about first steps. Eduardo said visibility is a first step. For example, the Council might go after a building, but programming is equally important. He said the Council needs to be visible in that context. Eduardo said we might find out it's not possible to take over the building.

He said you have to look at everything as a source of revenue. It's very hard to start for free. Johnathan member agreed it's important to do something to be noticed. Adam said that might also build support among the Council and Mayor.

David reiterated the importance of programming. He said he is leery of going after buildings first thing. He said the Arts Council needs an identity. Successful Arts Councils have programming first.

Barbara suggested looking at the Communiiversity as a model. Barbara asked about the Harvest Fair. Kat asked about the Arts Station. Adam suggested Concerts in the Park and the Farmers Market.

Adam thanked Eduardo for coming in this evening.

Ann Marie asked how we can plug into existing activities or create our own? Kat asked whether this is an Arts Council or a Commission. Adam said being part of the town isn't bad since we can piggyback on the township's insurance, for example.

Ideas floated including linking into the May flea market or weekly Farmers' Market.

Adam asked about the survey. Ann Marie said she put it on Facebook page today. Ann Marie mentioned the presence of the Cranbury Arts Council. Ann Marie said everyone around the table can offer something, a class, for example.

Ann Marie said we have to commit ourselves to something. Adam said maybe the survey will be helpful in building-up a mailing list. Ann Marie said as the survey results come in, she will keep

the group informed. The survey results will indicate if we have any additional volunteers and what types of artists we might have available to us. Adam said he'd like to showcase an artist to the Facebook page periodically.

Adam moved we adjourn. Frank seconded. Meeting adjourned.