

To: City Councilors Ballantyne, Strezio, Niedergang
From: Gregory Jenkins, Arts Council

Per: Docket # 210458 Order Special Meeting, August 5, 2020; Order Item ID 23332

In response to your board order to address the questions from cultural community members, please see the responses after each question posed.

- 1. Allocate city, state, and federal funds for the Somerville arts community, which includes its nonprofit arts and cultural organizations, with grants awarded on the basis of organizational need and impact. One model is the City of Boston, which has allocated federal CARES Act dollars toward arts organizations through a competitive process. Another is the City of Cambridge, which is making substantial arts investments in its FY21 budget*

Specifically, the Arts Council will be issuing two new grant categories with a pool of \$120,000 from our OM FY 21 budget. This categories will support:

- **SAC COVID Relief Grant for Local Cultural Organizations:** The Somerville Arts Council (SAC) is launching the COVID Relief Grant program to provide financial assistance to local non-profit cultural institutions that are facing dire economic circumstances brought on by the COVID crisis. We are aware that many local organizations are in peril due to the crisis. This new program will provide one-time grants up to \$24,000. We anticipate grants between \$3,000 and \$24,000.

Grant Program to Support Black, Indigineous, and People of Color (BIPOC); Fellowship and Project Grants: The Somerville Arts Council (SAC) is launching a grant program to support the local BIPOC community with a special emphasis on serving the Black community and celebrating Black culture. This new grant program is designed to serve BIPOC artists as well as strengthen the capacity for arts presenting, programming and instruction that serves predominantly BIPOC culture.

Overall, the City is exploring the use of federal CARES funds and other funding sources, such as CDBG, to support the community. Tom Galligani, in OSPCD, and myself will be exploring this in detail next week.

- 2. Enact a property tax abatement for landlords and owners who lease to artists and arts and cultural organizations. Tie these property tax reductions to rental relief for those tenants.*

It is my understanding that this type of property tax relief would require review and approval from the Assessors (board).

3. Temporarily relax certain permitting and licensing rules so that arts organizations can use their outdoor spaces to recapture some of their lost income for the next 3–4 months. The City made accommodations to support restaurants' expansion of their outdoor operations; similar assistance is needed for the arts and culture sector.

The COVID staff team discusses how it can support local businesses and organizations, including arts organizations, given our reopening phasing. At this point in our anticipated Phase 3 category, while this could be done, specific public permitting with safety measures enacted would need to be resumed. In addition, during this phase all outdoor gatherings are currently limited, “In Somerville, indoor and outdoor gatherings also remain set at no more than 10 persons allowed until further notice, unless specifically permitted in city activity-specific guidelines.

4. Explore ways to create new, permanent art spaces and secure existing facilities (including through issuing a municipal bond to support acquisition and dedicating a municipal building for arts use).

There are three initiatives currently in process to support this specific request. ArtFarm is still in design development and is moving forward with internal work. In addition, the review process on the 24 Cross and 165 Broadway RFI, which was issued by OSPCD to determine if arts and social service uses could be served via this disposition has resumed. The City is also developing a Creative Space Task Force to work with MAPC to examine arts production spaces in the City. A report will address vulnerabilities and opportunities of arts spaces, explore the City’s new zoning and find further policies to enhance art spaces in the city.

5. Please meet with us for a Town Forum and a wider conversation of how arts organizations and the City can partner for a brighter future. Let us help you! We, like you, are creative and innovative by nature.

The City is convening a Town Hall meeting on the Arts with the Mayor and staff to discuss their concerns and to reply to specific points in their letter. This meeting will occur on September 15th at 6:30. <https://www.somervillema.gov/events/2020/09/15/arts-community-town-hall>

In addition, the Arts Council has been convening meetings with artists and organizations to hear their concerns and to specifically support them with reopening plans relating to Phase 3

reopening. A number of organizations, dance studios, art education, will be able to reopen at Phase 3.