

## Cultural Affairs Committee Update

Off and running, the committee met on March 19 with a full agenda. Joan Lynch, Arlington Cultural Affairs Division hosted the meeting, gave a tour of the facility and overview of the programming at 3700 S Four Mile Run Dr. The committee marked its Kick-Off by adopting the Statement of Concern shared at the March 2 General Assembly. Tina Worden's attendance and participation was warmly welcomed in all R&E Committee March meetings in preparation for the budget report and resolution.

Both Kate Summers, president of Friends of the Arlington Public Library and Craig Syphax, president of The Black Heritage Museum of Arlington gave brief overviews of their respective organizations' and notable work. Please see the Announcements for the dates and details for the upcoming Library Book Sale, proceeds support Arlington Public Library programs.

The cultural landscape has changed dramatically in the last 9 years and its an exciting prospect to offer a glimpse of Arlington's dynamic culture. With a committee of 18 members, 11 were in attendance. The committee will reconvene in May to prepare for the June 4 presentation.

With an exploding student population and a persistent vacancy rate, the reality of the County's budget burden is on the minds of many.

### Arts Advocacy Efforts —Update:

Facing devastating cuts to the Cultural Affairs Division, the Arlington arts community is responding to the cuts in the County Managers FY 2020 Proposed Budget. Leading the effort is **Encore Stage & Studio** and **Embracing Arlington Arts**.

- Over the last few weeks, the community has organized to reach out to County Board members with emails, meetings, requests for appointments or speaking out against these cuts at Open Door Mondays. On March 11, over 100 attended an open advocacy meeting covered and featured on NBC4 news.
- To follow or join in on social media use #ARLsaveourstage or follow this link: <http://www.encorestageva.org/support-us/arlsaveourstage/>
- A petition with over 1,900 signatures so far, will be forwarded to the County Board. To get in on this: [change.org petition](http://change.org)
- **A Celebration of the Arts in Arlington will be held on Tuesday, April 2 from 6 - 7 pm.** With performances by local groups. All are encouraged to attend and share concerns over the budget cuts. Various groups will have speakers, The Arlington Players will distribute stickers to wear as a show of collective strength - and together attend the 7pm Budget Hearing.

**Statement to the Arlington County Civic Federation Membership Meeting April 2, 2019**  
By The Cultural Affairs Committee

**Concern:**

The Cultural Affairs Committee is concerned over cuts in the County Manager’s FY 2020 Proposed Budget, specifically reductions to the Cultural Affairs Division. The elimination of 5 key positions and reduction in grant funding will have devastating and long-lasting impacts to the arts community in Arlington.

The 2-tiered proposed reductions and realignments are:

- 1-Cultural Affairs Audio - Production Specialist \$83,143 1.0 (Vacant)
- 2-Scenic Studio Program Gunston Community Center \$108,621 1.0 (Filled)
- 3-Facility Manager at 3700 S Four Mile Run Dr \$96,663. 1.0 (Filled)
- 4-Costume Lab Gunston Community Center \$70,761 1.0 (Filled)
- 5-Facility Technology Services Director \$151,202 1.0 (Filled)

**Total Proposed Reductions: \$510,390.00**

And in the 2nd tier: Arts Grants \$70,000 - reduction

**Rationale:**

The County Board recognizes “the importance of arts and cultural activities to the health and well-being of all citizens, that the arts play a major role in defining community,” and the County government has “responsibility for supporting the cultural life of a community and for encouraging its growth and development.”<sup>1</sup>

For almost 30 years, Arlington has observed its commitment to support the arts through the Arlington Arts Grants Program in accordance with the Arlington County Policy for the Support of Arts Organizations and Artists. Approved by the Arlington County Board on December 8, 1990, the policy provides facilities, financial and technical support and administrative services to artists and cultural organizations in Arlington, as resources are available. The Cultural Affairs Division administers and provides material support in the form of grants, facilities and theater technology.

Financial resources and performance venues available to the arts community from the County have been in a gradual decline over the past 6 years. However, these cuts are an extreme reduction and a significant departure from the Arts Grants Program. These proposed cuts impact younger community organizations as well as Arlington institutions serving our community between 10 and 70 years, all deserve our care and adherence to our policies, mission and values. (*\*\*i.e. Prio Bangla 7 years; Dominion Stage 12 years; WSC Avant Bard-29 years, Signature Theatre 30 years; Encore Stage & Studio 52 years; Opera Nova 57 years; The Arlington Players 68 years in Arlington*)

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<sup>1</sup> Arlington Commission for the Arts Charter, adopted by the Arlington County Board, July 24, 2014

In 2017 the County participated in “Arts & Economic Prosperity 5”, a nationwide study conducted by Americans For the Arts.<sup>2</sup> The report found, using FY 2015 data, that non-profit arts and cultural organizations generated over 4,000 jobs and \$7.5 million in revenues for local government.

*\*\*In 2017, Arlington participated in a nationwide study conducted by American for the Arts to document economic impact of the nonprofit arts and culture industry in 341 communities and regions (113 cities, 115 counties, 81 multi city regions, 10 states and 12 individual arts districts)—representing all 50 US States and the District of Columbia. Americans for the Arts partnered with 250 local, regional and statewide organizations that represent 341 study regions—Arlington joined the study as one of the 250 partners. The study included surveys of Nonprofit Arts and Cultural Organizations, their audiences and input-output analysis to study economic impact—72 of the 127 eligible organizations participated, an overall 56.7 participation rate.*

In a public statement to the County Board on March 14, 2019, Marsha Semmel, Chair of the Arlington Commission for the Arts described the impacts: *“The proposed cuts will do the most damage to the work of many of our longstanding and community-minded arts and cultural organizations—as well as some of the new creative arts entrepreneurs who have been drawn to Arlington because of our County’s many positive affordances, but who are struggling to gain a foothold. These are groups without big budgets or deep pockets, spanning different generations and levels of expertise, groups that engage our diverse populations, amateurs and professionals, artists and arts enthusiasts, who build sets in the scene shop, tap the technical expertise of—and longstanding relationships with—experienced county staff, and depend on the costume shop and the mobile stage for their programs, productions, and festivals. Simply put, the activities that occur on that stage, in the scene shop, and at 3700 Four Mile Run Drive, testify to community engagement at its finest and foster cross-cultural, cross-generational creativity, learning, and connection. These have been hallmarks of Arlington’s special quality of life.”*

### **Where Will the Money Come From to RESTORE CUTS to the CULTURAL AFFAIRS Division?**

The budget envisions a reduction of \$18,000 in revenue from the approximately \$160,800<sup>3</sup> generated by fees and surcharges paid by the users of the service. It is difficult to imagine that the theater groups in Arlington will continue to pay fees when the services are no longer being provided.

In discussions with the Revenues & Expenditures Committee, it was noted that the Manager proposes to carry over \$4 million from the FY2019 budget for the purpose of an 'Economic Stabilization/Contingency Fund' in FY 2020. As these are non-allocated and discretionary funds,

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<sup>2</sup> The complete report can be found at [https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2018/07/VA\\_ArlingtonCounty\\_AEP5\\_CustomizedReport-1.pdf](https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2018/07/VA_ArlingtonCounty_AEP5_CustomizedReport-1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> County report 250 – Revenue by Fund and Cost Center, ADJ1-18 (at fiscal year-end) fund 101, cost center 71000.

some portion could be used to restore part or all of the cuts to the Cultural Affairs programs. (Re One-Time Funding Proposals, County Budget p. 53 book, p. 61 web)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the elimination and phasing out of 5 key positions and programs in the Cultural Affairs Division of Arlington Economic Development is a disregard to Arlington's existing policy and values. This proposal dismisses longstanding commitments by the County and diminishes our reputation in the eyes of our local and broader community. It is clear that insufficient analysis was performed prior to proposing these severe reductions. The County Manager should delete the reduction and direct staff to consider productive and strategic alternatives in consultation with stakeholders outside of the budget process. We urge the County to adhere to its values and bring stakeholders together to determine a path forward.

On March 19, 2019, The Cultural Committee unanimously adopted this statement by committee members: Duke Banks, Natalie Carr, Wes MacAdam, Sandy Newton, Carol Patch, Sarah Shortall, Craig Syphax, and Tina Worden.