



## CHARLOTTESVILLE CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

April 8, 2026 at 4:00 PM

CitySpace: 100 5th St NE, Charlottesville, VA 22902

The Charlottesville City Council held a special meeting on Wednesday, April 8, 2026, to discuss local arts and culture initiatives. All councilors were present: Mayor Juandiego Wade, Vice Mayor Natalie Oschrin, and councilors Jen Fleisher, Michael Payne and Lloyd Snook.

Dr. Andrea Douglas, Executive Director of the Jefferson School African American Heritage Center, presented an update on the “Swords Into Ploughshares” project and using art to tell the narrative of place. She shared the proposals from three artist finalists: 1) Hood Design Studio, 2) Model of Architecture Serving Society (MASS) with artist Dana King, and 3) PUSH Studio Group. The final design choice, voted on by the public, will be announced on June 10, 2026.

Councilor Snook inquired about the potential location choices for projects and the need to involve City Council in the decision for placement of the artwork. Councilor Oschrin asked about maintenance costs once the artwork is turned over to the City. Dr. Douglas and Mr. Freas discussed ideas for including maintenance as a component of the proposal and funding maintenance of objects that will be meant for public interaction. Councilor Payne suggested having the name of the Market Street Park intertwine with the artwork. Mayor Wade emphasized the importance of outreach and the work that Dr. Selena Cozart is doing for this project.

Deputy City Manager James Freas and Maureen Brondyke reviewed the Public Arts Commission and distinguished between the Commission and the Arts Council. Mr. Freas stated that the Public Art Commission would bring requests to City Council for approval of acquiring public art. Ms. Brondyke, Executive Director for New City Arts, spoke about the Charlottesville Area Arts Feasibility Study, which was made possible with support from the City of Charlottesville, UVA Arts, The FUNd at CACF, the Anne & Gene Worrell Foundation, and the Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau.

### Public Arts Commission

The role of a Public Art Commission is to make recommendations to the City Council for the management of the City’s public art collection. The role is very specific and necessary so that the City may make informed decisions with regard to the collection of artistic pieces that it owns. These are decisions around maintenance and restoration, expanding the collection, and deaccessioning (removing) pieces. The composition of the Public Art Commission should include people who are knowledgeable in the arts as well as reflective of the community’s culture and history.

It is an essential element of public art today that the City owns, or otherwise exercises control, over its public art collection. Beyond having control for the purposes of ensuring maintenance and upkeep of an art piece, ownership allows the City to also own the “speech” that an art piece represents. Where the City only owns the venue that an art piece is displayed within – the public location where the art is displayed – the City cannot regulate the content of that art, which is effectively protected free speech under the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Allowing a person or organization to display a piece of art in a public space requires that the City afford the same opportunity to any other person or organization, with little regard for the content of the art to be displayed.

Once created, a Public Art Commission would be tasked with developing a set of procedures and criteria for the consideration of public art investments and a plan for the development and maintenance of the City’s public art collection. This plan would result in annual work plans that would be presented to Council, potentially including requests for funding to support acquisition or commissioning efforts. A

Public Art Commission would guide the essential public conversations around public art installations in the City as well as providing a venue to discuss the logistics of location and materials for each piece. This role is particularly important for public memorials commemorating the history of the City, which would require engagement with entities such as the Historic Resources Commission in addition to the public processes described above.

Without a Public Art Commission, changes to the City's public art collection, whether to grow it or to remove older pieces, will continue to be ad hoc and uninformed by a broader sense of strategy. Given the level of effort necessary to consider growing this collection, it is likely that there will continue to be little to no expansion in the City's public art collection, absent this Commission.

### Art Council

An Arts Council, in Charlottesville, would be a non-profit entity focused on coordination and long-term stewardship of the City's art ecosystem. The Council would lead coordinated action in support of the art community through communication and advocacy, helping to identify the issues and potential solutions that can collectively strengthen artists and arts organizations in Charlottesville. Ideally, such an organization would receive financial support from the City, Albemarle County, and private philanthropy.

With City support, an Arts Council could fill the following roles for the City:

- Distributing through grants the City's contributions for the arts, potentially enhanced with additional private sector contributions.
- Managing City sponsored art competitions or requests for proposals.
- Advising on actions or investments the City could make to support the Arts sector in Charlottesville, such as the creation of an Arts District. Helping to collect input on such proposals from the art community and the broader public.
- Assisting in the management of Arts-oriented City facilities.

Based on the needs specific to Charlottesville, staff believes these two entities should be distinct with the public art commission specifically focused on the City's public art collection while the arts council is both regional in scope and broader in its focus. Despite that distinction, staff expects that there will be benefit to both entities to collaborate as we collectively work towards shared goals of supporting and enhancing the arts community in Charlottesville.

Ruby Lopez Harper shared information from a community-driven study which emphasized the strategic importance of developing a coordinated structure for the Arts community and staffing with local people.

Jessica Harris, Artistic Director with Empowered Players and Assistant Director of Community Research at the Community Research Program Manager at the Center for Community Partnerships, serving on the steering committee for this project spoke about the unique nature and integrity of the process to bring coordination among artists, art leaders, art workers, and people of different backgrounds.

Ms. Brondyke spoke about challenges for artists to address the cost of living in Charlottesville, and she requested that Council consider the economic impact of standing up a Public Arts Commission and an Art Council. She suggested using \$100,000 in funds to support these efforts.

Ms. Harris clarified that the Council will not help to sunset organizations, but will help to coordinate projects, proposals for funding and advocacy. It was recommended that the Arts Council be established as a 501c(3) organization to be able to leverage resources.

Council continued discussion about coordination and sustainable funding of the arts.

Councilors decided to report on the respective boards and committees on which they serve at another time.

On motion by Snook, seconded by Fleisher, Council by a vote of 5-0 adjourned the meeting at 6:20 p.m.

BY Order of City Council

BY Kyna Thomas, Clerk of Council

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