

Bellevue Arts Commission Special Meeting Minutes

April 23, 2025
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
1E-113 and Virtual

Commissioners Present: Chairperson Aldredge, Commissioners Bhargava, Chen, Sandra Martínez

Commissioners Remote: Commissioners Enomoto, Nederlander, Hazra

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Jesse Canedo, and Emil King, Community Development; Courtney Popp, City Attorney's Office

Others Present: Councilmember Stokes; Brook Rose, Washington Symphony Orchestra; Ellen Walker, Pacific Northwest Ballet; Vera Altunina, International Ballet Theatre

Recording Secretary: Gerry Lindsay

I. **Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Chair Aldredge, who presided. All Commissioners were present.

2. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

A. Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Bhargava. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Martínez and the motion carried unanimously.

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the February 26, 2025, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Chen. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Bhargava and the motion carried unanimously.

3. **Oral Communications** – None

4. **Action, Discussion and Information Items**

A. Partner Presentations

Brooke Rose, Executive Director of Lake Washington Symphony Orchestra (LWSO), noted being originally from Southern California, having served as executive director of the orchestra since 2020, and being involved with multiple local chambers of commerce and the Bellevue Rotary.

Brook Rose emphasized the negative impact of widespread budget cuts on arts education, particularly music programs, noting recent reductions in the North Shore and Lake Washington school districts. The orchestra prioritizes education through initiatives like annual education concerts and the Music Mentors program in partnership with Sammamish High School to offer mentorship at no cost to the school. The goal is not necessarily to produce professional musicians but to foster lifelong appreciation of and involvement in music, which benefits cognitive and social development, mental health, and community connections.

The mission of LWSO is to enrich and inspire communities through performance, outreach, and education, guided by the belief that music unites people. The orchestra seeks to remove stigmas surrounding classical music by creating family-friendly, accessible concerts that celebrate diverse cultural backgrounds. A recent education concert included music from various cultures to reflect the diversity of Bellevue's student population.

Several family-oriented initiatives were highlighted, including sensory-friendly Halloween concerts, free admission for children 12 and under, reduced-price tickets, and interactive opportunities such as an instrument "petting zoo." The orchestra also holds community-focused concerts annually, emphasizing themes that support and uplift marginalized groups, including Asian communities, the Pride community, Latin American cultures, and women composers.

Brook Rose provided the Commissioners with an overview of concert costs, noting that a single educational concert for 2,000 students, for whom the concert is free, involves expenses exceeding \$50,000 to cover venue rental, musician payroll, transportation subsidies, and production costs. Although funding primarily comes from grants, financial sustainability remains challenging.

Brook Rose identified significant limitations regarding performance venues on the Eastside, mentioning high costs and insufficient space at locations like the Kirkland Performance Center and Meydenbauer Center. Churches often host events despite concerns about unintended perceptions of indoctrination.

Attending concerts, volunteering, promoting the orchestra's educational programs, and identifying sponsorship opportunities are ways to show community support.

Chair Aldredge pointed out that Bellevue College has their community theater for smaller ensembles at reduced prices. Brook Rose suggested the venue may be too small to host the whole orchestra.

Commissioner Martínez said work is underway to put together a volunteer resource guide for the city. It would be good to include LWSO.

Commissioner Bhargava thanked Brooke Rose for an engaging presentation, noting a personal enthusiasm for the work of Lin-Manuel Miranda and for expressing a willingness to promote the orchestra's initiatives actively.

Ellen Walker, representing Pacific Northwest Ballet (PNB), discussed the organization's extensive engagement on the Eastside, highlighting its significant presence through the Francia Russell Center, which reopened in 2017 following displacement by the East Link Light Rail project. The challenging relocation process was discussed, and Bellevue's vital support for retaining the ballet school within the city was highlighted.

The vision of PNB emphasizes inspiring, engaging, and educating communities through dance, guided by the educational methods developed by founder Francia Russell. The PNB organization has had a considerable impact. It employs 48 professional dancers and over 700 additional full-time and part-time staff, making it the fifth-largest ballet company in the United States by budget. Prior to the pandemic, the PNB school had around 1,200 students; currently, there are approximately 900 students, but the numbers continue to grow. PNB annually distributes over \$500,000 in scholarships and maintains strong community partnerships with 30 schools across four school districts, including Bellevue. There are 200,000 constituents served annually through a variety of programs.

Ellen Walker highlighted several specialized programs at the Francia Russell Center, such as Dance for All, designed for children with disabilities, and Dance for PD, tailored to individuals living with Parkinson's disease. Both programs emphasize inclusivity, access, and community connection. There are also ongoing efforts to provide low-cost or free studio rental space to support other local arts organizations, reflecting the widespread regional need for suitable performance spaces.

Chair Aldredge thanked Ellen Walker for the presentation and praised PNB for its longstanding commitment to Bellevue. The city supports the organization through grants because it is essential to emphasize inclusivity and accessibility in arts programming.

Vera Altunina, artistic director and founder of the International Ballet Theater (IBT), noted having had professional ballet training in Russia. The IBT was organized in Bellevue on September 11, 2001, when, despite a national tragedy, community members gathered to support the arts, underscoring the resilience and solidarity of the local community.

The IBT continues its mission of providing artistic enrichment to Bellevue by exploring classical ballet traditions, innovative choreography, and contemporary dance. IBT's dancers primarily come from the affiliated International Ballet Academy, where they benefit from the renowned faculty who have performed with legendary ballet institutions, including the Mariinsky Theatre, the Paris Opera, and the New York City Ballet. The academy's diverse, multilingual environment enhances its international character and artistic excellence.

For over two decades, IBT has significantly contributed to Bellevue's cultural, social, and economic vitality through high-quality productions and educational programs. It emphasizes three core areas of impact: delivering collaborative and culturally diverse performances, offering educational initiatives that reflect global artistic standards, and promoting family-oriented programming across generations.

IBT's legacy includes nearly 25 years of continuous annual productions such as *The Nutcracker*, classical ballets like *Giselle*, *Swan Lake*, and original works, including their popular Halloween production *Dracula*, which has become a beloved Eastside tradition. Additionally, IBT places special importance on creating age-appropriate children's productions, including *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Jungle Book*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and a recently premiered adaptation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, featuring original music by a local composer and costumes crafted in Ukraine.

IBT attracts thousands of patrons annually, which boosts local commerce and generates substantial tax revenue. By positioning Bellevue as both a technological and cultural

hub, IBT helps attract visitors from across the region and internationally. Community engagement initiatives include special children's performances, outreach to Seattle Children's Hospital, Bellevue Athletic Club, and holiday events at Bellevue Square. IBT frequently collaborates with distinguished guest artists from renowned global companies, further enriching its artistic offerings. IBT's upcoming performance, *Don Quixote*, scheduled at Bellevue's Meydenbauer Theater, exemplifies its dedication to presenting authentic and artistically rich productions.

Despite financial difficulties resulting from the economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic, IBT has consistently sustained its artistic output, supported by ticket sales, family and community volunteers, and corporate sponsorship from entities such as Amazon and the City of Bellevue. IBT remains deeply committed to fostering Bellevue's cultural identity and shaping the community's artistic future.

Chair Aldredge thanked Vera Altunina for the presentation, acknowledged IBT's valuable contributions, and praised the organization for performing at Meydenbauer Center and for regularly utilizing Bellevue's local venues, reinforcing the city's cultural ecosystem.

B. Review of Commission Bylaws, Function and Guidance

Assistant City Attorney Courtney Popp was introduced as the new legal advisor to the Arts Commission.

The Commissioners were reminded that upon their appointment, they assumed official roles as Bellevue city officials, becoming integral to the city's governance process, similar in importance to City Councilmembers. Consequently, Commissioners must adhere to Bellevue's City Code, Code of Ethics, and the specific bylaws governing their conduct.

Each Commissioner brings unique, individual experiences and viewpoints to the table, but ultimately, the commission functions as a collective voice representing community perspectives on arts-related issues to the City Council. The Commission's diverse membership ensures a broad representation of ideas, which enables thorough planning and an equitable allocation of resources dedicated to the city's arts initiatives.

The Commission's bylaws were updated as recently as January 2024 to align with the work of all the city's boards and commissions. They delineate each member's roles, responsibilities, and operational procedures. The bylaws guide the Commission's decision-making, help staff facilitate the Commission's duties, and support the city's procedural framework, ensuring transparency and accountability in city governance.

The primary responsibilities of the Commission are outlined in the bylaws. They include acting as a liaison between artists, arts organizations, community members, and the City Council, promoting diverse arts programming, stewarding Bellevue's public art program, contributing to the city's long-term arts planning, and administering the more recently established arts grants program, which is having a significant impact on many arts organizations. The Commission is authorized to take on supplemental duties when appropriate, recommending new initiatives or advising the Council on community-driven proposals, subject to Council approval.

The Commissioners were reminded that they have specific limitations regarding advocacy or supervision of city staff and administrative operations. It was emphasized that Council approval is required for any public advocacy.

Commission meetings must adhere to strict transparency rules under public meeting laws, ensuring openness, accessibility, and clear communication with the public. The Commissioners must also abide by Bellevue's Code of Ethics, which emphasizes transparency, fairness, the avoidance of any conflict of interest, and respectful interactions among members, staff, partners, and the public. The goal is to reflect a collective consensus and to uphold professionalism, even when individual perspectives differ.

Courtney Popp encouraged the Commissioners to continue engaging respectfully and actively in their work, to maintain a collaborative environment, and to embrace their unique roles within Bellevue's civic framework.

5. **Commission Quick Business**

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm informed the Commissioners that the next meeting was slated for May 7.

Manette Stamm informed the Commissioners that an event to recognize their service to the commission is planned for April 30.

Manette Stamm took a moment to introduce Sandra Martínez as the Commission's newly appointed member, filling a previously vacated position.

Councilmember Stokes warmly welcomed Commissioner Martínez and emphasized the timeliness of joining the Commission during a period of significant advancement in Bellevue's arts scene.

6. **Reports**

A. Project Updates

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman shared that the Cultural Facility Grant Program is in the contract drafting stage. Staff are working closely with the City Attorney's Office, and a resolution is expected to be before the Council soon.

The 2025 Project and Eastside Arts Partnership grants are underway. A couple of projects have submitted their final reports.

Regarding planning projects, Lorie Hoffman shared that the city has contracted with EY Consulting to update its Economic Development Plan. The plan's creative economy section houses information regarding the BelRed Arts District and the connections between traditional and tech-based arts.

In May the final inspections will be conducted, and the foundations will be poured for Po Shu Wang's *Yonder Sky* in the BelRed Arts District. A late June/early July installation window is being eyed. There will be a reception in partnership with the Arts District Community Alliance.

Manette Stamm reported that four crosswalk locations have been selected for the installation of new creative crosswalks aimed at improving pedestrian safety. There was a total of 103 applications, and the selection panel is currently reviewing them. It is hoped that an artist will be selected soon, which will be followed by community outreach and a 2026 summer installation.

Lorie Hoffman shared that Anna Mlasowsky's public art installation in Crossroads is currently being fabricated. A significant component of the fabrication work is being done in Germany. All is on schedule to see the work installed in the fall of the year.

The Commission was informed about an upcoming exhibit showcasing the recently acquired Portable Art Collection. It is scheduled for late June with a reception in July.

Lorie Hoffman took a moment to give a massive thank you to Councilmember Stokes, the Councilmember's longstanding service as liaison to the Arts Commission.

Councilmember Stokes warmly reflected on having spent twelve or more years supporting the arts in Bellevue and highlighted the Commission's transformative impact and the unique human value that the arts bring to the city.

Chair Aldredge acknowledged Councilmember Stokes's invaluable experience, wisdom, and guidance and highlighted specific instances where those insights significantly informed decision-making processes.

7. **Communication** – None

8. **Adjournment**

Chair Aldredge adjourned the meeting at 5:38 p.m.

City of Bellevue staff liaison

Date