

Bellevue Arts Commission Meeting Minutes

May 7, 2025
4:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
1E-113 and Virtual

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

Commissioners Remote: Commissioner Nederlander

Commissioners Absent: None

Staff Present: Manette Stamm, Lorie Hoffman, Community Development

Others Present: Kayla Johnson, Bellevue Youth Choirs; Piyali Biswas De, SADHANA; Joy Hagen, Evergreen Association of Fine Arts; Era Pogosova, Theatre 33; Grace Emiko Noo Nakamora, Eurasia Arts Foundation

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 with the exception of Commissioners Bhargava and Nederlander who joined at 4:32 p.m., and Commissioner Enomoto who arrived at 4:38 p.m.

2. **Approval of Agenda and Minutes**

A. Approval of Agenda

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

B. Approval of Minutes

Motion to approve the April 23, 2025, minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Martínez. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Chen and the motion carried unanimously.

3. **Oral Communications**

Alex Tsimerman gave public comment about the City Council and exclusion from civic committees.

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

A. Partner Presentations

Kayla Johnson, Artistic and Executive Director of the Bellevue Youth Choirs (BYC), noted that the organization was founded 13 years ago with a focus on delivering quality choral education to youth in Bellevue and the greater Eastside. The programming emphasizes inclusivity, musical skill development, and exposure to global music traditions.

Like many arts organizations, BYC faced significant challenges during the pandemic. Post-pandemic, the number of students had grown from between 10 and 20 to nearly 200 choristers by 2025. The number of choirs has been expanded, and new levels have been introduced, including a planned expansion into young adult and adult choirs.

BYC currently serves children from age four to 18 and structures its programs based on age and skill level. The organization follows the Bellevue School District calendar, holding three major concerts per year and numerous community performances. There are logistical challenges associated with finding suitable rehearsal and performance venues, given that local school districts and churches no longer rent to outside groups, which often forces BYC to seek spaces in Seattle or farther afield. The next concert is scheduled for June 14, 2025, and enrollment for the next season will open on June 1 and remain open until September 30, with a second window after the December concert.

Kayla Johnson emphasized the organization's commitment to accessibility, noting that over \$15,000 in scholarships were provided to ensure no student is turned away due to financial constraints. Ten percent of BYC's students currently benefit from financial aid. Gratitude was expressed for the support offered by the city and the Commission, which has enabled BYC to expand its programming and administrative capacity.

In response to a question asked by Commissioner Martínez regarding the selection of musical repertoire, Kayla Johnson explained that staff members constantly undergo professional development and utilize vetted sources to ensure culturally respectful and authentic selections from diverse traditions.

Chair Aldredge noted the recurring concern from local arts organizations about the lack of large performance venues in Bellevue and committed the Commission to escalating the issue to the relevant authorities.

Piyali Biswas De spoke, representing the organization Sadhana, and began by explaining that the organization was founded in 2019 with the objective of addressing artistic and societal issues through a wide range of creative disciplines, including dance, music, theater, photography, creative writing, and painting. The organization conducts seven projects. The first initiative is focused on supporting marginalized artists and artisans in India, particularly those who are untrained and who were heavily impacted during the pandemic due to the cancellation of festivals and a lack of medical aid. Sadhana provided relief and assistance during the critical period. The second initiative, titled Art to Elevate, involves collaboration with Recovery Café Seattle, where Piyali Biswas De noted personally teaching dance to individuals facing homelessness. The program was extended to inmates at the Washington Women's Correction Center, where Indian classical dance was introduced as a form of healing. The participants responded with emotional engagement. The third project, Art to Master, seeks to bring high-caliber South Asian classical master artists to the community at no or minimal cost. Well-known artists such as Sonal Mansingh and Rukmini Vijayakumar have been invited to offer workshops and training. The fourth initiative, Rising Star, is aimed at promoting emerging adult artists who lack opportunities for visibility. The fifth, Art for Tagore, centers around the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European Nobel laureate. The initiative, which began with the first grant the organization received from

the Bellevue Arts Commission in 2023, has grown into a larger festival celebrating music, literature, and other art forms related to Tagore's legacy.

Piyali Biswas De said another initiative, Motivate Through Film, was developed during the pandemic when individuals had more time to create. Although activity in the area has slowed due to funding constraints, it is committed to nurturing it. The speaker noted having personally worked to secure funding for the organization, and contributions have been received from Microsoft, Google, Allstate Foundation, Renton and Issaquah funding, and from 4Culture, which is one of the biggest funders.

There is a diversity of age among Sadhana's participants, ranging from five to over eighty years old. A master class is held in Bellevue where a tabla maestro offers free percussion lessons. Another notable event included two workshops by Rukmini Vijayakumar in both Kirkland and Bellevue. Despite the successes, the organization has faced persistent challenges in securing performance venues. Eastside Baha'i and Bellevue College, once available, have stopped renting out spaces. Events have subsequently moved to the Issaquah Depot Museum, which limits audience capacity and accessibility. A major upcoming event, slated for June 7, 2025, will feature a day-long celebration of Tagore and include dance, vocal performances, instrumentation, and art exhibits. The Bellevue Youth Theater, which is now being used for the event, is too small for the expected attendance of over 500, which means the event will need to be divided into segments.

Sadhana has also hosted rare classical Indian performances, such as Sattriya, with sponsorship from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. Due to high venue costs in Bellevue, particularly at the Meydenbauer Center, the organization has been unable to host large-scale free or low-cost events there. Any support in identifying alternative venues would be appreciated.

Chair Aldredge acknowledged the issue of venue scarcity and mentioned recent efforts, including the initiation of construction grants to organizations such as Bellevue College, on the understanding that the theater spaces will be made accessible to the broader community at low or no cost. Piyali Biswas De acknowledged having had positive experiences at Bellevue College in the past, but noted that recent staff transitions have caused disruptions in booking. It isn't easy to plan events without having confirmed dates.

Arts Program Analyst Manette Stamm said it is possible Bellevue College is not currently taking reservations owing to planned renovation activities. The agreement with the college, however, does dictate making the space available for the public to use.

Chair Aldredge agreed that the matter warrants some follow-up with Bellevue College and also agreed with the need for more affordable public venues in the city.

Joy Hagan, grants manager for the Evergreen Association of Fine Arts, explained that the organization, now known as the Eastside Association of Fine Arts, was founded in 1975 and is based in Bellevue. It serves artists from the Eastside and conducts most of its events in the surrounding areas. The group hosts monthly meetings that feature well-known artists who deliver demonstrations or artist talks, followed by critique sessions for member artworks and informal receptions to encourage community bonding. One of the association's most active programs, Plein Air, organizes weekly outdoor painting sessions from May through September at rotating locations throughout the Puget Sound area. The locations include Sammamish, Bellevue, Fall City, North Bend, Index, Seattle, Woodinville, Everett, Kenmore, Duvall, Bothell, Carnation, and Issaquah. The sessions are open to both participants and observers interested in plein air painting.

The organization's public art program enables members to jury into exhibitions displayed at several public locations. There are five locations, including the PACCAR Education Center and the Bellevue and Newcastle Public Libraries. The art installations rotate every three months, offering artists extended visibility without the organization collecting any commission from sales. A recent highlight included three artwork sales from hospital exhibitions that were accompanied by heartfelt letters from patients and staff who expressed appreciation for the positive emotional impact of the displayed art.

Joy Hagan described the annual juried members' show in which professional jurors are engaged. The exhibitions are held at community centers or senior living facilities; the 2024 show took place at the Mercer Island Community Center. Such exhibitions provide artists with opportunities to showcase their best work, earn cash awards, and engage with the public in a shared artistic environment.

The organization is committed to supporting youth-oriented arts. Historically, the program has been funded through an annual art rummage sale. The most recent sale, held at the Northwest Arts Center, proved to be one of the most successful to date. Additional grant funding enabled the association to expand its impact by awarding two \$1000 scholarships. The scholarships were awarded to the Jubilee Reach after-school program, and the other went to the Shack Art Center Youth Outreach Program in Everett.

The grant dollars received from Bellevue have been very much appreciated. The grants were beneficial following the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely diminished the group's membership and revenues. Prior to the pandemic, the association boasted around 250 members, but the number fell to approximately 75 during the health crisis. The group has been reorganized with a new board of directors, which has injected fresh ideas and renewed energy. One of the first significant actions involved a rebranding effort, which included updating the organization's logo and website to create a modern, relevant image. The rebranding required revisions to signage and promotional materials, and although there was debate over design options, the final selection met with satisfaction.

The group was holding its meetings at the Bellevue Art Museum meeting hall, but that relationship came to an end after about eighteen months. The group then transitioned to the Crossroads Community Center, which became the new home for meetings and public engagement. The shift to Crossroads followed positive experiences hosting a booth at the Crossroads Farmers Market. Encouraged by the exposure, the organization plans to continue participating in the market biannually as part of its outreach strategy. The community center has proven advantageous due to its accessibility and technological capabilities, including support for video recordings and YouTube content. While not all members are familiar with digital platforms, the organization has hired help to manage video production and other technical needs.

Joy Hagan also noted that the association established a new relationship with Arts Umbrella in Kenmore. The partnership allows members to access quarterly three-hour classes at significantly reduced rates, expanding the scope of professional development available to artists.

The organization's long-term aspirations include the reinstatement of its highly successful Open Call Juried Show, which featured higher-caliber art, paid jurors, and public exhibitions that generated significant income through sales and entry fees. However, the group has been unable to secure a venue that offers a month-long rental

period at an affordable cost, which is essential for such a program. The lack of suitable and accessible venues remains the primary barrier to the continuation of the successful initiative. Finding a venue is central to the group's current wish list.

When asked by Commissioner Enomoto about additional needs beyond venue access, Joy Hagan acknowledged that, thanks to robust grants from 4Culture through the Open Doors project, the organization is currently financially stable. Nevertheless, there is a growing need to transition toward more paid staff positions. The reliance on volunteers has become increasingly unsustainable, particularly as many younger potential members are employed full-time and cannot commit regular hours. Paid positions are being considered for video production, marketing, and website management, among other administrative tasks, to ensure more professional and efficient operations.

Upon inquiry, the speaker confirmed that membership has rebounded to approximately 150 individuals, effectively doubling from the post-pandemic low. The resurgence in membership was attributed in part to the period when meetings were held at the Bellevue Art Museum, which offered a central location and convenient parking. The speaker noted that frequent venue changes have presented a challenge but expressed hope that the group can remain at Crossroads Community Center for the foreseeable future.

Chair Aldredge asked about the organization's membership. Joy Hagan said there are currently 150 members. Many of the new members have resulted from meetings held at the Bellevue Art Museum. Fewer are attending the programs at Crossroads, but there are indications that the numbers will start to grow soon.

Commissioner Martínez asked about the factors contributing to the association's longevity since its founding in 1975, to which Joy Hagan responded that the core value has always been a sense of community. The organization serves as a space for artists to make connections, engage in collaborative learning, and support one another. The association provides essential resources such as professional guidance, exhibition opportunities, and networking with fellow artists. When the group secured space at the Seattle Design Center in 2011, monthly art walks were launched, and that helped build connections between Eastside and Seattle artists.

Joy Hagar expressed concern that fewer members of the community are attending art galleries and museums in the region. That is in stark contrast with Seattle, where traditions such as the monthly Art Walk in Pioneer Square attract hundreds of attendees, even during poor weather. The lack of comparable cultural traditions on the Eastside has been identified as a significant area for growth.

Chair Aldredge added that the lack of a centralized, publicly accessible communication tool, such as an event calendar, likely contributes to lower attendance. Previous promises made by the PACE project to develop such infrastructure have not been fulfilled.

Commissioner Enomoto noted that the demographic differences between Seattle and Bellevue, characterized by a predominance of professionals and families, may limit cultural participation due to full schedules. Nevertheless, there remains a strong potential to develop arts traditions in Bellevue, primarily through initiatives in the BelRed Arts District.

Era Pogosova explained that Theatre33 is a multilingual nonprofit community teaching theater founded in 2013 by a group of Russian-speaking immigrants from Eastern

Europe and Central Asia. The original purpose of the organization was to preserve cultural heritage through storytelling. In 2016, the organization began integrating children into productions, leading to the development of community family plays. As children adapted more easily to English, the theater began offering programming in both Russian and English. In that year, Theatre33 rented its first small studio in the Overlake area. By 2023, it opened a new performing arts facility within the BelRed Arts District. The theater is currently in the process of signing a lease for additional space to expand class offerings and provide rehearsal opportunities for other artists. The facility includes a featured artist program, which curates visual art to complement stage productions. A recent production titled *Home*, a physical theater piece, was paired with artwork exploring the theme of what home means to each artist.

Theater33 launched its first major international initiative with the Bellevue International Theater Festival in April 2024, hosted at the Meydenbauer Center. The event featured seven theaters from four states and performances in four languages, reaching over 1200 attendees. Although the venue is costly, its quality and the professionalism of the staff are to be praised. The festival has received strong positive feedback, and two participating theaters have already requested to return. The festival is now set to become an annual tradition.

Theater33 offers a wide array of programming for audiences and performers of all ages, ranging from toddlers to senior citizens. The activities include classic, contemporary, and experimental theater, along with free community programs such as outdoor events at Crossroads Park, season opener parties, and SpringFest. This family event combines storytelling and games. The organization's signature offering, the community family play, provides multigenerational opportunities for families to collaborate on stage. The plays run from April to October, and the 2025 production is scheduled for October 17-19 at Meydenbauer Center. The project encourages collaboration between parents and children in a peer-based, creative setting.

Era Pogosova said Theatre33 maintains a commitment to accessibility. Many shows are free or pay-what-you-can, and ticketed events are deliberately priced below market rates. The organization has partnered with the Center for Information and Services in the Community (CISC) to provide free tickets to seniors and offer scholarships to youth participants. In 2024 alone, over \$ 3,330 in scholarships was distributed.

Era Pogosova highlighted a significant achievement for the organization, noting that a group of Theater33 youth performers was selected to represent Bellevue at the American Association of Community Theaters Youth Fest in Louisville, Kentucky, in 2023. Their performance, which explored themes of possessiveness and perception, earned high praise. The group was the only youth delegation adjudicated alongside adult ensembles and received the festival's ensemble award for outstanding achievement. Two of those performers remain active in the studio.

An application has been submitted to present a youth production of *The Little Prince* at the Edinburgh Festival in Scotland, scheduled for August 2026. Only high school students are eligible for the program, and Theater33 will prepare a cast from that age group for the performance.

In addition to youth festivals, Theater33 participated in the Kaleidoscope Festival hosted by the Washington State Community Theater Association. The production, *Constellations*, won at the state level and advanced to the regional competition in Idaho,

where the group also won. Production will now proceed to the national competition in Des Moines, Iowa.

Era Pogosova stated that the organization plans to introduce a youth-focused component to the annual festival soon. Ideally, the event will be held at Bellevue College, which offers a suitable theater and educational environment for young performers. The vision includes creating two distinct but complementary festivals: one for adult productions at Meydenbauer Center, and one for youth productions at Bellevue College. Tentative age ranges for the youth festival will be nine to eighteen, with the expectation of transforming Bellevue College into a vibrant space filled with young artists and creative activity.

The organization recently hosted a play in Ukrainian, featuring five native speakers in the cast, who had learned the language specifically for the production. A decision has been made to tackle a new play annually in a language other than Russian or English. Where possible, subtitles will be used.

Theater33 continues to develop partnerships with several cultural organizations. The BelRed Arts District Community Alliance has been on board since its inception. The Is It Culture Coalition is also a partner, and a potential collaborator is Sing It in Seattle. Other partnership organizations include Seagulls, a French-language company, Haberi Production, a Chinese-speaking troupe, and Kritsi Dance Academy, which is contributing Bollywood choreography to the upcoming community family play, *The Jungle Book*. Art Modern Line, a contemporary dance group, has also performed at Theatre33's venue. Theatre33 works closely with the Chinese Information Service Center to provide accessible theater experiences to seniors, with plans underway to launch a Silver Stage Program for the elder community to participate in classes and performances.

Theater33's current and upcoming programming includes a production of Harold Pinter's *Betrayal*, to be staged over two weekends in May. The Seagulls theater company will perform *The Ballad of the Stages*. The youth group will present *Cinderella* in early June, and their award-winning production *Constellations* will be restaged on June 7 and 8 before traveling to the national festival in Des Moines, Iowa. Additional events include a Russian-language play in July from the Kids Playhouse program and an open lesson showcase by the Studio33 youth program on June 18 and 19. The season finale will take place mid-June.

A summer theater camp is planned, made possible by capital facility funding from the Arts Commission, which will allow Theater33 to install air conditioning in its space. The funding has also supported the hiring of eight part-time staff members who assist volunteers and ensure operations run smoothly. The organization expresses gratitude for the city's support, which has helped transform its space into a true home for creative work.

Commissioner Martínez asked about the organization's experience in the BelRed Arts District. Era Pogosova shared that Theatre33 had previously considered Lake Hills but encountered resistance regarding tenant improvements. After initially being dismissed by developers during the height of the pandemic, the organization was eventually offered a lease when a space in BelRed became available. The landlord reviewed the group's financials and approved the partnership. The organization has a deep commitment to remaining in Bellevue, particularly in the BelRed Arts District, which has proved to be a supportive and creative environment. The district's role in elevating the visibility of local artists can be held up as a key benefit.

Chair Aldredge asked how large an audience the Theatre33 venue can accommodate. Era Pogosova said it accommodates an audience of 45 with a cast size of four, limited by building code restrictions due to the absence of fire sprinklers. Although the original intent was to establish an 80-seat venue, code restrictions reduced the allowable capacity. Expanding the capacity would require cost-prohibitive upgrades, such as installing a new water main or constructing a firewall. Instead, Theatre33 maintains a functional layout with a reception area, classroom, green room, and performance space. For larger productions, the group utilizes external venues, including Meydenbauer Center, which seats 410. Some of the most recent festival events filled up about 75 percent of that venue's capacity. Given the growing interest, there may well be some sellout performances in the future. The organization has an interest in exploring zoning options that might allow for greater flexibility in the current venue's audience size.

Chair Aldredge praised the artistic value of the organization's programming. Era Pogosova encouraged the Commissioners to attend the performance of *Betrayal*, describing it as an elegant and intellectually rich piece by Harold Pinter. The artistic director is to be praised for originality and technical vision, particularly in the use of lighting, music, and sound to create immersive experiences.

Commissioner Bhargava inquired about Theater33's process for identifying collaborators. Era Pogosova explained that partnerships form both organically and through outreach efforts. In one instance, the organization contacted a local connection to find a Bollywood instructor. In other cases, such as with Seagulls and Haberi Productions, groups approached Theater33 seeking space. These interactions often reveal unknown yet complementary organizations. There is a need for more artist gatherings or "mingles" to foster organic connections and promote collaboration, ultimately strengthening the regional arts ecosystem.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora, executive and artistic director of the Eurasia Arts Foundation, stated that the organization is dedicated to preserving, promoting, and evolving the music and dance traditions of the Silk Road, while fostering humanitarian understanding and cultural exchange. The foundation represents eight nationalities and communicates in five languages: English, Russian, Turkish, Uzbek, and Farsi. The artistic scope of the organization includes traditional dances and music from Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Afghanistan, Uyghur (East Turkestan), and Tajikistan. The foundation aspires to collaborate with artists from neighboring countries, such as India and Russia, envisioning future performances inspired by the historical Silk Road.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora described the three primary operational arms of the foundation. The first is the Virtual Academy, which reached audiences across Africa, Europe, East Asia, North America, and Canada during the pandemic. The academy hosted fourteen online concerts, each built around a dance lesson followed by a recital. During the pandemic, Washington residents, including children and adults from Bellevue and Seattle, received free tuition, while participants from Europe and Canada were offered discounted access. The second arm is the Eurasia Academy, a school that provides affordable dance education to children and teens who are not professional dancers. The third is the professional Eurasia Arts Ensemble, comprising seasoned dancers with 15 to 30 years of experience.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora shared having begun studying Silk Road dance in 1975 and had founded the organization in 1983. Through a video presentation, personal

reflections were shared regarding the speaker's journey as a dancer, choreographer, and now grandmother, underscoring a decades-long dedication to cultural arts.

The organization's partnerships with several local and cultural groups were highlighted, including Friends of the Bellevue Cross-Cultural Center, where the ensemble performed during the spring; the Baha'i Center of the Eastside, which serves a predominantly Iranian community; and the Azerbaijani community in Washington, based in Bellevue. Performances for the partners are often charitable, with the foundation absorbing the professional fees for dancers, photographers, videographers, and IT personnel through grant funding.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora said Bellevue's cultural grants are essential to the foundation's continued outreach, especially outreach to underfunded communities. Support is also received from King County 4Culture, the State of Washington, and the City of Seattle, in addition to occasional assistance from the Artist Trust and private donations. Despite those sources of support, there is an ongoing challenge given limited staffing and the difficulty of performing administrative tasks such as accounting and grant writing. The foundation's director and sub-director currently handle those responsibilities. Additionally, the speaker noted personally sewing costumes to keep expenses manageable.

A desire was expressed to expand the capacity to build organizational relationships and engage with other arts groups and grant sources, a necessary transition from being solely a dancer and teacher to becoming a more outward-facing advocate for the foundation.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora reflected on the foundation's recent activities in Bellevue. In the previous year, the organization hosted a highly successful Nowruz event, supported by the Bellevue Arts Commission, which attracted nearly 400 attendees and featured three hours of public programming at the Baha'i Center. For the current year, the organization returned to the Baha'i Center to perform during the International Women's Day celebration on March 8 with a program called Expressions of Love. Additional performances included a fundraiser for the Azerbaijani community at the and a festival at the Baha'i Center commemorating the prophecy of the Báb.

Outside of Bellevue, the foundation also participated in the Tashkent Sister City Association's Central Asian Nowruz celebration in Seattle. Upcoming performances include participation in the Sabantuy Festival of Tatarstan on June 12 and the Turkfest cultural event in October, which is expected to draw approximately 3000 attendees over two days. Plans are also underway for a Winter Wonderland concert to be staged in Bellevue, envisioned as a multicultural collaboration involving Indian, Chinese, and Mexican artists. The event is still in the early stages of planning, and the organization is seeking suitable partners and logistical support.

Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora expressed a desire to understand better and join more local associations and arts networks in Bellevue to increase the foundation's visibility and collaboration. The commissioners were thanked for their support, and Grace Emiko Noor Nakamora reiterated a heartfelt commitment to promoting performance art despite the many challenges faced.

B. Project Grant Updates

Manette Stamm reminded the Commissioners that, in 2026, only project grants will be available. The other two granting programs operate on a biennial schedule.

Project grants, which were previously known as Special Projects, have existed in some form for at least fifteen years. In its earlier format, the grant used a sliding scale model ranging from \$500 to \$5,000. However, to improve transparency and planning capability for applicants, significant changes were introduced in 2023. Rather than risking unpredictability, where applicants might request \$5,000 and receive only \$500, the program was revised to allow applicants to choose a fixed award amount. Applicants now must submit proposals for a specific amount, and funding is granted in full or not at all. The shift enables applicants to structure their projects with financial clarity. The average award over the past 15 years has been \$1,867. Following the changes made to the program, the average award has increased slightly. In 2023, the program also introduced a “BelRed Bonus,” providing an additional \$1,000 for projects situated within the BelRed Arts District.

The guidelines have been revised so that instead of \$1,000, \$2,000 and \$3,000, applicants can now request \$3,000, \$5,000 or \$7,000. While larger requests will be permitted, they will require more detailed justifications to ensure responsible allocation. The goal is to dissuade applicants from automatically selecting the highest amount without proper planning or justification. All awards will remain on an all-or-nothing basis.

To enhance the evaluation process, the updated application now requires specific information about the location of BelRed Arts District projects. In the past, some applicants claimed the BelRed Bonus without identifying where their project would take place. The revised guidelines now prompt applicants to confirm whether they have initiated conversations with venue providers, given that assumptions about availability have previously proven to be problematic. The change is designed to assess the applicants’ preparedness and understanding of Bellevue’s limited venue availability.

Manette Stamm said the updated grant cycle will launch in the fall. The Grant Committee will be formed around the same time and will consist of Arts Commission members and external evaluators. The panel will review submissions and bring recommendations to the full Commission in November. Final approval by the City Council is expected in early 2026, continuing the same grant cycle structure as previous years.

Commissioner Enomoto raised a concern that, while the award amounts have increased, the overall grant budget may not have kept pace. Manette Stamm clarified that Bellevue’s funding has indeed grown due to a significant increase in support from 4Culture. Previously, 4Culture contributed around \$15,000 annually. That amount has since risen to \$64,000, allowing the city to support larger grants. It was stressed that future funding levels are uncertain and subject to each year’s grant awards. Funds received each year are allocated for the following grant cycle to ensure fiscal planning.

Arts Community Manager Lorie Hoffman further clarified that in past years, many funds were tied to capital improvement projects, which limited the city’s financial flexibility. Now, more funds reside in the general fund, providing greater flexibility for operational and programmatic expenses, although this limits the city’s ability to support mid-range capital projects. The change, however, makes increased funding for project grants possible.

Commissioner Enomoto inquired whether the city plans to guide applicants, particularly to help them determine which award tier would be most suitable for their proposal. Manette Stamm responded that no formal office hours have been planned, but added

that the suggestion is a strong one. In the past, the city hosted informational sessions and contracted professional grant writers to assist applicants at no cost. While those services are typically offered during broader grant cycles, there is an interest in continuing to provide similar support in the future, depending on staff capacity.

Commissioner Martínez inquired about the reporting requirements for grant recipients. Manette Stamm explained that all grantees are required to complete a post-grant report, which serves as an invoice and includes event outcomes, attendance data, lessons learned, and, more recently, demographic information about project leaders and boards. Although the data is not used to determine funding eligibility, it provides valuable insight into representation and informs future outreach strategies. Commissioners serving on the review panel may request access to the reports to assess past project outcomes, especially in cases where applicants are seeking renewed funding for similar projects.

Lorie Hoffman said that demographic information is not requested upfront, as it is not a determining factor in who gets funded. However, it is an essential tool for staff to use in the back end to assess long-term equity trends, without influencing award decisions.

Chair Aldredge urged new Commissioners to volunteer for the grant review committee. The project grant cycle provides a manageable entry point given its lower volume of applications outside of the years when all grant programs are open. In primary cycles, the number of applications can reach sixty to seventy, while the project grant cycle typically has fewer applications.

Commissioner Martínez inquired about the past use of a grant writer and asked about the person's role. Manette Stamm explained that the city previously hired an external professional grant-writing firm to assist organizations applying for Bellevue and 4Culture grants. The firm's services were provided free of charge to applicants, notably to support participation in the 4Culture Doors Open funding initiative. While the program received positive feedback, it could have been better promoted.

Commissioner Chen inquired about how organizations discover that resources are available to them. Manette Stamm said outreach includes direct emails to past applicants, a listing on the City of Bellevue website, and the proactive use of data. Lorie Hoffman added that staff compiled a list of every art and culture nonprofit with a Bellevue address using publicly available data and emailed them about grant opportunities and available assistance. Social media is also actively used. Outreach is part of the city's efforts to engage new applicants and improve equitable access to funding.

Commissioner Hazra inquired about the Bellevue School District's policy regarding the rental of their facilities. Manette Stamm stated that it seems to depend on who one talks to and who one is. There does not seem to be a consistent policy. Lorie Hoffman added that the issue is not unique to Bellevue. There are a few shining examples of school districts that prioritize community use and offer the staffing needed to do the work, but they are few and far between. The facilities are often quite lovely.

5. Commission Quick Business

Manette Stamm informed the Commissioners that the next meeting will occur on the first Wednesday in June, and it will be Commissioner Nederlander's final meeting.

6. Reports

A. Commissioner's Committee and Lead Reports – As Noted

B. Project Updates from Staff

Lorie Hoffman reported that *Yonder Sky*, the public artwork by artist Po Shu Wang, has been fully installed and has passed inspection. The sculpture is expected to be publicly unveiled during the summer once transportation arrangements are finalized.

The Creative Crosswalks project is also progressing. The selection committee met recently to review a strong group of applicants.

The artwork by Anna Mlasowsky for Crossroads is on track and scheduled for installation in August. While the piece remains in Germany, its shipment is being expedited. The staff are optimistic about the timeline, with no significant concerns at present.

Lorie Hoffman said Mimi Shimomura curated the exhibit of artworks currently on display at City Hall, which features Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander artists. The show, organized by the city's Diversity Advantage team, includes detailed written context and will remain in place through mid-June. Once the exhibit concludes, the portable art show will be installed, and staff will coordinate a reception for the participating artists.

Commissioner Bhargava asked about the Bellevue Youth Theatre facilities. The old building remains standing, and the question asked was if the city has any say in what will happen to it. Lorie Hoffman stated that some investigation is needed to confirm, but suggested that the old structure may belong to the Bellevue School District.

Era Pogosova shared that the building is currently being used for storage and is considered seismically unsound, which limits its viability for public use.

Commissioner Hazera suggested recommending to the City Council that a note be sent to the school district to consider opening such facilities to the community, particularly in light of the ongoing shortage of performance and rehearsal venues for local arts organizations.

7. **Adjournment**

Chair Aldredge adjourned the meeting at 6:22 p.m.

City of Bellevue staff liaison

Date