

Dear Mayor and Council,

The role of the Cultural Arts Commission is to provide you guidance on arts policies and programs. In that spirit, we are writing to share a strong concern with the Manager's Proposed Budget for 2022/23. Specifically, our concern is with the \$20,000 listed for "Cultural Arts" which is earmarked for grants to arts non-profits.

While we are not opposed to the Town awarding small grants to arts organizations, we are concerned that, in practice, this prioritizes arts non-profits over the Town's own cultural arts initiatives, specifically those of the Community Arts & Culture Division. We feel strongly that the funds, in the immediate term, would be more effectively and more efficiently used by the Community Arts & Culture Division. Once the Division is more fully funded, then we think it would be appropriate and prudent to launch a granting program for the arts in Chapel Hill.

In 2017, Community Arts & Culture was formed out of Council's prioritization of arts and culture and their strategic goal of creating a "Vibrant and Inclusive Community." However, the Town's budget for public art and arts programming has remained stagnant since then – and for years before that:

2009-2010	44,900
2010-2011	46,800
2011-2012	48,140
2012-2013	47,565
2013-2014	47,790
2014-2015	46,279
2015-2016	48,440
2016-2017	49,240
2017-2018	48,690
2018-2019	43,688
2019-2020	43,522
2020-2021	47,240
2021-2022	47,240

We've all seen the substantial impact that the Community Arts & Culture Division has been able to make with these dollars – from the Art + Transit program to new downtown murals to public art on greenways to the Tracks Music Library to the Poet Laureate program. These projects not only activate our community with engaging arts experiences, but they also directly support local, diverse artists and creatives who make the art, cultural, and musical experiences. However, if we want to move beyond these and have the impact that could truly be transformational for our community, the Council must first allocate more funding to the Community Arts & Culture budget.

While the government can't be the *only* provider of public and cultural arts, we believe it has a central role that merits appropriate funding. We are concerned that the town's public and cultural arts funding has not just remained flat – it has effectively decreased due to inflationary cost increases over the past 15 years. The Division has consistently delivered high-quality programs and projects and has continued to "do more with less". Those programs and projects have created more demand for public art in our community, and more collaborative possibilities.

Once we have a more fully and appropriately funded public art program in Chapel Hill, we believe an additional program providing grants for arts and cultural projects would be welcome and impactful, and as a Commission, we are poised to play a central role in designing it. In line with Chapel Hill's own stated values, such a program would by necessity be transparent, inclusive, and equitable. There would need to be an open call, impartial criteria, and thoughtful stewardship. For several years, the Town has been funding a few non-profits without such a process and without input from the Commission, and we are concerned about this lack of transparency and lack of a clear process.

In addition to the granting process being ethical and effective, it would need to be efficient for Community Arts & Culture staff, who would administer the funding once they and the Commission administer the process. There's also the overarching question of what the Town's role should be in providing funds to arts non-profits, who else provides such funding, and what the funding would be for (operational, programmatic, etc.). There is much that must be clarified and vetted before a granting program can be launched in Chapel Hill, but the Commission is eager to work with Council and Staff to develop, design, and deploy a highly effective arts granting program that has the potential to have a transformational effect on the arts and the arts community in Chapel Hill.

Respectfully, we ask that the Council:

- 1) allocate the \$20,000 in the Manager's Recommended Budget to the Community Arts & Culture Division; and
- 2) charge the Cultural Arts Commission with working with Community Arts & Culture staff to review the current funding for arts & culture non-profits and consider the cost/benefit of creating a transparent, open grants program for the arts and artists in our community. We would come back to Council in advance of the FY2023/24 budget with our findings and recommendations.

Signed,
Justin Haslett and Josh Rosenstein
On Behalf of the Chapel Hill Cultural Arts Commission