



TOWN OF CHAPEL HILL

Town Hall
405 Martin Luther King Jr.
Boulevard
Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Legislation Text

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Appoint the Town of Chapel Hill's First Poet Laureate.

Staff:

Maurice Jones, Town Manager

Department:

Town Manager

Presenters

Allen Buansi, Member

Town Council

Rachel Schaevitz, Member

Background

Strong cultural arts initiatives are the hallmark of a vibrant community. The Town has demonstrated its support of the arts by funding arts related organizations and events, by installing public art throughout the Town and by promoting a wide array of artistic endeavors both small and large.

Poetry is an art form worthy of promotion and attention, especially given its appeal to young people. Council Members Allen Buansi and Rachel Schaevitz are now proposing the Town appoint its first Poet Laureate to help create a poetry initiative and to serve as an Ambassador for the arts in Chapel Hill.

Two of the other towns in Orange County have preceded Chapel Hill in appointing poet laureates. The Town of Carrboro has had a poet laureate since the early 2000s. Hillsborough has had a poet laureate since 2010. Chapel Hill is the only town in Orange County without a poet laureate. With the addition of a Chapel Hill Poet Laureate there is great potential for Orange County to become a magnet for poetry events, attracting even more visitors and business to the area. The primary duty of the Poet Laureate is to provide spaces and opportunities for performances and the sharing of poetry. This position requires engagement in activities that enhance the presence of poetry in the social and civic life of a town.

Chapel Hill's first poet laureate would serve and be limited to a two-year term. The Town would provide an honorarium of \$2,000 for the entire two-year term. Because this would be the Town's first poet laureate, the Town would rely on the poet laureate to engage with the broader community and set the standard for organizing activities and programming related to poetry. An open application process would be developed over the next two years for the selection of subsequent poets laureate. The first poet laureate would initially operate out of the Town Manager's office, and will be transitioned to the Community Arts & Culture department of the Town.

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Appointment of C.J. Suitt

Town resident C.J. Suitt is a renowned poet in North Carolina and across the country. He was born and raised in Chapel Hill and currently lives in town. He is renowned for his ability to promote poetry as an art form, especially among young people. He has been published in several collective works of poetry including *Sacrificial Poets Presents: The Classics*. He has been featured in several local newspapers, and he has published as a guest columnist in *The News & Observer* as well as *The Chapel Hill Herald*. He received the 2009 Metamorphosis Champion Award for ongoing efforts to ensure the voices of young people are heard. He co-founded the first youth poetry organization and the first internationally competing youth poetry team and organization in North Carolina. The Hannah Ruth Foundation has honored Mr. Suitt for his leadership and his work with the Chapel Hill community. Appointing Mr. Suitt as

Chapel Hill's first poet laureate will make a strong statement about Chapel Hill's commitment to the arts and to social justice.



Attachments:

- Resolution

WHEREAS, vibrant, diverse communities embrace, promote and appreciate the value of the cultural arts; and

WHEREAS, the Town of Chapel Hill has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the cultural arts through the funding of arts organizations and by installing a variety of public art throughout the community; and

WHEREAS, poetry is an art form that has been used throughout human history to chronicle the times, give voice to the voiceless and inspire generations to create and to love and to cry out for change; and

WHEREAS, the position of poet laureate for municipalities has become a popular way to show support for the arts; and

WHEREAS, our regional partners in the Towns of Carrboro and Hillsborough have both created this position in the last 20 years; and

WHEREAS, Town resident C.J. Suitt is a renowned poet in North Carolina and across the country; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Suitt has been published in several collective works of poetry including Sacrificial Poets Presents: The Classics; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Suitt received the 2009 Metamorphosis Champion Award for ongoing efforts to promote poetry with the youth in our community.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Town of Chapel Hill that the Council hereby approves the creation of the honorary position of Poet Laureate to be initially housed in the Town Manager's Office; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Poet Laureate will receive an honorarium of \$2,000 for a two-year term; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Town Council agrees to appoint Mr. C.J. Suitt as the Town's first Poet Laureate, effective January 1, 2020.

This the 20th day of November, 2019.

The Agenda will reflect the text below and/or the motion text will be used during the meeting.

By adopting the resolution, the Council appoints the Town of Chapel Hill's first Poet Laureate.