

Arlington Public Art Annual Retreat February 1, 2014 (9:30 am – 2 pm)

Location: Jane Howard's house, 12 Woodland St., Arlington

Guest speaker: Cecily Miller, past Executive Director of the Somerville Arts Council and the Forest Hills Cemetery (Forest Hills Educational Trust)

Attending: Adria Arch, David Ardito, Rose Austin, Barbara Costa, Susan Green (10:30), Alberto Guzman, Jane Howard, Suzanne LeFebvre, Jill Manca (12:30), Stephanie Marlin-Curiel, Nilou Mochhala, Bill Turville.

Goal: To set the agenda for next year and beyond.

After introductions, announcement by Jane that Mystic Wines is looking for artists to show their work in the shop. Jane discussed the Public Art Fund still awaiting State approval; Cicely suggested it would be good if the Cultural Commission could control disbursement of that fund. She also asked if the Robbins Library had a fund for art when it was renovated (1994); Jane knows the architect, David Wallace.

Adria showed a slide show, "Public Art in Arlington" of existing pieces of public art. Also mentioned: the Waldo Park sculpture., and Kevin Duffy's Spy Pond swan sculpture (in process). (See Agenda for list of what APA has accomplished.)

What's next? Transformer Box mural project, Chairful 2014, Arts Rocks Menotomy (collaboration with Parks & Recreation), Arts & Culture Liaison. Further in the future: Percent for Art?

Cecily Miller presentation

Somerville Arts Council: Cecily worked at the Somerville Arts Council (SAC) over 20 years ago, with \$250K budget at its peak; raised money from foundations but mostly MCC (Massachusetts Cultural Council). SAC started as an all-volunteer organization. MCC got National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funds for a large 3-year grant helping towns to fund directors, which provided incentives to towns/cities by requiring them to match funds.

Cecily cautioned against aiming for permanent public art as the #1 goal – this is frustrating for artist in terms of freedom of expression and accommodating the public, etc. Temporary art (from one day to 3-5 yrs, up to 15-20 yrs) is just as valid, and can do more.

Some towns (Lowell, Pittsfield) have sought out public arts funds.

Arlington is unique in the presence of nature: Spy Pond, Menotomy Rocks Park, bike path). Use this – pull floats behind bikes on the bike path (like Jamaica Plain’s spring fest)? Use Farmers Market (big jello murals or print with vegetables? We could check with Patsy Kraemer, though there’s a space limitation there). Combine the proven success of restaurants/food with art.

How to define public art?

Cecily talked about controversial projects in Somerville. Debate over development of Assembly Square Mall motivated her idea for a Mystic River theme for the art fest that year (Somerville is in the Mystic River watershed); resulted in strong pushback from Mayor. Her aide said “That’s not art – art is something I put over my sofa!” But public art is strongest when it has something to say and people can experience it, and it feels relevant. Artists have an uncanny ability to take things we may take for granted, and make them more meaningful. People from the community may want to shape the art but you hire the artist to do things we haven’t thought of, just let the artist know what it is that you want to express. Discussion of a Korean War memorial in Somerville: the jury was comprised of veterans who had their own standard figurative idea, and included (our) Bill Turville, an artist and veteran. Cecily held several meetings where vets could just talk, and then she showed work of MA artists (many of the standard figurative memorial artists were from outside MA); eventually (with very small budget) they came up with memorial which included evocative objects mounted on a timeline, using an existing pedestal, and it was very successful.

Cecily advises no open calls for public art; instead, she sought out curators who made suggestions of artists.

It’s not a good idea to run a public art project without paid staff or consultant.

Private developers may (should) be convinced to put money toward public art – to enhance the value of their own building, but city officials have leverage. Get art on the agenda, make developers contribute to the Town’s public art fund.

Cecily described the process for a Union Sq (Somerville) project, which had two separate juries: a neighborhood advisory group which determined what mattered; and a jury of artists and professionals who selected artists. The RFP paid people \$500 to develop proposals. They made a public event out of proposal selection, including showing a slide show of public art around the nation, which opened up peoples’ thinking about what was possible. Included a whimsical arrangement of dance steps sprayed onto the ground. It’s also important for artists to be brought into the project early on, as functional pieces can be done by artists. Remember to think about maintenance needs. Decommissioning: how do you advocate for removal when something feels no longer right?

Transformer (switch) boxes: Better as graphic designed rather than fine art. Maybe tell artist(s) this will only be up for three years, not going to ask them to repaint it.

Murals: Cecily told about development of murals that marked the entrance to the Mystic River. She dealt with the state highway department and worked with David Fichter and (younger) HS

kids (wages administered by ERI for low-income kids). Students passed out flyers for the neighborhood. Muralist did the design, then kids painted it. Photos of the kids were incorporated into the mural (as well as that of an unhappy neighbor, shown with friends from the 'old days.')

Office: Somerville Arts Council (SAC) evolved from a file cabinet and desk to occupying various offices in various departments, to a large empty annex...Now they have a FT director, FT program coordinator, PT person who does books/accounting, and interns. (Can do inventory, and very active volunteers are arts leaders.) Cecily warned that it's hard to get payments in a timely way through the City's system. Grants through SCAT as fiscal agent is much better; if programming money is needed quickly, don't have funds go through the City. However it is good to have access and be part of city government, as an arm of the city that pertains to arts and culture. The Mayor has given the SAC independence on how to spend their funds.

Cecily's goals were: promoting artists' community in Somerville; creating/supporting the ways artists could contribute to the community life; and helping artists have their work seen/heard.

Two programs which transformed the community perception of art:

- 1) Somerville Garden Awards (Clara Wainwright): Could enter oneself but also could enter other people's gardens in the contest, which showed appreciation, enlarged the idea of who is considered an artist! Katherine Krister (?check name with Cecily) who may live in Arlington, enlisted writers to do oral histories of each entrant – teams of a writer, an artist, and a gardener went out to each. The opening was a great event, mayor gave out certificates, Christine Temin did an article on the front page of the Globe.
- 2) Illumination Tour –of houses and store windows. Wonderful to have blazing lights in a dark time of year. Discussion about distancing it from religiousness. Rose suggested that 'People of the First Light' is a Native American reference, and Arlington's holiday lighting event is called First Lights; Revels are also about the Solstice...

Cecily mentioned that Somerville artists included those who didn't live there; Capuano wanted them to become part of the constituency. Stephanie pointed out that the Arlington Cultural Council has a list of artists.

Forest Hills Cemetery: Cecily worked there for 13 years after the SAC. There, she no longer had an agenda of using local artists, but instead artists who would do the best work. She did mostly temporary work.

Someone named Rebecca (ask Cecily for last name), who lives in Gloucester, could be an important resource for us – she does preservation work and knows Dallin collection. Worked at MFA in American Decorative Arts – knows conservators and bronze treatment.

Cecily showed images of the pieces, including the ethereal Spirits in the Trees and Folly for a Pine Forest (which could work for Arts Rocks Menotomy). Cecily offered to put together a slide show for thinking about Art Rocks Menotomy.

Forest Hills had money but she also got NEA funding.

Dave said he knows a sculptural garden in Dover, and Susan said she has photos from Acton/Boxboro.

Group discussion after lunch break

Cecily suggests a theme of PLAY in a call to artists for next year's Art Rocks Menotomy; would be good for Parks & Rec goals. DeCordova once did artist mini-golf, giant chess set...

Fundraising

Cecily suggests we use a fundraising consultant to help flesh out strategies. We should be looking for individual donors. Who are the art patrons? Who are the collectors in town? Could Marc Gurton, as a gallery owner, help us identify some? House parties are a good way to develop relationships. Remember the earlier suggestion to make a case to developers. Could also organize something with restaurants. Start an annual fund – start small and simple, and build up; memberships could be \$10, \$15 per month...

Jane suggested :

- 1) Insert into the Master Plan something about development and art. They are doing open meetings each month (per section). Federal funds could be for \$1.5 million or more (Stephanie said she recently emailed Carol Kowalski about that).
- 2) Form a small committee around the Public Art Fund to determine how it will work, and go to Adam Chapdelaine. We should ask for volunteers at the next regular APA meeting.

Dave asked how to promote the idea of an Arts & Culture Liaison person. Cecily asked if we had a Main Streets program here, as a way to get money into the Town and work on an identity and physical plan with Federal funds; might get arts liaison position funded.

Cecily mentioned another Arlington resident, Mimi Graney, who handles the Somerville Main Streets program; perhaps she should be invited to an upcoming Cultural Commission meeting. Bill said he knows her. She started Fluff Fest, does Farmer Market ... not sure if finds still exist in Main Street program. Mimi also works on helping the storefront program (which Ted Fields is also doing here), to improve dilapidated storefronts. Jane said the Community Preservation Act is now being proposed again in Arlington Town Meeting.

House parties: Cicely suggests they could be on a presentation of what APA has already done and hopes for, ask those present what they want. Or have a speaker. Cecily is happy to talk to us about fundraisers. Rose asked how to navigate getting funding when the Arlington Center for the Arts (ACA), and APA, and the AIFF (film festival) and more are all seeking funds.

Nilou suggested tapping into young families more as a resource. ISIS drew people in from Cambridge and all over. (Note that ISIS space is now available for rental by Erik Kondo.)

Susan wondered how to deal with the pushback from 'old vs new' residents that some in Arlington voice, and how to make long-term residents part of the process. Through

food/cooking? Everyone is proud of their meals – connect with an artist? Cecily suggested Farmers Table events – could do on the bike path, use the chairs! A super long picnic table, maybe with baked goods, ‘not trying to change the town, we want to make it more you.’ Stephanie mentioned the Long Table in Hyannis, event with musicians. Regarding musicians, Cecily suggests we do a Porch Fest as done in Somerville. Susan and Bill suggested art lemonade stands, staffed by kids, or art buttons, buy a cookie, solve a problem...

Cecily suggested commissioning an artist to show ‘who we are’ like the Humans of NY blog – put it on light poles!

Jane mentioned that there is a diversity project in town now, including True Story Theater.

Adria cautioned that all plans need to be doable!

Review of 2014 calendar

- Jill gave a Transformer Box update; theme is Nature
- Adria reported that Tom Davison got money from Arlington Cultural Council for an arts liaison to help organize Arlington Alive
- Rose will represent Chairful at EcoFest (March 29) and will liaise with Tom Davison about publicizing Chairful.
- Dave gave information about Winfred Rimbert’s Residency at Arlington High School in March
- Dave did review of APA financials
- (Cecily noted that artist stipends she used went up over the years, from \$500 to \$2500.)
- Rose pointed out that Chairful is our only fundraising event; Cicely asked if we had underwriters. We get \$10 entry fee per registrants.

Cicely suggests a focus at an upcoming meeting about fundraising to focus on Chairful – start early – and she will come to that meeting.

[END]

Submitted by Barbara Costa