

**MINUTES OF THE
MIAMI-DADE COUNTY CULTURAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

April 15, 2026

A meeting of the Miami-Dade County Cultural Affairs Council was held at the Stephen P. Clark Government Center, 111 NW 1st Street, 6th Floor Conference Room and online via Zoom.

<p><u>Members Present</u> Brian May, Chairman Kareem Brantley Mitchell Bierman Zaba St. George Castro Sandra Curbelo Adolfo Henriques, Immediate Past Chair Commissioner Daniela Jean Janá Sigars-Malina, First Vice Chair Cheryl Rees Rosa Sugañes Monty Trainer</p>	<p><u>Members Not Present</u> Al Dotson, Jr. Councilwoman Linda Julien</p>
<p><u>Staff</u> Ashlee K. Thomas, Interim Director Graham Winick, Assistant Director Kelly Allocco Stephanie Antequera Patricia Arbelaez Roxana Barba Stefania Barigelli Dorianny Campbell Nicole Campbell Denisse Carranza Nicole Chaplin Karen Diazgranados Jhonnatan Escalante Brian Flagler Eric Fliss Stephanie Garcia Bianca Gonzalez Theodore Harrell Liliana Hernandez-Constenla LaToya Hightower Christine Jefferson Kevinique Lawrence Dorixis McComas Val Medina Ana Meza</p>	<p><u>Staff (continued)</u> Gilda Mooney Carmen Morris Javier Navarro Paula Parra Alex Peraza Adriana Perez Dana Pezoldt Travon Pierre Carolina Pupo-Mayo Katherine Revell Pablo Rincon Raoul Romain Gisella Rivas-Diaz Mohamadi Sakande Amanda Sanfilippo Long Helen Sanchez Nikenna Smart Javier Siut Christina Tassy Jane Thayer Geraldine Toussaint Andrea Valencia Pamela Valles Veronica Vera Eduardo Vivas</p>

	<u>Guests Present</u> Marc Burns (Coconut Grove BID) Emily Cardenas (Dranoff 2 Piano Fusion)
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Cultural Affairs Council Vice Chair Janá Sigars-Malina called the meeting to order at 10:04 a.m. Vice Chair Sigars-Malina chaired the meeting on behalf of Chairman Brian May, who attended the meeting via Zoom. She welcomed the Cultural Affairs Council members, Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs staff, and all guests in attendance.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL

Approval of the March 18, 2026, Minutes

The minutes of the March 18, 2026, Council meeting were approved unanimously. (Motion by Mr. Trainer; Seconded by Ms. Curbelo)

Requests for Excused Absences for April 15, 2026

Requests for excused absences for Councilors Al Dotson, Jr. and Councilwoman Linda Julien, were approved unanimously. (Motion by Mr. Brantley; seconded by Ms. Curbelo)

FY 2026 – 2027 Grant Program Panels

Council Vice Chair Sigars-Malina presented the grant panels for the FY 2026-2027 grants cycle. The Cultural Advancement (ADV) Grants Program panel will be chaired by Councilor Bierman; the Cultural Development (CDG) Grants Program panel will be chaired by Councilor St. George Castro; the Festivals and Special Events (FEST) Grants Program panel will be chaired by Councilor Sagrañes; the Hannibal Cox, Jr. (HCJ) Cultural Grants Program panel will be chaired by Councilor Trainer; the Michael Spring Major Cultural Institutions (MCI) Grants Program panel will be chaired by Chairman May; and the Youth Arts Miami (YAM) Grants Program panel will be chaired by Councilor Bierman. The grant program panels were approved unanimously. (Motion by Commissioner Jean; seconded by Mr. Brantley)

REPORTS AND DISCUSSION ITEMS

Updates on the FY 2025 - 2026 State Arts Budget

Assistant Director, Graham Winick, reported that at the time of the Council's last meeting the State had concluded its annual legislative session without adopting a state budget, its primary constitutional obligation. It is anticipated that lawmakers will be called back for a special session to address the budget. Mr. Winick noted that several bills of concern failed to advance, while others were transmitted to the Governor for consideration and signature.

Mr. Winick reported that no special session had yet been called to address the budget despite earlier expectations that one would occur in April. A separate special session focused on redistricting is scheduled for next week, though it is not currently expected to be used for budget negotiations. He explained that the State of Florida Senate President and House Speaker have convened a committee to reconcile significant differences between the chambers, which remain approximately \$1.2 to \$1.5 billion apart in their budget proposals. According to legislative representatives, it remains possible that a budget special session may not occur until June.

Mr. Winick stated that the Legislature must present a finalized budget to the Governor no later than June 15, allowing sufficient time for gubernatorial review and approval before the start of the State fiscal year on July 1. There have been no changes in current recommendations for arts grant funding. The House proposal remains at approximately \$23 million for State arts grants, while the Senate proposal remains at approximately \$20 million. In both chambers' proposals, local arts agencies such as Miami-Dade County were removed from consideration in the initial requests without explanation.

Mr. Winick reported that the bill related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, has not yet been transmitted to the Governor. The bill has passed both the House and Senate. He noted that an engrossed version of the bill was recently released, providing the final language intended for presentation to the Governor. While amendments seeking greater clarity and flexibility for local governments were not adopted during floor debate, the engrossed version appears to offer clarification. Staff and legislative partners will continue reviewing the measure in detail only if and when it is signed into law.

Updates on the FY 2025 - 2026 County Arts Budget

Interim Director, Ashlee Thomas, reported that the Department's proposed County budget has been submitted and that staff recently participated in both budget planning and budget hearing meetings. All motions previously advanced by the Council have been shared with the Office of Management and Budget as well as the County Administration for consideration.

All County departments have been directed to maintain flat budget requests for the upcoming fiscal year, with no enhancements or increases requested at this time. The Department is currently facing an estimated \$3 million deficit within its administrative budget due to rising operational costs, including fringe expenses, employee benefits, and other standard cost increases.

Ms. Thomas further stated that an additional \$1.5 million would be required for the Department to maintain pace with demand in its grants programs, including support for new applicants and expanded programming needs. In total, approximately \$4.5 million would be necessary for the Department to sustain current service levels and operations. Council members previously urged that this amount be included in the Department's budget request.

Ms. Thomas reported that the County is entering what is expected to be a particularly challenging budget cycle. Constitutional offices are continuing to navigate budget coordination in their second year of implementation and several County Commissioners have indicated the process is not expected to be easy. As a result, staff does not anticipate significant enhancements and will continue to keep the Council informed regarding any reduction targets or additional directives as they are received.

The Department's formal budget presentation to the Office of Management and Budget is scheduled for April 22, at which time staff will present information substantially similar to that previously shared with the Council. Following that meeting, staff expects to receive further guidance regarding departmental funding levels, potential reductions, savings targets, and other fiscal priorities.

Ms. Thomas added that the Miami-Dade County Mayor, County Commissioners, and budget staff are currently working to prepare the County's proposed budget, despite not yet having finalized revenue figures from the State. The County is still required to present a proposed budget by July 15 and a clearer picture of the County's overall fiscal outlook is expected at that time.

Ms. Thomas explained that while the estimated \$4.5 million need is intended to preserve current operations rather than expand services, it would nonetheless be considered a budget increase. Absent additional funding, maintaining a flat budget would likely require reductions or reallocations within the Department's existing resources. She noted that one cost-saving measure already identified by the budget office is a 3% savings target through attrition, achieved by leaving vacancies unfilled. She added that staff will be better positioned to prioritize needs and adjust operations once additional guidance is received. In response to a question regarding a potential philanthropic line item for donations, Ms. Thomas stated that while the Mayor and Administration are exploring various funding strategies, the Department's priority remains supporting nonprofit cultural organizations through its grant programs. She emphasized that the Department seeks to avoid competing with the nonprofit sector's fundraising capacity and noted that directing private donations through a governmental line could reduce resources otherwise available directly to community-based organizations.

Department Facilities Update - Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center

Eric Fliss, Managing Director, provided a recap of the season at the Dennis C. Moss Cultural Arts Center, noting that the season opened in October with the annual “Backyard Bash,” themed “Abducted by the 80s.” He reported approximately 1,600 attendees and highlighted performances by Wang Chung, Men Without Hats, and Naked Eyes, marking a successful season kickoff.

Mr. Fliss reported that highlights of the season included the annual Halloween collaboration with Alhambra Orchestra, Greater Miami Youth Symphony, and The Children’s Trust, which drew thousands of attendees and remains a community tradition. He also noted that the Miami Youth Ballet’s *Nutcracker* achieved its highest grossing performance to date.

Holiday rental activity from November through December was strong, with multiple schools and community organizations utilizing the venue and approximately 8,866 tickets sold and providing meaningful revenue support.

Mr. Fliss highlighted January programming including a sold-out production of *Ava*, “The Rocket Man” Elton John tribute, and Monty Alexander’s *To Make It to Jazz*, which also included a partnership with Global Empowerment Mission for Hurricane Melissa relief efforts in Jamaica, with staff participation in donation processing and packing activities. Winter and spring programming featured Veronica Swift, Meow Meow, and a Neil Diamond tribute, as well as a shift toward extended-run and multi-performance presentations such as *Batsu*, *Import Taste*, and *Monica Bill Barnes: Many Happy Returns*, which were well received.

Popular family programming included *Peppa Pig*, *My First Concert* and *Curious George: The Golden Meatball*, along with wellness-focused initiatives such as “Art and Wellness” with Ari Urban and a sound bath experience led by Davin Youngs. Mr. Fliss noted continued success presenting partnerships, including Cecile McLorin Salvant, the Glenn Miller Orchestra, *Taste of Ireland*, and *Swan Lake* by the World Ballet Company, which sold out and generated over \$80,000 in ticket revenue.

Looking ahead, The Moss Center’s future programming includes the All Kids Included Family Arts Festival on May 2, marking its 20th anniversary, as well as performances by Christian McBride, tribute acts, and additional seasonal programming. The summer season will go on sale May 13 and will include classic rock packages, dance, flamenco, jazz, and cabaret offerings. Mr. Fliss noted that rising production, travel, and labor costs continue to impact the performing arts sector, requiring careful balancing of affordability and accessibility while maintaining the Center’s mission.

Art in Public Places Update

Amanda Sanfilippo Long, Curator and Artist Manager, provided an update on the Art in Public Places program, reporting that staff recently held a Professional Advisory

Committee meeting regarding artist presentations for the Miami International Airport garage improvement project. She noted that MIA is undergoing a major capital improvement program, with more than \$12 billion in planned development across the airport.

Ms. Sanfilippo Long reported that artist Thom Faulders was selected for the garage activation project, describing him as an interdisciplinary artist whose work spans design, architecture, museums, and public art, and who is based in Los Angeles. She stated that the intent of the commission is to create an iconic visual experience for travelers, contributing to Miami's identity and serving as a recognizable landmark within the airport environment. The concept draws inspiration from flight patterns, mapping systems, and local vegetation, including the traveler palm, and is intended to create a "moment of wow" for visitors. The project is currently in design development and contract phase, with project management led by Pablo Rincon and oversight by program leadership, including Patricia Romeu. Ms. Sanfilippo Long noted that the garage structures will also undergo exterior and interior improvements as part of the broader capital program.

Ms. Sanfilippo Long further reported on additional Art in Public Places initiatives in Little Havana in partnership with the Related Group, including the José Martí Villas project. She stated that artist Francisco Lo Castro will activate a prominent gazebo within the development for public engagement. She also highlighted the José Martí mid-rise project, which will feature work by Nereida Garcia Ferraz on the building façade, along with additional commissioned works by Maritza Caneca, Marlon Portales, and Jacoub Reyes, coordinated under project management by Veronica Vera.

She additionally noted that a work by Sam Gilliam from the County's collection will be featured in an upcoming exhibition at the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum at FIU. Ms. Sanfilippo Long reported that a current call to artists is open for Upland Park, a major transit-oriented development, with more than \$2 million in public art opportunities available for local and national artists.

Ms. Sanfilippo Long stated that staff will be participating in the Florida Association of Public Art Professionals conference in West Palm Beach, as well as upcoming professional recognition events, including the Art and Business Council breakfast featuring Art in Public Places Chief Patricia Romeu as a panelist. She also noted the opening of the South Florida Cultural Consortium exhibition in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, marking its 30th anniversary, with programming continuing through October 4.

In response to questions, Ms. Sanfilippo Long clarified that Art in Public Places is not involved in the State-led downtown Miami I-395 signature bridge project. She also confirmed that the Art in Public Places ordinance applies to municipalities, and that staff is coordinating with the City of Miami regarding public art requirements for the new soccer stadium project, though timelines remain under discussion and implementation is still being determined.

DIRECTORS REPORTS

Interim Director, Ashlee Thomas, reported that the Department continues to operate at a high level of activity and thanked the Council for their ongoing commitment and support. She noted that the South Florida Cultural Consortium exhibition is opening at the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, and highlighted continued engagement efforts by the Cultural Grants team, including recent in-person grant workshops held in Pinecrest to connect directly with constituents and promote awareness of available funding opportunities.

She provided an update regarding the Coconut Grove Playhouse project, explaining that the item was originally scheduled to be heard before the City of Miami Planning, Zoning, and Appeals Board but was deferred due to a noticing error related to the Board's role. To avoid potential legal issues, the Department requested re-noticing and deferral, which has been acknowledged by the City. Ms. Thomas stated that staff, along with County legal counsel, will attend the meeting to formally request the deferral, with the matter now expected to be heard on May 6. She added that recent litigation related to the project has been dismissed, leaving no active legal barriers, and noted that pending approvals will allow the project to proceed into Phase 2, including permitting for garage and theater construction components.

Interim Director Thomas also highlighted the upcoming All Kids Included Family Arts Festival at the Moss Center on May 2, marking the program's 20th anniversary. She noted that the event will recognize founding partners and community leaders, including Francine Anderson, The Children's Trust, and Director Emeritus Michael Spring, and will include a proclamation for AKI Day from the Mayor.

Finally, Ms. Thomas reported on Department efforts focused on emerging arts leadership and professional development, including a workshop on artificial intelligence and its application in creative practice. She noted that the session will include expert presenters and case studies, including academic perspectives on AI integration in arts education, and encouraged participation from emerging arts leaders across the field.

COUNCILOR REPORTS

Councilor Trainer reported on ongoing development activity in the West Grove, noting that significant portions of the area are currently undergoing redevelopment, with substantial construction underway. He stated that future phases are expected to extend across 37th Avenue and that the scale of development represents a major transformation for the neighborhood. Councilor expressed optimism about the long-term impact of the project and indicated he would continue to keep the Council informed as work progresses.

Councilor Curbelo noted that incorporating a QR code into presentations could be a useful tool to allow attendees to easily access materials and related information.

Separately, Councilor Rees shared a positive observation regarding the Art in Public Places program, noting that while serving at jury duty at the new Justice Center, she was able to view the installed public artwork. She remarked that the artwork significantly enhanced the environment and contrasted favorably with older jury facilities, commending the program's contribution to public spaces.

Councilor Sigars-Malina also briefly referenced recent programming at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, noting a successful event involving dance and community engagement, and highlighted continued strong attendance at cultural institutions such as Miami City Ballet. She emphasized that cultural organizations are actively expanding outreach to attract new audiences and increase participation.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:48 a.m.

Submitted by,

Andrea S. Valencia