

**Minutes  
Special Council Meeting  
April 28, 2025  
9:00 a.m.  
Virtual Meeting**

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS:** Chair Cohen, Mr. Astorino, Senator Bartolotta, Representative Ciresi, Mr. Gabel, Ms. Goldberg, Ms. Gunderson, Representative Labs, Mr. Parks, Mr. Stull

**COUNCIL MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:** Vice Chair Alaquiva, Senator Cappelletti, Judge Morgan, Ms. Vilayphonh, Mr. Warfield, Ms. Zaborney

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:** Karl Blischke, Executive Director; Heather Doughty, Deputy Executive Director; Christopher Duerr, Program Coordinator & Grants Specialist; Jamie Dunlap, Chief of Creative Catalysts & Lifelong Learning; Amy Gabriele, Chief of Finance & Administration; Norah Johnson, Director of External Affairs; Laura Kline, Executive Assistant; Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector; Sarah Merritt, Director of Creative Communities; Dana Payne, Director of Capacity Building and Creative Asset Development; Seth Poppy, Director of Data Systems & Creative Services; and Ian Rosario, Director of Arts Organizations & Arts Programs & Grants Liaison

**GUESTS PRESENT:** Addie Abelson, Chief Counsel; Philip Horn, Senator Connie Williams.

**ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER:** Karl Blischke welcomed those in attendance and informed them that the meeting would be recorded for the administrative purpose of minute taking. Mr. Blischke then turned the meeting over to Chair Cohen.

**ROLL CALL:**

*Karl Blischke, Executive Director*

Mr. Blischke called the roll. A quorum was established.

**ITEM 2: REQUESTS FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS:**

Chair Cohen asked if the PCA received any requests for public comments. There were no requests for public comment.

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** Chair Cohen reminded the Council of the PCA's Conflict of Interest Policy.

**ITEM 3: Recommendation for Pennsylvania Partners in the Arts – Creative Sector Flex Fund**

*Amanda Lovell, Director of Access to the Creative Sector*

Council Member Stull indicated that he has a conflict with the organization referenced in this recommendation, Berks Arts Council.

Ms. Lovell reported that this recommendation is a proposal to make changes to the Region 7 partnership as well as creating a transition plan for these changes. Ms. Lovell explained that based on an analysis and consideration of organizational performance, PCA Staff recommends that the Council discontinue its partnership agreement with Berks Arts Council effective with the convening of the fiscal year 2025/2026.

Ms. Lovell reported that Berks Arts Council serves Region 7, which includes the following counties: Berks, Lancaster and Schuylkill. Lovell stated that over the past three years, the PCA staff has communicated with the staff at Berks Arts Council regarding the need for improvement specific to the organization's responsibilities and activities as a PPA partner. Lovell explained that based on ongoing communication with Berks Arts Council and a review of its Creative Sector Flex Fund processes, and feedback from constituents and partners, PCA staff has determined that the organization's performance does not justify continuing the partnership.

Ms. Lovell stated that in March of 2025, PCA staff received feedback from a member of the Pennsylvania legislature. She added that PCA staff reviewed the documentation of Berks Arts Council's 2024/2025 creative sector flex fund grantmaking processes and upon that review, it revealed several instances in a divergence of practice from those outlined in the partnership agreement and in the published program guidelines.

Ms. Lovell stated that to rectify these issues, PCA staff recommends that Council approve \$30,000 in funding to address issues with Berks Arts Council's grant process. Lovell explained that of this amount, \$10,000 had previously been approved but not distributed, and \$20,000 would be new funding. She added that the total is intended to support six 2024–2025 Creative Sector Flex Fund applicants, with PCA staff providing oversight for the distribution.

Ms. Lovell also stated that PCA staff will have oversight into the distribution of these funds to the following applicants:

- Allegro: The Chamber Orchestra of Lancaster
- Anthracite Philharmonic
- Gabriel Chamber Ensemble
- Lancaster Creative Factory
- Schuylkill Choral Society
- Tamaqua Community Arts Center

Ms. Lovell stated that additionally, PCA staff requests that Council authorize the agency's direct administration of the Region 7 Fiscal Year 2025/2026 PPA Program to ensure continuity of services and adherence to program requirements. Lovell added that in the interim, PCA staff will work with Berks Arts Council to ensure that the needs of Region 7 communities continue to be served. She stated that PCA staff will collaborate with Berks Arts Council staff to develop positive and clear communication during the transition and added that the PCA will require that Berks Arts Council complete and submit any required final reports and documents by March 31, 2026.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation.

Mr. Astorino made a motion to approve the motion. Ms. Gunderson seconded the motion. Mr. Stull abstained from this motion due to the conflict. Motion carried, Mr. Stull abstained, none opposed.

#### **ITEM 4: Recommendation for Strategic Plan**

*Karl Blischke, Executive Director*

Mr. Blischke thanked Council for their work on the strategic plan over the last year, and for being engaged in the strategic planning process. Blischke explained that this recommendation is to adopt the strategic plan framework that is outlined in the Council Book. Mr. Blischke stated that if adopted, PCA staff will work to administer an action plan that will set forth benchmarks and implementation steps for Council to review and use as tracking documents to see progress that is being made in implementing the plan.

Mr. Blischke highlighted some of the information contained in the Council Book that included recommendations gathered as part of PCA's retreats as well as information that came from surveys, community meetings and Council roundtables.

Ms. Blischke explained that as PCA worked on this plan with Council, five key focus areas of the plan were identified and added that these will be part of the work going forward. Blischke highlighted the five key focus areas which are listed below:

1. **Asset Development:** Strengthening creative enterprises by offering technical assistance and capacity-building for entrepreneurs and small businesses through regional hubs.
2. **Workforce Development:** Establishing industry partnerships with the Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Education to raise career awareness, address skill gaps, and create pathways for creative professionals.
3. **Community Development:** Expanding successful initiatives from the previous plan by enhancing creative communities and supporting the growth of creative districts.
4. **Visibility:** Increasing awareness of Pennsylvania's creative industries both nationally and internationally, promoting PCA's name and opportunities.
5. **Policy Development:** Conducting research to advance the creative sector and using findings to shape impactful policies.

Blischke stated that this new direction aims to position PCA as a vital force in Pennsylvania's community and economic development.

Ms. Gunderson asked Mr. Blischke to provide more of an explanation about the workforce development component and how that could work or have worked in other areas so Council can get a better understanding of it.

In response to this question, Mr. Blischke detailed how workforce development could function, citing Ms. Dunlap's work with the Department of Labor and Industry in areas like live entertainment, film, and digital media. Blischke explained that this involves identifying employers and businesses coming together to identify key skills gaps and training opportunities that can be used to increase their talent pipeline. He stated that part of that is developing a pathway with apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.

Chair Cohen thanked Council and staff for the hard work and participation that was needed to make this plan happen.

Chair Cohen asked Council if there were any questions. Hearing none, Chair Cohen asked for a motion to approve the recommendation.

Ms. Goldberg made a motion to approve the motion. Mr. Parks seconded the motion. Motion carried, none abstained or opposed.

### **ITEM 5: Council Update**

*Karl Blischke, Executive Director*

Mr. Blischke informed Council members that their Annual Statement of Financial Interest forms must be filed by May 1, 2025.

Mr. Blischke updated the Council on federal developments affecting the PCA, particularly reviews by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) that include the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH.) Blischke reminded the Council that PCA receives a \$1.2 million annual NEA grant, which is dependent on the federal budget, but most of PCA's funding comes from the state.

Mr. Blischke stated that PCA has already drawn most of the NEA grant, with about \$350,000 pending reimbursement and added that while some NEA grantees have received expedited grant close-out notices, PCA has not.

Representative Ciresi stated that due to federal uncertainties, PCA should consider suggested contingency planning, including budgeting without NEA funds and exploring collaborative efforts among small organizations.

In response, Blischke shared that PCA has already frozen travel and nonessential spending and is working with Amy Gabriele to plan for various budget scenarios. Senator Connie Williams, who serves on the NEA board, offered to speak on PCA's behalf at an upcoming meeting and said she provide any updates she is permitted to share.

Mr. Blischke also highlighted a new public-private partnership with TeamPA and PECO. He explained that this marks PCA's first formal collaboration with PECO and is expected to launch a grant program by summer. Ms. Goldberg asked about PECO's past involvement, and Blischke explained this partnership grew from PECO's broader support of arts organizations, including through the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance.

Mr. Parks emphasized the importance of stakeholder communication. Blischke said PCA is preparing a public-facing communication package and will begin direct outreach to grantees and partners starting mid-to-late May to help them understand future funding opportunities.

Chair Cohen closed by thanking the team for their work and noted PCA's ongoing efforts to creatively manage the budget and programs for the upcoming year.

### **ITEM 13: Adjournment**

Meeting Adjourned at 9:38 AM