

CITY OF HIGHLAND PARK CULTURAL ARTS ADVISORY GROUP
REGULAR MEETING

Tuesday, April 14, 2026 - 6:00 PM

Highland Park City Hall, Pre-Session Conference Room
1707 St. Johns Avenue, Highland Park, Illinois

PUBLIC NOTICE

In accordance with the Statutes of the State of Illinois and the Ordinances of the City of Highland Park, a regular meeting of the City of Highland Park Cultural Arts Advisory Group is scheduled to be held at the hour of 6:00 P.M. on Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at City Hall in the second floor Pre-Session Conference Room, 1707 St Johns Avenue, Highland Park, Illinois.

Individuals with questions or feedback about an agenda item may address the Advisory Group in the following ways:

1. **EMAILS FOR THE RECORD.** Email the Cultural Arts Advisory Group staff liaison, Communications Manager Amanda Bennett, at abennett@cityhpil.com. If you wish to have your comments read into the record, limit your communication to 200 words or less. Public comments received by 3:00 PM the day of the meeting will be read under Business from the Public. Any comments received during the meeting will be held until the end of the meeting.
Public comments should contain the following information:
 - In the subject line, identify, “CAAG Meeting – Read into the Record”
 - Name • City • Address (optional) • Phone (optional) • Organization, agency representing, if applicable. • Topic or agenda item number of interest
2. **EMAILS WITH UNLIMITED INFORMATION.** Individuals who do not wish to have their comments read into the record can email staff liaison Amanda Bennett an unlimited number of words. Emails will be forwarded to the Cultural Arts Advisory Group if requested.
3. **TELEPHONE.** Individuals with no access to email may leave a message with staff liaison Amanda Bennett by 3:00PM day of meeting.
4. **LIVE COMMENTS.** Individuals are able to address the Advisory Group during the meeting. Questions/comments are limited to written testimony into the record or spoken comments, not both.

MEETING AGENDA

- I. Call to Order
- II. Roll Call
- III. Approval of Minutes
 - a. January 13, 2026
- IV. Business from the Public
- V. New Business
 - a. Photography Contest – New Approach Debrief
 - b. Volunteer Opportunities
 - c. Poet Laureate Program Update
- VI. Chair Report
- VII. Staff Report
- VIII. Adjournment

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CULTURAL ARTS ADVISORY GROUP OF
THE CITY OF HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS**

MEETING DATE: January 13, 2026

MEETING LOCATION: Pre-Session Conference Room – Highland Park City Hall
1707 St. Johns Avenue, Highland Park, Illinois

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

At 6:01 PM, Chair Rota called the Cultural Arts Advisory Group (“CAAG”) regular meeting to order and Staff Liaison Bennett called the roll.

Advisors Present: Advisors Archambeau (VC), Bruno, Gran (6:06 PM), Greenberg, Herzog, Hollander, Matiosian (6:04 PM), Rota (C); Student Representatives de la Cruz, Peterson, Sullivan

Advisors Absent: Student Representative Edelstein

Staff Present: Amanda Bennett, Communications Manager/Staff Liaison; Megan Cherry, Management Analyst/Alternate Staff Liaison

Also Present: Councilmember Yumi Ross (Council Liaison)

MINUTES

a) Approval of the October 21, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Advisor Archambeau moved to approve the minutes, seconded by Advisor Bruno. Voice vote, unanimous. Chair Rota declared the motion passed.

BUSINESS FROM THE PUBLIC

No business from the public.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Member Introductions

Chair Rota welcomed CAAG’s new Advisors, and invited everyone to introduce themselves and share a bit about their background.

b) Arts Award Nomination Discussion

Chair Rota and Staff Liaison Bennett provided a brief introduction and background of the Arts Award. Staff Liaison Bennett shared that nominees are reviewed via a two-step process: the nominees are reviewed by CAAG, and a summary of their discussion is provided to the City Council, who ultimately chooses the winner. Advisors also have the opportunity to individually and anonymously provide comments on each nominee; this feedback is also shared with the City Council to inform their decision.

Staff Liaison Bennett also shared that one of the nominees, Noah Plotkin, has a business that has an active contract with the City. However, City staff does not see this as a conflict of interest, as the nomination is for Mr. Plotkin as an individual.

Staff Liaison Bennett introduced the first nominee, Secret World Books. The Advisors agreed that Secret World Books goes above and beyond their role as a business, bringing in authors from around the country for guest talks and stocking books by local authors, along with a variety of community events.

Staff Liaison Bennett then introduced the second nominee, Noah Plotkin. There was some concern that this particular nomination didn't clearly separate Mr. Plotkin's accomplishments as an individual from those of his business, Life Rhythms, especially because the City has an active contract with Life Rhythms. The Advisors shared that it would be helpful for City Council to clarify the criteria regarding business versus individual nominations.

Finally, Staff Liaison Bennett introduced the third nominee, Maria Barnhill. Student Representative Sullivan shared that Ms. Barnhill has spent an enormous amount of time and energy rebuilding and recruiting students to Highland Park High School's Choir Program. The Advisors agreed that Ms. Barnhill has clearly made an impact on her students and HPHS, however, they are concerned that these accomplishments are too closely associated with her duties as a choir director.

Chair Rota, the Advisors and Staff Liaison Bennett noted that all three nominees are strong, with a notable impact on the community. Staff Liaison Bennett reviewed and discussed the Arts Award criteria with the Advisors. The Advisors reiterated that they would appreciate clarification when considering a nominee whose business has a current contract with the City, and agreed that they should revisit the award criteria regarding an individual when their accomplishments are tightly tied to their professional role.

Council Liaison Ross asked Staff Liaison Bennett if she would share some of the concerns the Advisors identified regarding individual and business nominees. Staff Liaison Bennett explained that she will draft a memo to City Council regarding what was discussed by CAAG, but mentioned that the policy discussion regarding clarifying criteria will likely be presented separately from the discussion regarding the nominees.

c) Poet Laureate Program Update

Advisor Bruno provided an update on the Poet Laureate Program, and the various programs and events that Laura Joyce-Hubbard, the City's Poet Laureate, has coordinated and facilitated over the past several months. She also shared Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard's upcoming events in the community.

Staff Liaison Bennett shared that this topic is before the group today because Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard has proposed a capstone project to conclude her time as poet laureate. She would like to collaborate with The Art Center on a praise poem project. She would coordinate a series of workshops for community members, and poems written as part of these workshops would be exhibited at The Art Center, incorporating a visual component.

Staff Liaison Bennett explained that in October 2025, the Advisors agreed and voted on a 2026 work plan that includes selecting a new Poet Laureate. Previously, Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard elected to renew her term as Poet Laureate with the City for a year, instead of two years. However, in light of the proposed capstone project, which can't be completed in one year, Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard would like to renew her agreement for the original two year term. If the group is in favor of extending her term, then Staff Liaison Bennett will take the group's recommendation to the City Council and advise them to renew Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard's appointment. Extending Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard's term would move the search and selection of the City's next poet laureate to 2027.

Advisor Gran asked if there would be an opportunity for the group to provide feedback on Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard's proposed project, and if there is money available in the budget for any costs associated with

this capstone project. Staff Liaison Bennett explained that Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard is not asking for any additional money. She will also ask Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard to draft an outline of her project, which will be shared with the Advisors. Staff Liaison Bennett will then invite Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard to attend the next meeting to share more about her project.

Advisor Gran thanked Staff Liaison Bennett for the information, and explained that she is concerned that the next poet laureate might need more money to facilitate their programs than Poet Laureate Joyce-Hubbard, and Advisor Gran wants to ensure that the next poet laureate is set up appropriately to be successful. Staff Liaison Bennett provided the Advisors with a detailed breakdown of the budget for the Poet Laureate Program.

The Advisors were in consensus on recommending the extension of Laura Joyce-Hubbard's term as poet laureate.

OTHER BUSINESS

a) Chair Report

Chair Rota is pleased to be the new Chair of the Cultural Arts Advisory Group. She is looking forward to promoting the visual arts, especially as it pertains to murals. She shared information about the mural on the underpass from Highland Park into Highwood. She believes that murals bring color, life and diversity to communities and is looking forward to involving community members, particularly students, in this initiative.

Staff Liaison Bennett explained that Township High School District 113 is working on this project, potentially as part of next year's Focus on the Arts. There are some challenges associated with the location of the mural; it is located on an underpass, so coordination with Metra is essential to ensure the integrity of the structure. Staff Liaison Bennett explained that CAAG and the City's role in the mural process is strictly administrative, and that a goal of the City's mural program is to emphasize the importance of the relationship between the artist and property owner. She explained the process for obtaining a permit for a mural.

Advisor Gran commented that people don't know about the City's mural program, and asked how CAAG can help share out information about this program. Advisors Matisosian and Vice-Chair Archambeau shared ideas on how to promote and market the program and associated ordinance. Staff Liaison Bennett noted that CAAG could work on a print piece that could be distributed to businesses. CAAG could form a working group of two Advisors, who would research the ordinance and put together some information that would be relevant to business owners. The Advisors agreed; Staff Liaison Bennett shared that this topic will be on a forthcoming agenda.

b) Staff Report

Staff Liaison Bennett provided an update on "Miss Nitro." The Park District of Highland Park is embarking on a community engagement process regarding potential locations for "Miss Nitro" at Brown and Lincoln Place Parks. This is a Park District process, but Staff Liaison Bennett will provide updates on the process, as they are available. Late last year, the Park District prepared preliminary exhibits and obtained feedback from the Board of Commissioners at a workshop directing Park District staff to pursue planning for both locations. Further Park District consideration is anticipated for spring 2026, which means that conservation and reinstallation of "Miss Nitro" will likely occur in summer 2026.

Staff Liaison Bennett also shared that the City purchased new software to facilitate this year's photography contest, based on the recommendation of Advisor Gran. CAAG will schedule a special meeting for some time in March to choose the contest winners.

Finally, Staff Liaison Bennett provided information about the City's involvement in the America250 initiative. The bipartisan, national project celebrates the country's semiquicentennial of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. As part of this initiative, the City would like to invite CAAG to participate in a poster contest, facilitated by the US Conference of Mayors, by developing a rubric and providing feedback on the contest submissions. CAAG's feedback will be shared with the City Council and Mayor for final determination. The winner will be recognized at the HP Awards Ceremony in April, following a similar schedule to the Photography Contest, which will allow CAAG to schedule only one meeting to discuss both contests.

ADJOURNMENT

Advisor Bruno moved to adjourn. Advisor Gran seconded the motion. Voice vote, unanimous. Chair Rota declared the meeting adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Megan Cherry, Management Analyst/Alternate Staff Liaison

MINUTES APPROVED BY THE CULTURAL ARTS ADVISORY GROUP ON: