

NOVEMBER 6, 2025
6:00 P.M. – UNOFFICIAL MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER by Chair Ochoa at 6:00 PM.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE by Commissioner Mann.

ROLL CALL

☒ = Present ☐ = Absent

Commissioners

- ☒ Charlene Ashendorf
- ☒ Fisher Derderian
- ☒ Brendan Ford
- ☒ Erica Lucia
- ☒ Alisa Ochoa
- ☒ Allison Mann
- ☐ Debora Wondercheck

City Staff

- ☒ Brian Gruner, Parks and Community Svs. Director
- ☒ Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist
- ☒ Monique Villasenor, Recreation Manager
- ☒ Ashley Thomas, Sr. Recreation Supervisor
- ☒ Laura Fautua, Executive Assistant
- ☒ Kathia Viteri, Recreation Specialist

PRESENTATION:

1. POET LAUREATE - DANIELLE HANSON

Poet Laureate, Danielle Hanson, presented a poem and event updates.

2. NEWPORT-MESA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT - ARTS REPORT

Tamara Fairbanks from NMUSD presented.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Nancy Warzer-Brady: Education and Community Engagement Director for Backhausdance, expressed gratitude to the Arts Commission for its grant support, shared positive outcomes from the “Dance for Joy and Well-Being” senior dance series at the Costa Mesa Senior Center, acknowledged staff assistance with program visibility, and invited commissioners and the public to attend the free culminating class and performance on November 24th.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Ashendorf: Shared that after attending and intending only to observe the Backhausdance class, she was warmly drawn into participating. Found the experience meaningful and outside her comfort zone in a positive way, and praised the program’s impact on seniors, staff, and volunteers while expressing excitement for the finale.

Commissioner Lucia: Commended the artists who participated in the ARTventure exhibition and praised staff for organizing Community Arts Day and the Arts Awards, highlighting the joy of seeing local students perform and describing both events as lively and well-enjoyed.

Commissioner Ford: Praised the teenage performers at the ARTventure Art Awards, commended Commissioner Wondercheck and City staff for producing a top-notch event and venue experience, and shared inspiration from Philadelphia’s diverse and integrated public art, encouraging the Commission to bring similarly thoughtful, place-specific ideas into Costa Mesa’s arts master planning.

Commissioner Mann: Expressed enthusiasm for the growth of local arts initiatives including the Poet Laureate Program, school arts efforts, and Backhausdance, highlighted the excitement and youth engagement at ARTventure and Poetry-Oke!, and reflected on museum experiences in Chicago while voicing support for exploring a range of public art styles in Costa Mesa.

Vice Chair Derderian: Thanked staff for managing a busy fall season of arts programming, praising the strong community participation and the continued growth of local arts partnerships and events, such as the scarecrows from Scarecrow Festival.

Chair Ochoa: Thanked commissioners, partner agencies, and staff for their strong participation in ARTventure, praised the event's impact and artist engagement, and highlighted CMTV's storytelling. She also shared ideas for expanding literary arts in public spaces, discussed funding challenges facing arts nonprofits, encouraged exploration of new grant and funding strategies through potential subcommittees and policy updates, and voiced support for integrating bilingual poetry and public art into future City planning.

CONSENT CALENDAR

1. MINUTES – 08/07/25 and 09/04/25 Draft Minutes

Chair Ochoa proposed an amendment to page two of the August 7th minutes, misspelling of commenters name, Eli to Illa.

MOTION/SECOND: Chair Ochoa made a motion to approve August 7th draft amended minutes and September 7th draft minutes /Seconded by Commissioner Mann.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Ashendorf, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Lucia, Commissioner Mann, Vice Chair Derderian, Chair Ochoa

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: Commissioner Wondercheck

Motion Carried: 6-0

MONTHLY REPORTS

1. ARTS SPECIALIST UPDATE

Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist, presented.

Commissioner Mann asked staff what impact the forthcoming transition of OCMA into the UC Irvine Langson Museum might have on Costa Mesa and how the institution's future direction could influence the local arts landscape.

Commissioner Ashendorf praised the long-term growth of ARTventure, noted a disconnect between the gala venue and the exhibiting artists, and encouraged exploring a more inclusive, creative, and accessible event format and location in the future.

OLD BUSINESS: NONE

NEW BUSINESS:

1. APPROVAL OF UTILITY BOX ART PROGRAM DESIGNS

Laurette Garner, Arts Specialist, presented.

Commissioner Ashendorf shared that the panel prioritized selecting utility box designs that represented diverse areas of the community and included both local and nationally recognized artists and expressed hope the Commission would enjoy the recommendations.

Commissioner Mann praised the thoughtful artist selections and placements, noting the process and presentation felt especially streamlined and well-organized compared to previous years.

Commissioner Ochoa asked whether differences in design formatting would be standardized during the production process.

Public Comment:

Dr Adam Ereth: Executive Director of Someone Cares Orange County, shared that the organization submitted a mural honoring former leaders Merle Hadelberg and Shannon Santos while highlighting the stories and spirit of the community they serve, and expressed hope the piece would be considered as a reflection of their 40 years of service in Costa Mesa.

Commissioners commended public commenter for their submission.

MOTION/SECOND: Chair Ochoa made a motion to approve the 12 utility box art designs/Seconded by Commissioner Ford.

The motion carried by the following roll call vote:

Ayes: Commissioner Ashendorf, Commissioner Ford, Commissioner Lucia, Commissioner Mann, Vice Chair Derderian, Chair Ochoa

Nays: None

Abstained: None

Absent: Commissioner Wondercheck

Motion Carried: 6-0

2. AMERICA'S 250TH ANNIVERSARY

Brian Gruner, Director of Parks and Community Services, presented.

Vice Chair Derderian proposed a community-wide public art initiative to celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary in 2026, suggesting a city-supported but community-driven mural and sculpture competition that partners with local businesses.

Commissioner Ashendorf expressed appreciation for the concept and enthusiasm about engaging local businesses. Noted concerns about the short timeline and overlap with master planning efforts, and suggested a subcommittee model to help develop the idea collaboratively with commissioners, staff, and community members.

Vice Chair Derderian acknowledged timeline limitations, suggested focusing primarily on murals while remaining open to other publicly accessible art forms, and reiterated his willingness to volunteer time and work with staff and partners to help move the concept forward through an appropriate subcommittee structure.

Commissioner Lucia asked clarifying questions about whether the proposed artworks would be temporary and later removed and confirmed that the vision centered on installations located on private property that would still be publicly accessible.

Vice Chair Derderian explained that the proposal would give businesses and community groups flexibility to host publicly accessible artwork with minimal restrictions, preferably visible from the street, and said the duration of installations could vary depending on the participants, emphasizing that his main goal was simply to increase public art throughout the city.

Chair Ochoa asked for clarification on what role the City itself would play in supporting or facilitating the proposed public art initiative.

Vice Chair Derderian responded that City involvement could range from simple staff and commission support to potential Council-approved funding for prizes, but noted the concept could also proceed through private partnerships if needed, emphasizing flexibility and interest in gauging staff and City leadership support.

Chair Ochoa asked staff to share examples of how arts have previously been incorporated into July 3rd celebrations so commissioners could consider building on past efforts.

Ms. Thomas explained that prior July 3rd events had included chalk artists, muralists, and a dance performance, which represented the extent of past arts activations.

Mr. Gruner noted that current arts funding is limited and any additional support would require Council approval, emphasized staff capacity constraints due to the upcoming master plan work, and suggested a small group of commissioners informally develop ideas to bring back rather than forming a formal subcommittee.

Vice Chair Derderian mentioned Travel Costa Mesa has shown informal interest and reiterated that he envisioned minimal staff workload, mainly City endorsement and basic participation guidelines, while raising concerns about the compressed timeline due to winter meeting gaps and other priorities. He added that a partner organization could begin organizing the effort administratively before the Commission formally weighed in, allowing momentum to build while the City later decided how to support or endorse the project.

Commissioner Ashendorf echoed concern about the tight timeline, noting that losing December and January would significantly shorten the window to plan and implement a nine-month public art initiative alongside other major Commission efforts.

Public Comment:

Nancy Warzer-Brady: expressed support for a broad, inclusive arts-centered celebration of the historic milestone that could extend beyond a single day and involve multiple art forms and schools, while suggesting funding be distributed widely rather than through a single competition prize and offered her support to help further develop the idea.

Vice Chair Derderian described the discussion as a broader brainstorming effort to inspire artistic elements for the July 3rd celebration, emphasizing community engagement, public participation, and flexibility, while also floating additional ideas such as collaborative art activities and a poet laureate tie-in.

Chair Ochoa expressed support for celebrating the milestone and for murals in principle, encouraged broader creative freedom and diversity in artistic styles and themes, and suggested a digital “visual time capsule” storytelling project to capture Costa Mesa’s identity for the future.

ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER MEMBER & STAFF COMMENTS

Commissioner Ford praised Chair Ochoa’s work as a visual artist and promoted her upcoming exhibition, encouraging others to attend in support.

Commissioner Ashendorf echoed enthusiasm for expanding public art and highlighted the aspirational idea of bringing “art in every park” throughout the city.

ADJOURNMENT Chair Ochoa adjourned at 7:40 PM.