

Dear Mayor and Council Members,

As Chair of the Yountville Arts Commission it has been my pleasure and privilege to serve our Town.

As a result of Council's vote last week to not reappoint our Performing Arts Chair- I have had many conversations, hours of reflection and I am trying my best to provide leadership to a Commission that is shaken.

I understand that we serve at the will of the Council and must be reappointed to continue our volunteer duties.

What I don't understand is how the Council could gut our Performing Arts Committee.

In the last budget this committee was specifically funded. We would never have requested that funding if we didn't have the leadership to guide it.

Due to the leadership and initiative shown by one of our newest members Performing Arts was monetarily supported by the Council, then shortly afterward the Council did not reappoint the person who is in charge of the committee.

Meanwhile, our events have never been better attended. We have never had so much interest in the Art Walk, Gallery, Literary Events and yes - Performing Arts.

I've been trying hard to figure out what happened. After looking at the voting it seems that some council members simply do not value or are uninformed about our work.

This is hard for me to believe... as Chair to date I have not received any negative feedback or criticism. Our communication is via a formal yearly report, I also assumed that the Council read our minutes, looked at our meetings on YouTube and were aware of the excellent work this commission is doing. Our staff support has been extremely helpful and they are very aware of our goals and how we day-to-day fulfill our mission.

I have read and reread our mission statement and we have not only fulfilled our mandate, but expanded into new programs, diversified the artists involved in regards to age, geography, race and sexual orientation. Yountville is an Arts destination.

The questions asked during the interview process were biased toward someone who has never been on the Commission. The Council had access to the candidates application, references, staff reports as well as the interview questions. I thought your decision-making criteria and the ranking would be based on merit. My assumption was incorrect. It is reasonable to ask candidates the same questions and rank them. When ranking I think most people would say- Candidate #1 is the most qualified (Score of 4 if 4 people are applying), Candidate #2 (score of 3) is second most qualified. The votes are telling.

I'm not opposed to having new members on the Commission. Public service is inclusive and should be welcoming. It's the disconnect that I'm struggling with - I thought that the candidates (new and incumbent) would be judged on merits, work ethic, leadership, commitment, participation and vision for the future. I was wrong - the candidates were not ranked in terms of merit.

Asking people with a collective service record of over 20 years if they have "ever attended a meeting" is inexplicable. Asking an incumbent if they could attend meetings at 5pm on a Monday when they have been doing so for well over a decade makes no sense to me.

Perhaps I should have briefed the Council on the work that each incumbent has done. I'm sorry if that was my mistake.

Robin McKee-Cant started with the Commission during the pandemic. She quickly volunteered for difficult projects in Marketing, Social Media, and Art, Sip and Stroll Committees and was immediately impactful. Then, above and beyond that, she resurrected the Performing Arts Committee.

She is the only professional artist on the Arts Commission. Yes... the only professional artist on the Art Commission. She has expanded the involvement of the residents by welcoming many advisory members to her home-to involve more people in Art, Sip and Stroll and Music in the Park band selections.

Robin has connected us with many new performing artists and even fundraised independently to help with the cost of Music in the Park. She does much more than make a 5pm meeting once a month and it is very disappointing that she didn't receive the full support she deserves.

I'm happy to provide any more information the Council may desire. Going forward my hope is that selection criteria for all candidates is more transparent and inclusive.

Respectfully,

Cynthia Kapjian, MD  
Chair, Yountville Arts Commission