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Local Political Power and the National Scene

THE SETTING

History Making. An informal meeting in Seattle, May 1974. Office of Mayor Wesley Uhlman.

Those Present. John Blaine, Executive Director, Seattle Arts Commission, and Alvin H. Reiss, private consultant, in town for a workshop with the Arts Commission.

Outcome. The first articulation of the importance of the arts in our cities. Preceded by "A Bill of Rights for the Arts in Our Cities" (written by Reiss for a speech he delivered in Cleveland, Ohio, 1973). The "Bill of Rights" was used by the Governor's Conference, county officials, and state legislators.

RESULTS

Three Who Became Involved

WES UHLMAN

Advocate for local governmental support for the arts; introduced resolution "The Quality of Life in our Cities" at the U.S. Conference of Mayors in 1974. The resolution was endorsed by that group and later by the

National League of Cities. As Mayor of Seattle for eight years (1969–77), did much to make use of the arts to revitalize a major city.

FRANK LOGUE, JR.

Chairman, the National League of Cities Task Force on the Arts (1976–79); Mayor of New Haven, 1976–79. Sought to increase community consciousness of the arts and expand the arts audience.

MAYNARD JACKSON

Chairman, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Committee on the Arts when issue paper, “The Taxpayers’ Revolt and the Arts,” was published, 1978. Mayor of Atlanta, 1973–81.

The three mayors, in various national capacities, urged the publication of *Local Government and the Arts* — “a cookbook into which mayors and city leaders can look for recipes for their own cities”¹

“Bill of Rights for the Arts in our Cities”

In June 1974, the U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a first-time resolution on “The Quality of Life in Our Cities,” drawn from the following. The resolution, introduced by Mayor Wes Uhlman of Seattle, adopted points 1, 3, 7, 11, and 14 of Alvin H. Reiss’s “A Bill of Rights for the Arts in Our Cities” as guidelines for city action in the arts:

1. That city governments recognize the arts as an essential service, equal in importance to other essential services, and help make the arts available to all their citizens.
2. That the public at large, through the efforts of concerned fellow citizens and the municipal government, come to recognize that the arts are not an isolated area but part of the overall environment.
3. That the physical appearance of the city, its beauty and its amenities, be a resource to be nurtured and that any attempt to destroy that beauty be challenged.
4. That the arts be assured a firm place within the city’s school system, and that local colleges and universities open up participation in the arts to all their students.
5. That grassroots arts activity at the community and neighborhood level be recognized as a vital contribution which, for many citizens, is a key part of the educational process.
6. That city government include within their long-range budgetary programs new mechanisms for increasing their dollar support of the arts.

7. That every city have a public agency specifically concerned with the arts.
8. That every city have adequate facilities for presenting the arts.
9. That every city recognize the contributions of its artists by making benefits available to them through zoning, taxation, and housing.
10. That city government regularly employ artists in their schools, libraries, parks, and public places.
11. That a percentage of the total cost of every municipal construction budget be set aside for the purchase or commission of works of art.
12. That every corporation of size, doing business with the city, have an identifiable figure whose official area of responsibility shall include the arts and environment.
13. That elected officials and those running for elective office shall view the arts as a key area of concern and shall include a program for the arts in their official platforms.
14. That working together in a true community spirit, the city government, the arts community, and the public at large shall help to effect a new manifesto, "That no American shall be deprived of the opportunity to experience the beauty in life by barrier of circumstance, income, background, remoteness, or race."²

THE PEOPLE: LOGUE, UHLMAN, AND JACKSON

FRANK LOGUE: [at a meeting of ACA, Seattle, 1976, regarding conventions] An invitation to the [ACA] meeting in Seattle in 1976 on Local Government and the Arts brought me, Phyllis Lamphere [Councilwoman, Seattle; President-elect, National League of Cities], Nancy Hanks, Wes Uhlman, and Michael Newton together. Ms. Lamphere, on becoming president of [the League], appointed a Task Force on the Arts and asked me if I would chair it. The Task Force was charged with continuing responsibility of having the arts permeate city government: transportation, housing, human resources, CETA, etc.

It's not what happens *at* conventions [that's important;] rather, the seeds are sown for what happens *afterwards*.

[In 1977, Bette Treadwell, a member of the staff for the National League of Cities, developed a questionnaire circulated to cities, which was the first information bank to have ever been developed. It was used in the publication *Local Government and the Arts*.]

WES UHLMAN: The Seattle experience is transferable. In 1970-71, one out of every five was unemployed during the Boeing recession, and the budget was in trouble; it was a time to look inward.

- a. The artist was important when the spiritual image of the city was low.
- b. Arts councils must change as community focus and needs change. Creative activity is pivotal and there must be care not to be too coopted by bureaucracy, but it is important to be professional, to have bureaucratic skills, and [to] know how to move within the system. The entities (arts councils) have been established; now they must be maintained.
- c. Arts power is increasing; [an] example would be when proposed budget cuts are rescinded due to community pressure.
- d. The citizen advocacy group is a powerful assistant – [it] could work with government officials, and work as a counterforce in dealing with criticism.

MAYNARD JACKSON: In something as complex as a community, sometimes we don't see how one part affects all the others. Take the arts, for example. You probably appreciate how the arts bring people together. And you already know how they open our minds to all kinds of new experiences. But the arts not only create beauty, they create jobs. Businesses prefer to locate in communities with a rich cultural life. Try to imagine your community with no music, no dance, no poetry, no theater, no sculpture or painting. You have to imagine, eventually, industry and jobs gone, too. And, after that, the people. . . .

One of the most exciting developments I have noticed is the initiative taken by arts organizations and individual artists to reuse existing urban structures for cultural activities.³

Frank Logue worked on the home front to increase community consciousness of the arts, to expand the arts' audience, and to take the arts to the places (murals in the welfare department and schools, dances and musical performances in libraries and other public buildings, etc.) where they would be seen.

The potential of arts involvement in the city feeds both images – that of the mayor, and that of the arts commission. Uhlman, when stepping down as two-term mayor of Seattle in 1977, got credit for making a city that was formerly described as a “cultural dustbin of the nation” viewed as “one of the country's livable cities.” In 1967 Seattle had two theater companies. In 1980, there were 12 major companies, four dance companies, and more professional theater companies per capita than anywhere except New York City. In 1980 there were 40 art galleries, compared to only ten in 1967.

MAYNARD JACKSON: Whether the artists realize it or intend it, they help teach us and help prove to us that our cities can come alive again.

The arts represent the vitality and perhaps the very identity of the city itself. The arts are the highest expression of urban life, and the cultural enrichment that is possible in an urban setting is the highest and most eloquent justification of the city itself. The arts and the city are inseparable.

NOTES

1. Wes Uhlman, quoted in Luisa Kreisberg, ed., *Local Government and the Arts* (New York: American Council for the Arts, 1979), acknowledgments.

2. Alvin H. Reiss wrote "Bill of Rights for the Arts in Our Cities" for a speech he delivered in Cleveland in 1973. Used by permission. Final quote is from Alvin H. Reiss, *Culture and Company: A Critical Study of an Improbable Alliance* (New York: Twayne, 1972). *Culture and Company* had already distinguished Reiss as a visionary for methodologies for support from the private sector.

3. There was no personal discussion with Maynard Jackson. The Mayor's office submitted previously written statements in response to the query, April 29, 1980.