

## Norwich approves second \$500,000 grant for arts programs



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By **Claire Bessette**

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Norwich — After initial partisan debate, the City Council unanimously approved a \$500,000 second-year grant for arts programs and adopted a cultural calendar with dozens of important dates for different nationalities, ethnic heritages and religious faiths.

At its meeting Tuesday, the council's majority four Democrats — prior to the late-night resignation of Democratic state Rep. Derell Wilson — proposed allocating \$500,000 of the city's remaining \$2 million in American Rescue Plan Act money to the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition for Norwich-based arts programs.

Proponents on the council and speakers during public comment touted the successes of last year's \$500,000 grant to the coalition, which funded programs in schools, at arts and cultural locations and in the community.

Wilson called the arts grant "impactful funding" and said the city is looking to support the arts beyond their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Council Republicans said they did not oppose arts funding, but Alderman Grant Neuendorf attempted to postpone the vote until Feb. 6. Neuendorf said there may be other priorities for the remaining ARPA dollars.

City Manager John Salomone supported a delay. He will present a detailed plan at the Jan. 17 council meeting on remaining ARPA funds, unspent amounts reclaimed from first-year recipients, as well as repayments from allocations made as loans to businesses. Salomone said providing \$500,000 to the cultural coalition would be 25% of the remaining funds

Democratic Council President Pro Tempore Joseph DeLucia said the city received \$28.4 million over the two years of ARPA funding, so the \$1 million combined total for the arts actually is 3.5% of the city's total federal grant.

"I don't understand what we are arguing about," DeLucia said.

Neuendorf's request to delay action failed in a 4-3 vote, with the four Democrats against postponing action and the three Republicans in favor. The council then unanimously approved the \$500,000 to the cultural coalition.

### Cultural calendar

The adoption of a cultural calendar followed a similar path. The Board of Education was the first to adopt a cultural calendar in January 2021, listing dozens of significant dates for various cultures and nationalities. Lead proponent, Democratic Alderman Swaranjit Singh Khalsa, was a school board member at the time.

Khalsa provided a colorful printout of the proposed city cultural calendar containing 64 dates to council members Tuesday, along with the brief summaries of the meaning of each date. He said the calendar would evolve as residents propose new dates and artwork.

Khalsa offered to assist the city with the cultural calendar, which will be hosted on the city's website. He said the calendar will need to be updated each year, as dates for some events change.

Republican Alderwoman Stacy Gould attempted to amend the resolution to adopt the calendar by just providing a link on the city website to the Board of Education’s cultural calendar. But Khalsa objected, saying many more people go to the city website, whether to pay taxes, seek permits or to contact city departments, and a city calendar would get a wider audience.

Khalsa said the city is trying to attract more diversity on city boards and commissions, and the cultural calendar could help with that effort.

“Diversity is a fact, but inclusion is an act,” Khalsa said. “And this is what we are doing through cultural calendar. We are acting on inclusion on different people who live in our community.”

Gould’s amendment was defeated 4-3 along party lines, and the council then voted 7-0 to approve creating a city cultural calendar.

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**Scott Matson** January 8, 2023 at 19:28

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We all know that what Norwich needs is more “arts” programs. Government action at its best.

**KEN KEELEY** January 8, 2023 at 18:52

[Report](#)

Where exactly is the \$1 million “Arts Fund” going? So far I have read about \$100,000 of the arts fund being awarded in a “Part One” list of awardees; and \$150,000 now in the works, but nothing awarded, called “Part Two”. That leaves \$750,000 remaining. As far as the quote in the story...“Proponents on the council and speakers during public comment touted the successes of last year’s \$500,000 grant to the coalition, which funded programs in schools, at arts and cultural locations and in the community.”...Only \$100,000 of this \$500,000 has been awarded, and most of the projects have not been completed. This is way to vague for Norwich taxpayers. Hopefully the City Manager will line-item the \$1 million “Arts Fund” part of the Norwich taxpayer’s American Rescue Plan money.

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