



City Hall
601 4th Avenue E.
Olympia, WA 98501
360-753-8244

City Council

Approval of Poet Laureate for 2021-2023

Agenda Date: 4/13/2021
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Title

Approval of Poet Laureate for 2021-2023

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

The Arts Commission recommends approval of the proposed 2021-2023 Poet Laureate.

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve the proposed 2021-2023 Poet Laureate.

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve the 2021-2023 Poet Laureate.

Staff Contact:

Stephanie Johnson, Arts Program Manager, Parks, Arts & Recreation, 360.709.2678

Presenter(s):

Stephanie Johnson, Arts Commission Staff Liaison

Frederick Dobler, Chair, Olympia Arts Commission

Background and Analysis:

Every two years the City of Olympia selects a Poet Laureate to engage our entire community in the literary arts. Olympia's take on the position of Poet Laureate is less an honorary title and more about service over status. Duties include:

- Promoting poetry as an art form,
- Expanding access to the literary arts,
- Encouraging poetry as a community voice that contributes to a sense of place

Olympia's next Poet Laureate will be called specifically to utilize the power of poetry and language to contribute insight, foster understanding and support healing around issues of equity and inclusion in our community.

Olympia's previous Poet Laureate, Sady Sparks, completed her two-year appointment at the end of

December 2020. Challenges in recruitment, due to COVID and otherwise, have delayed this recommendation.

The Jury met on March 25, 2021, to deliberate on the seven applications received for Poet Laureate. Applications included a resume, samples of poetry, a video reading and a program proposal. Jurors included:

- Kellie Braseth, Director of Strategic Communications, City of Olympia
- Frederick Dobler, Chair, Olympia Arts Commission
- Sady Sparks, Olympia Poet Laureate 2019-2020
- Erin Tail, Poet
- Thresea "Mama T" Yost, Curator of Futures Rising exhibition at SPSCC Leonor R. Fuller Gallery

After deliberation, four applications were moved forward for interviews on April 1, 2021. Following interviews, the jury recommended Ashly McBunch for Poet Laureate, finding them to hold a strong poetic arts side in addition to clear transferrable skills needed to manage the complexities of the Poet Laureate position.

The jury appreciates McBunch's strong presence, balance of skills, well-considered proposal, and ability to involve community members who have not formerly been engaged with poetry. The poet intends to encourage the voices of others through the Poet Laureate platform: "*The audience would be inclusive and diverse to show the beauty behind groups not often seen and voices not often heard. It will be about promoting and expansion and provide a safe space for everyone to find peace through expression.*"

The Arts Commission reviewed the recommendation of the jury on April 8, 2021 and moved unanimously to recommend Ashly McBunch to Council for approval. As this recommendation comes so late in the first quarter of 2021, if approved, the Arts Commission proposes the appointment extend from July 1, 2021- June 30, 2023 with any work the Poet Laureate proposes before the start of term be included in their Scope of Work and prorated accordingly.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The Poet Laureate engages the community in programming to promote and teach the art of poetry.

Options:

1. Approve the recommendation for the 2021-2023 Poet Laureate as recommended by the Arts Commission.
2. Do not approve the recommendation for the 2021-2023 Poet Laureate.
3. Provide an alternate direction to the Arts Commission.

Financial Impact:

Honoraria for the Poet Laureate is \$1,500 per year, for a two-year appointment - from the Municipal Art Fund. As this recommendation comes so late in the first quarter of 2021, if approved, the Arts Commission requests the ability to prorate any agreed-to tasks completed between contract signing and the start of term on July 1, 2021.

Attachments:

Ashly McBunch Application

Ashly McBunch Reading