

DATE: June 1, 2023

Dear Acting Director Thaikkendiyil and Ethics Commissioners:

As the Director of Grants for the Arts (GFTA), I have the pleasure of working with Joanne Lee, Deputy Director of Programs at the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC). Ms. Lee has shown true dedication in supporting arts organizations and individual artists by developing innovative and responsive programs during and after the pandemic. While I will miss working with Ms. Lee, I wholeheartedly support her waiver request to work for the Chinatown Media and Arts Collaborative (CMAC). I can attest that Ms. Lee did not show any favoritism towards CMAC when working on the Storm Relief grant program this spring. I have always found Ms. Lee to be professional and honest in her conduct.

As the two primary City departments overseeing arts and culture programs, our two departments often collaborate on programmatic initiatives and share best practices. Proposition E, passed by San Francisco voters in 2018, dedicated a percentage of the hotel tax revenue to support arts and culture programs. One of the funding programs created by Proposition E is the Arts Impact Endowment to address emerging needs of the arts community. As required by Proposition E, the Arts Impact Endowment is jointly administered by SFAC and GFTA. The Storm Relief grants, an effort to alleviate the financial burden from storm damage to properties used for arts and culture, was one of the initiatives jointly administered by SFAC and GFTA. Our aim was to get grant funds out as quickly as possible.

Ms. Lee, another SFAC staff member, and I individually reviewed approximately 50 applications received to determine whether each applicant met eligibility requirements. We had one meeting to discuss the half dozen or so applicants whose eligibility we were unsure about. None of us had any doubts about CMAC's eligibility; all three of us had individually determined they were eligible.

Nor was there any subjectivity in deciding how much eligible applicants received. Because funding requests exceeded the funds available, we divided the funds across the eligible applicants. Most organizations received grants of \$3,750, which was the maximum amount, unless they had asked for a lesser amount. Ms. Lee and the SFAC staff had no involvement in administering the grant funds. GFTA worked with an arts intermediary organization, Intersection for the Arts, to ensure that the funds were disbursed to each grantee.

I ask that you support Ms. Lee's waiver request to work for a nonprofit arts and culture organization who is a City contractor. Ms. Lee's expertise in arts administration, real estate development and love for Chinatown is exactly what CMAC needs at this early stage of its development. With Ms. Lee at the head of CMAC, I am sure that it will prosper.

Thank you for your consideration.

Vallie Brown, Director
San Francisco Grants for the Arts

From: [Arvanitidis, Laurel \(ECN\)](#)
To: [Ethics Commission, \(ETH\)](#); [Thaikkendiyil, Gayathri \(ETH\)](#)
Cc: [Canning, Michael \(ETH\)](#)
Subject: Letter of Support - Joanne Lee Waiver Request
Date: Friday, June 2, 2023 11:30:54 AM

Dear Acting Director Thaikkendiyil and Ethics Commissioners,

I am writing in support of Joanne Lee's waiver request to work for the Chinatown Media and Arts Collaborative (CMAC) after leaving her position at the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC). I am the Director of Business Development at the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) and have overseen the Nonprofit Sustainability Initiative (NSI) program since its inception in 2017. I know Joanne well and have always been impressed by her knowledge of real estate and community development. When Joanne first told me that she had been offered the position of Executive Director of Edge on the Square (a project of CMAC), I was very excited for her and for CMAC! She is the perfect person to move Edge on the Square to the next phase of development and this position is wholly aligned with Joanne's long-term career directory.

The NSI program provides funding to community organizations, including neighborhood arts and cultural institutions, to protect and expand critical services for residents. The program provides grant funding through an intermediary (Community Vision) for lease stabilization and space acquisition to enable organizations to continue to stay rooted in their communities and contribute to the long-term cultural and economic vitality of San Francisco. The NSI program is led by OEWD, with staff from the SFAC and the Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development serving in an advisory capacity and participating on the grant review panels. OEWD also works with staff from other city departments to ensure that we have a full depth and breadth of the city's knowledge and expertise in our program development and methods for reviewing grant applications to ensure that we are applying all best practices in grantmaking. Due to SFAC leadership transitions and Joanne's past experience in real estate and nonprofit administration, she became the NSI delegate soon after she started working at SFAC.

I recall the grant round in early 2022 when the Chinatown Media and Arts Collaborative (CMAC) was awarded funds. There were only three applications in that round, and all three organizations received funding. The projects were reviewed by 6 panelists of both city and noncity staff. All six panelists scored the three applicants independently, and then we met to discuss each applicant's strengths, any concerns about the applicant's ability to successfully close a real estate transaction and the impact the grant and real estate transaction would have on the organizations long-term sustainability. Joanne's assessment of CMAC was consistent with the other panelists, the panel's scores were generally aligned, and all panelists unanimously agreed to award grants to all three applicants. CMAC's application would have been successful regardless of Joanne's scoring.

The decision to award the grant was made almost 15 months ago in March 2022, but CMAC has not yet proceeded to contract. I have been working closely with Community Vision (the intermediary) to close this grant with CMAC, which we expect to happen in the coming weeks. Neither Joanne nor any SFAC staff has been involved with the discussions with CMAC and Community Vision about meeting the final conditions required to successfully execute this sub-grant.

I fear if the Ethics Commission were to deny this waiver it could have broader impacts on the City's granting processes and would deter existing staff from supporting sister departments in RFP reviews. Our ability to successfully bring in a diverse array of expertise and opinions from other departments and the community in reviewing grant applications is key to ensuring the city has a fair and just granting process. To hinder someone's career advancement as a result of their supporting another city agency by serving on an RFP panel would have the potential to lead to worse outcomes for the city's grant making.

I urge you to grant the waiver so Joanne may work for CMAC and continue to serve the City's broader goals by creating a vibrant cultural space and economic catalyst for the Chinatown community.

Thank you,

Laurel Arvanitidis

Laurel Arvanitidis
Director of Business Development
Office of Economic and Workforce Development