



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and City Council

THRU: Christopher Shorter, Assistant City Manager

FROM: Kimberly McNeeley, CPRP, Director, Austin Parks and Recreation Department

DATE: February 27, 2020

SUBJECT: Ordinance No. 20190822-066 – Fee Waiver Austin Veteran Arts Festival

Following the passage of Ordinance No. 20190822-066 on August 22, 2019, Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) staff began working with Glenn Towery, founder of the Veterans Suicide Prevention Channel, to schedule Austin Veteran Arts Festival (AVAFEST) events at multiple Parks and Recreation facilities. The Festival opened on October 12, 2019 and closed on November 16, 2019. The resolution directed PAR to assist in publicizing the event through the City of Austin Communications and Public Information Office (CPIO); assist in post-event evaluation and to make recommendations for future space needs based on usage and attendance.

PAR partnered with AVAFEST organizers to produce eight exhibitions with opening receptions, a dance workshop and 16 nights of performance of four different productions during the festival period. The City of Austin contributed \$29,804 of in-kind performance/exhibit space. Space was utilized at the Dougherty Arts Center, the Emma. S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center, the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center, the Asian American Resource Center, the Susannah Dickinson Museum and the Old Bakery and Emporium. PAR, in cooperation with CPIO, publicized festival events through internal media channels, on the Department's website, through social media outlets, and the City's media channels.

Attendance, ranging from 8-24 attendees, was less than expected at the eight art exhibition opening receptions. It is estimated that about half of the attendees were exhibiting artists or AVAFEST staff. Opening receptions at Cultural Center performance events ranged from 75 to 150 attendees. Feedback from attendees was very positive about the quality of and experience at the events and exhibitions.

Attendance for performances fared better with an average attendance of 56 per performance night. Participation in the dance workshop was 10 (all veterans) with 57 attending the performance. Two performances at a City facility were canceled with four event cancellations overall during AVAFEST. Veteran participation in all arts events was good with a total of 260 veterans participating as artists or performers across Austin; approximately 48 veterans participated as artists at City facilities.

AVAFEST organizer, Glen Towery, reports that the event did not meet its fundraising goals, raising only \$13,317 for 58 events. Use of spaces was not fully maximized due to lack of attendance. For this reason, PAR staff and AVAFEST organizers both recommend that the festival continue in 2021, taking 2020 off to raise funds and re-organize.

Should you have any questions, please contact my office at (512) 974-6717.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager