



Arts, Culture & County Governance

In November 2009, Cuyahoga County voters approved Issue 6, which in 2011 will replace the county's current three-commissioner form of government to that of an elected County Executive and County Council. A transition team is engaging citizens in the process through a number of working groups and working to develop strategies for effectively and efficiently moving the county to this new form of government.

On Friday, January 15, the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (CPAC) convened an Arts and Culture Roundtable in order to give greater Cleveland's arts and culture sector a better understanding of this process and how arts and culture can play a part in both the transition process and within the new form of county government.

Panelists included Mayor Bruce Akers of the City of Pepper Pike; Judy Rawson, former mayor of the City of Shaker Heights; and Galen Schuerlein, Vice President of Burges and Burges Strategies. The panel discussion was moderated by CPAC Vice President Megan Van Voorhis.

The following are key points from that discussion.

What the Panelists Shared:

- Approval of Issue 6 reconfigures Cuyahoga County government significantly. The ballot initiative will result in direct election of a county executive and that of an eleven-member county council, which creates separations of power and a system of checks and balances between executive and legislative powers of the government. It also, for the first time, establishes a county charter.
- Economic development is a key component of the county reform effort. The ballot initiative called for establishment of a nine-member Economic Development Commission, which will be charged with creating an economic development plan and regularly revisiting and refining it.
- While there is a heightened focus on economic development, county government will continue to have a strong focus on other services, including health and human services. Attention to equity – in hiring, in council representation and in distribution of county funds – will play a greater role in county affairs. The map of county districts was set up specifically to reflect this concern for equity, with ample representation from both the city of Cleveland and suburbs. Racial equity has also been a major theme of the reform group New Cuyahoga Now, which intends to serve as a citizen watchdog over the new county government.

- The transition team, chaired by County Administrator Jim McCafferty, is responsible for ensuring a smooth transition to the new county structure. The group intends to establish eleven working groups to address virtually every facet of county governance before new public officials take office in January 2011.
- The transition team is working to engage citizens in the process in a meaningful way; inspire new ideas for addressing challenges within the community; leverage northeast Ohio's strengths more effectively; streamline county processes, reducing patronage and overhead in favor of more investment in provision of services; persist through the process; and ultimately, succeed in transforming county government.
- As of the Roundtable, 28 candidates had pulled petitions to run for the new county elected positions – 3 for the position of county executive and 25 for county council.
- Individuals can learn more about the transition process, see a map of the new county council districts and sign up to volunteer in the effort at <http://charter.cuyahogacounty.us>.
- New Cuyahoga Now, the group that originally advocated for passage of Issue 6, intends to remain in existence and to serve as a watchdog to ensure that changes in county government reflect the intent of the citizenry and of the original ballot initiative. To learn more about this effort, visit <http://newcuyahoga.com>.
- Members of the arts and culture sector should consider voting early through absentee ballots; approximately 40% of the electorate now does so. By requesting an absentee ballot, voters can review the ballot, research candidates and issues and take time to make a more informed decision.

What the Audience Suggested:

- The arts and culture sector should advocate for inclusion in the workings of the Economic Development Commission, including potentially seeking the ninth seat on the Commission (the other eight members of the council will select the ninth member).
- The arts and culture should work to ensure that when Cuyahoga County government constructs new buildings, artists are included in the earliest stages of design.
- The sector should also consider advocating for a staff position or agency within county government that would focus on arts and culture.
- The arts and culture sector should hold candidate forums in order to learn more about each candidate for county government's platform, and specifically, about their arts and culture plank.
- The arts and culture sector should consider not only speaking with candidates but also with running candidates from the arts and culture field.

- The Ohio Cultural Data Project will help to make the case to the new council and the new executive just how critical the arts and culture sector is to the local economy. The online portal will capture aggregate information (such as number of employees, payroll, etc.) about the sector, increasing the ability to communicate compelling information to the council. All local arts and culture organizations should consider participating.
- The arts and culture sector should advocate for heightened transparency and access, both within government and within the sector itself. Web tools like live feeds now make it possible for anyone to access such information anywhere, when such tools are made available.
- The Arts and Culture Roundtable should serve as a conduit for information about the status of the government transition, as well as for upcoming elections. Once candidates are announced, they should be invited to present their platforms at Roundtable events.
- Issue 18, which established 10 years of dedicated public funding for Cuyahoga County's arts and culture sector, will expire in 2017. The arts and culture sector should be mindful that the county government plays a key role in processes related to this public funding, both by appointing the board members of Cuyahoga Arts and Culture and by deciding if and when a reauthorization levy would be placed on the ballot.

For Additional Information:

- For more information about the Cuyahoga County Charter Transition Advisory Group, and to volunteer in the transition process, please visit <http://charter.cuyahogacounty.us>.
- For more information about New Cuyahoga Now, please visit <http://newcuyahoga.com>.
- For a list of candidates for county government, please visit <http://boe.cuyahogacounty.us/en-US/candidates.aspx>.
- To obtain more information about running for county office, please visit <http://boe.cuyahogacounty.us/en-US/2010CountyExecutiveCountyCouncil.aspx>.
- For more information about the Ohio Cultural Data Project, please visit www.ohculturaldata.org.
- For more information about CPAC and the Arts and Culture Roundtable, please visit us at www.cpacbiz.org.