

Session 14-03 a Special Meeting of the Public Arts Committee was called to order on February 27, 2014 at 5:30 pm by Vice Chair Michele Miller at the Homer City Hall Cowles Council Chambers located at 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.

PRESENT: COMMITTEE MEMBERS MILLER, PERSONS AND FELLOWS

ABSENT: COMMITTEE MEMBER NEWBY AND APLIN (EXCUSED)

STAFF: RENEE KRAUSE, CMC, DEPUTY CITY CLERK

### **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Vice Chair Miller requested a motion to approve the agenda.

FELLOWS/PERSON – MOVED TO APPROVE THE AGENDA.

There was no discussion.

The agenda was approved by consensus of the Committee.

### **APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES** *(Minutes are approved during regular or special meetings only)*

A. Meeting Minutes for Regular Meeting of February 13, 2014

Vice Chair Miller requested a motion to approve the minutes.

PERSON/FELLOWS – MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 13, 2014 AS PRESENTED.

Vice Chair Miller cited two amendments.

PERSON/FELLOWS MOVED TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 13<sup>TH</sup> WITH THE CHANGES.

There was no further discussion.

The minutes were approved as corrected by consensus of the Committee.

### **PUBLIC HEARING**

A. Memorandum Re: Recommendation to City Council on the Acceptance and Placement of a Donation of Artwork

Vice Chair Miller opened the public hearing on the request for acceptance of the donation if a bronze bust of Brother Asaiah bates to be placed in WKFL Park located at heath Street and Pioneer Avenue as a permanent memorial. Vice Chair Miller announced the floor was open for public testimony or comment and requested persons to come forward, sign in please state their name for the record and reminded the audience they will have three minutes.

Mr. Troy Jones, he has been a resident for several years, he is very opposed of the statue being put up actually anywhere in the city. He did not believe that it would be Brother Bates wishes for that. Mr. Jones had several other reasons against putting the statue up. He stated that there is already a picture in Chambers and he did not agree with that either. He felt it was sufficient. He did not believe a statue represented all of the residents of the city of Homer at all so he is very opposed.

Mr. Ray Kranich, lifelong resident of Homer been here couple days longer than the previous speaker, he falls in 100% behind the opinion piece in the Tribune by Brad Hughes. In fact he does not believe it is the place for personal memorials on city property anywhere in the city and he believed it was taken care of with the issue of the Jean Keene Memorial. He believed it would open a big bag of worms if they did place a memorial on city property. Mr. Kranich proceeded to list a number of people that would be deserving of a memorial such as Hazel Heath, Carl Schulman, Lillian Walli, Mae Harrington, Fred Anderson, his parents worked toward getting the roads and dock and turning the trails into roads. If you start putting memorials on city property you won't have room for a bench because someone will want to remove the bench to put in a memorial. He further believed the Brother would be turning in his grave and he did not even want the park named after him. He was a very humble man. He does not think it is right to out a personal memorial on public property. The Seafarers Memorials covers a whole variety of persons not just one.

Paul Hueper, resident of Homer, agreed with Ray and Troy and he is going to request that the committee do a bit more investigative reporting; Mr. Hueper noted all the articles that have been written to the local papers including Bill Choate's piece. He said there are some really serious things here to consider. There is a direct connection between WKFL and Asaiah. You cannot separate the two. They are inseparable. There are some inconvenient truths and if you visit the Charles Manson website, it states that Charles Manson spent time with WKFL. Mr. Hueper asked if the city as a community wanted to be identified with Charles Manson and the mass murders that took place. You have to look at the things that took place at the WKFL here and he referenced portions of Mr. Choate's letter that referred to people in the commune being put into a prison, into a root cellar whenever they disobeyed the follower, that is abduction, that is taking somebody hostage and breaking federal rules. Mr. Hueper stated he is relating these incidents to challenge this committee, the newspapers and the community to really take a serious look and do some investigative reporting and find out what the roots of the WKFL group and what they are connected to Asaiah Bates and he never knew Asaiah Bates personally but to his knowledge there was never any renouncing of what took place at WKFL and in fact was the person who sold the property to the city and wanted the name WKFL for the park. You can't separate the two. Mr. Hueper continued by stating he was just throwing this out there, there are a lot of people hurt and if you read Bill Choate's letter there was child molestation taking place, murders taking place and there is some really, really bad history and we have to look at our heritage as a city and decide, do we want to be associated with that, he personally does not. He'll have grandchildren one day and he doesn't want to have to drive his grandchildren by the park there and explain WKFL and what it is all about. This is not the wisdom, faith, knowledge and love he wants to be involved with; and asks the city and the Council to seriously think about. Do some investigative reporting; these are not his facts, this is information that he is finding on other websites; these are things in history, you can go to [charliemanson.com](http://charliemanson.com) and find WKFL. You remember what Manson did. Let's really get to the root of this and he agrees with the others that he doesn't want to see a bust of anyone in the Chambers, in a park, at the museum, at the Library, we really should look at the history that has come up about WKFL and Asaiah Bates and disassociate ourselves from that.

Arlene Ronda, felt that it would be really remiss not to put her two cents worth in, so in order to do that she will refer to Brad Hughes point of view article; to her he laid it out and made a whole lot of sense but for her brief testimony here, she believed this is really a Rorschach test (inkblot test) and that we see into what we see into it and Brother Asaiah is just kind of the focal point; but she does agree with Brad when he says Brother's sentiments of "walk away from my grave and don't look back" had less to do with humility, and Ms. Ronda stated that here was the key for her, than the belief in the transitory experience of the individual life and the universal presence of the divine in all not just the special few" and she believed that is why Brother Asaiah was so respected by so many people in this community. Because he did live that, and he stood for being kind to one another and to listen to one another and that was the bottom line for her, statues don't really do it for her and she agreed with what Brad Hughes said. She believed that they honored Asaiah for that reason, his humanity and his insistence that he sees the good in other people and you respect each other, but statues don't do it for her she thinks in a more abstract, what he stands for is more important. She stated that if you haven't read Brad Hughes article you should.

Mike Kennedy, city resident, like Arlene wanted to put in his two cents worth and agreed that if you haven't read Brad's article you should, Mr. Kennedy stated he made a lot of good points. Mr. Kennedy is opposed to the bust and he has testified a couple of times before about it. Mr. Kennedy stated he was a friend of Asaiah's who was a complicated individual in a lot of ways, he was a warrior as a bombardier in WWII, he shed that warrior status and became a peacemaker and he was one of those entrusted with Asaiah's burial. Mr. Kennedy agreed with the sentiment. Mr. Kennedy further agreed that he would not be surprised that Asaiah sat for the bust. Asaiah would do anything to get along with people. Mr. Kennedy added that Asaiah had told him to not believe anything he said find out for yourself, think for yourself, don't listen to him. About the association with Charlie Manson, he has done some research and joined a group on yahoo and he has purchased a book by one of the Manson group members, not one that murdered those people but he wrote that Charlie went to the Fountain in 1969 after Venta was killed. He stated that the Manson group was cultivating the Fountain to use them, there were some similarities between the groups, the number 144,000 comes up between the two groups. Some of this stuff comes up in different Christianity related such as the different robes in the Episcopal Church. He also believes that the city erred in accepting this property and violates the separation of Church and state. He thinks that bringing all this up may stir up some trouble. He further noted it's not what Asaiah wanted but what we want. He reiterated the issue of separation of church and state...

Linda Jones, agreed with all the previous testimonials, she has submitted a letter to the papers so people know where she stands and regardless WKFL was a religious organization and Asaiah Bates stated in 1988 when he sold the property to the city that he still identified with Krishna Venta and he wanted a sign for Krishna Venta himself but City Council said they couldn't do that, and that is why they reduced it to the WKFL sign, the tree that Asaiah wanted he called the Tree of Life and that the rock that he had placed there represented the alter. She stated they are all religious terms for that reason she agreed with Mr. Kennedy that the park should not have been in it at the time. She also wanted to reinforce that she disagreed with having the statue placed anywhere on public property.

Bill Choate, he wrote an opinion piece for the paper, he has had dozens and dozens of calls and emails from people who think the way he does that it is not the place for a bust, and the Charlie Manson connection is kind of funny but he does know that Asaiah had Charlie Manson's hat and he gave it to a friend of his so he now has the bragging rights to having Charlie's hat so he does know that there is some cross pollination between the two groups.

Ken Landfield, there are a couple of things that he would like to address, if there were a person deserving of a statue Asaiah should be on the short list and if a statue was to be built then he believed Leo should be the person to do it. Mr. Landfield said if it was his \$20,000 he would fund a lecture series or a scholarship but it's not his money. He firmly believed Asaiah would not want a statue of himself on the rock. The connection with WKFL while real Mr. Landfield did not believe was relevant. He did have an association with the US Army he was a veteran. Mr. Landfield reported trying to locate the information on how the park was named because he recalls Asaiah not wanting his name on the park. He believed somewhere else for the statue at the hospital, the museum, the library or even at the old barefooters property would be appropriate and a good place for it. The reason he stirred this up was to have this conversation, unlike the public restrooms, this conversation was held and now there is unhappy people on all levels because the conversation was held whether it's because it wasn't or we did want to discuss it.

Vice Chair Miller closed the public testimony in absence of further public testimony.

Vice Chair Miller requested the recommendations to be read into the record. Committee member Person read the recommendations

FIRST RECOMMENDATION IS TO RECOMMEND COUNCIL ACCEPT THE DONATION OF THE BRONZE BUST OF BROTHER ASAIAH BATES BY JOHN NAZARIAN CREATED BY ARTIST LEO VAITI TO BE INCLUDED IN THE MUNICIPAL ART COLLECTION.

SECOND RECOMMENDATION IS MOVED TO RECOMMEND COUNCIL PLACE THE BUST OF BROTHER ASAIAH BATES IN THE FOLLOWING LOCATION.....

Vice Chair Miller explained that the task was to decide what recommendation to make to City Council tonight.

Ms. Person responded that they just need to make one recommendation; Council will make the final decision. She believed the testimony here has been pretty unanimous against the acceptance and placement in WKFL Park. However, they do have letters from two former city Mayors in support as well as other letters in support of acceptance and placement. Ms. Person commented that the naming of the park, WKFL, may be more problematic than the statue with religious ties.

Ms. Fellows commented that she did not see a recommendation not to accept.

Ms. Krause explained that she provided the three recommendations for clarification for the committee but that the committee could choose to make whatever recommendation they deemed appropriate.

Comments from each committee member Ms. Miller stated that her first reaction to recommend not accepting it but then she is not sure. Ms. Fellows said she did not want to accept it at all. Ms. Person stated that she would like to accept the statue but have another location determined by Council. She went onto explain that to be offered such a piece of artwork for the collection is an honor and she would love to see other statues of the Hazel Heath and those others.

PERSON/ - MOVED TO RECOMMEND COUNCIL ACCEPT THE DONATION OF THE BRONZE BUST OF BROTHER ASIAH BATES BY JOHN NAZARIAN CREATED BY ARTIST LEO VAIT TO BE INCLUDED IN THE MUNICIPAL ART COLLECTION.

Motion died for lack of a second.

FELLOWS/PERSON - MOVED NOT TO ACCEPT THE BUST OF BROTHER ASIAH INTO THE MUNICIPAL ART COLLECTION.

There was a brief discussion on the generosity of the donation even though the community was not in favor.

VOTE. NO. PERSON.

VOTE. YES. FELLOWS. MILLER.

Motion carried.

There was a brief discussion making a motion on accepting the statue and placement in another public venue. It was noted that there was testimony that overwhelming stating the Public did not want the statue even if placed in another location. Vice Chair Miller reiterated the motion that was just made and passed by the committee.

The Audience requested clarification on the motion that was passed. Vice Chair Miller stated that the motion made and seconded was to recommend City Council not accept the donation in the Municipal Art Collection.

### **COMMENTS OF THE AUDIENCE**

Ken Landfield stated that that was different but good job and commented that they could have accepted it and then found a placement for at a later date...there it is, it's done.

Troy Jones I think you have done a good thing thank you.

Paul Hueper, commented, "Glad to see the arts becoming central to Homer and we do want to accept art that exemplifies the community and thank you for not accepting art that represents what this community is really all about.

Andy Haas, Brother Asaiah was a friend. Mr. Haas thought he was a glorious man. When Mr. Haas knew Brother Asaiah, Asaiah attended almost every church in town, he attended them joyfully. Mr. Haas objects to him being tied to WKFL, or whatever you call the Barefooters, he was a joyous and righteous man. Mr. Haas understands the difficulty and he would have accepted to expand the artwork in this town.

Mike Kennedy thanked the committee for hearing the public testimony, he believed it was difficult and at some time contentious. He believed that the donation was contingent on placement in the park and he did not believe you could separate that unless things had changed. He hopes everyone can move on from the whole controversy. Mr. Kennedy recalled Asaiah thought the world of Krishna Venta until he died. He was a personal friend of Asaiah until the end and could testify to that. That being said, he was a wonderful man he treated everybody pretty well, he don't think this whole deal of a bust was something that he would have wanted and apparently the town don't want either. He's dead and if he has not passed on well we are still on this plain and need to go on so Thank you.

Linda Jones thanked the committee for making the choice that they made. She advocated for the future that any donations of artwork, especially from people who don't live here, to be brought before the public for comment.

#### **COMMENTS OF THE CITY STAFF**

Ms. Krause commented that the Committee did an auspicious job, thank you.

#### **COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE**

Ms. Person commented that maybe at the next public hearing they can be more organized and thanked the public for attending.

Ms. Fellows thanked the audience for coming also.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Committee Vice Chair Miller adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m. **A WORKSESSION IS SCHEDULED FOR 4:00 P.M. PRIOR TO THE NEXT REGULAR MEETING WHICH IS SCHEDULED FOR MAY 8, 2014 AT 5:00 P.M. at City Hall Conference Room Upstairs, 491 E. Pioneer Avenue, Homer, Alaska.**

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Renee Krause, CMC, Deputy City Clerk I

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_