**Commission on Nightlife and Culture Meeting Minutes**

**April 7, 2022**

* **Chairman Vinoda Basnayake Report**
* My name is Vinoda Basnayake. I’m the Chairman on the Commission of Nightlife and Culture and I’m going to call this meeting to order. First, we need to do roll call. Then the first order of business is to approve the last meetings minutes. In the interest of time, I don’t believe we need to read over them as everyone has a copy.
* **Review of Last Meeting’s Minutes**

Commissioner Theresa Belpulsi reviewed last meeting minutes. All commissioners approved.

* **Meeting Commencement**

Chairman Basnayake of the Commission welcomed all the commissioners.

**Chairman Basnayake:**

My name is Vinoda Basnayake, I’m the Chairman of the Commission of Nightlife and Culture. And the first order of business is to call a roll call.

* **Roll Call**

Keith Slade, DCRA

Tiffany Thacker, DMPED

Theresa Belpulsi, Destination DC

Jeffrey Scott, Commission on Arts and Humanities

Vinoda Basnayake, Chair/Business Owner

Directo Solana Vander Nat, MONC

Ris Lacoste, Owner, Ris

Cristina Amoruso, DSLBD

Ian Callendar, Suite Nation

Sarah Fashbaugh, ABRA

Jennifer McCahill, MONC

Keith Sellers, WDCEP

**\*no public attendance**

**V.B.**: We have a quorum to proceed. Good evening, welcome to the Commission meeting. As we know, the whole point of this Commission is to advise the Mayor and the city, and MONC on ways to improve laws and policies that impact nightlife, and establishments and residents all the various stakeholders in the nightlife and economy community

As with everything else, we’re in a period of transition and recovery. I think it’s been a very long time and our priorities have shifted a lot in the last year We very much value the ideals each of the Commissioners input because the whole idea and the way it was structured to represent the many different stakeholders/stakeholder communities. I hope on the one hand you’ve come to the Commission with some of the priorities that are important to the stakeholders you represent but also so that you can take this back to your stakeholders, what we discuss in the meeting and how we plan on being a service to them and advising the Mayor and the Council and the Mayor’s Office of Nightlife and Culture on things that are relevant to them. So, we’re looking forward to everyone’s comments and questions and engagement.

So obviously there are some new faces and the biggest one everyone knows is we have a new Executive Director, Solana. So, with that I’m going to pass the mic to Solana.

* **Mayor’s Office of Nightlife and Culture Update, Director, Solana Vander Nat**

Hello, my name is Solana Vander Nat and I’m the new Director of the Office of Nightlife and Culture.

I am happy to represent the Bowser Administration and share an update from MONC at my first Commission meeting. I know this Commission provided important industry and community insights to my predecessor, and I look forward to building on past successes and expanding MONC’s public engagement to support the nightlife and cultural ecosystems.

Since last fall, MONC has participated in over 175 community engagements and continues to meet with key constituents to obtain a better understanding of local conditions, current challenges, and exploring areas for improvement.

For example, in November 2021, MONC hosted a job fair where nightlife and hospitality establishments participated; almost 300 people attended, with almost half receiving vaccinations.

Throughout this fiscal year, MONC is proud to have participated in numerous Ward Meet and Greets, grand openings for minority-owned small businesses, and the opening ceremonies of the Metro Cooking DC Convention, the largest food event in the Mid-Atlantic.

MONC was also present when Mayor Bowser launched the 4th Annual DMV Black Restaurant Week, where she announced continued commitment to equity, opportunities, and growth for new Ward 7 and 8 establishments via the $58 million Food Access Fund.

MONC continues to work with the Washington Regional Alcohol Program to encourage patrons that if you will be out celebrating and alcohol is involved to have a designated driver or use one of WRAP’s codes.

MONC also hosted a nightlife roundtable with MVTCID to discuss nightlife issues.

In February, I participated in my first Business and Economic Development Performance Oversight Hearing.

MONC has also been very involved with making connections in the theater community connecting the Lincoln Theater and Gala Theatre together for cross advertising and collaborative work.

We’ve also been working with Project Glow and Broccoli City teams to provide assistance for their upcoming festivals. MONC also worked with the Mayor’s Office of Women’s Policy and Initiatives procuring the location for the Women of Excellence Awards at the Wharf. We are in the process of working with the Department of Behavioral Health to highlight mental health awareness in the hospitality industry while also distributing opioid overdose reversal kits and offering educational resources on administering in case of an emergency.

Tonight MONC is participating with the Mayor’s Office of Latino Affairs to host a multilingual job fair after our Commission meeting.

MONC has also provided technical assistance to business operators to work with other agencies to ensure grants are inclusive of the food, retail, and hospitality industries across the District.

I want to highlight that diversity, equity, and inclusion are important issues for me, especially coming from the industry and navigating DC as a Latina and woman entrepreneur. For that reason, I have been intentional about engaging underrepresented communities - including immigrant-owned, business operators and staff, the LGBTQ+ nightlife community, and women-owned businesses - to underscore the Bowser Administration’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I’d like to share a bit more about three public engagements related to public safety, the 2022 RHI Sociable City Summit, and streateries that MONC supported in collaboration with DC agencies and local partners.

First is public safety:

MONC is leading the charge in connecting our nightlife and culture community to MPD to ensure that the latest news and resources are accessible and available. For example, in partnership with MPD, MONC canvassed Ward 6 establishments who were vandalized or burglarized to highlight the “Private Security Rebate Program”. We also provided the operators with burglary prevention tips, as well as public safety resources.

MPD’s 1st District’s Tasha Bryant and the Mount Vernon Triangle CID President and CEO, Kenyattah Robinson, joined MONC visiting Mount Vernon Triangle Businesses providing businesses with If You See Something Say Something Suspicious Activity Reporting Tool and provided the business owners the opportunity to ask MPD questions.

And on vaccines:

Ahead of Mayor Muriel Bowser announcing the vaccination requirements for certain businesses, we targeted all eight wards to distribute vaccination requirement signs, answer questions, and distribute masks. MONC also provided the Business Improvement Districts and Main Streets with bags of PPE equipment and proof of vaccination requirement signage.

MONC partnered with MOLA, MOAPIA and the Mayor’s Office of African Affairs to translate the proof of vaccination requirement signage in six of the most important foreign languages to ensure that business operators understood and were able to comply with the Mayor’s vaccine requirement.

MONC also partnered with DC Health to provide vaccinations and boosters to industry workers and invited DOES to answer unemployment insurance questions.

MONC also discussed the vaccine requirement and mask mandate at the Mayor’s Office of Asian Pacific Island Affairs and the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Developments townhalls.

The safety of our communities has always been at the forefront of any decision coming from Mayor Bowser’s Office. The vaccine requirements’ goal was to curb a spike in COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant. But due to an incredible community-wide effort, cases have dropped by more than 90% since the omicron peak, hospitalizations due to COVID complications have fallen, our healthcare system’s capacity remains strong, and public health data shows that we’re ready to take this step in our recovery. Due to that, Mayor Bowser lifted the mask mandate and encouraged visitors and businesses to be safe and exercise good judgement.

Now, DC is open and on the rise.

Second is the RHI Summit:

DC hosted the three-day 2022 Responsible Hospitable Institute Sociable City Summit the first week of April. This was the first time the Summit has been hosted here and the first edition since the pandemic began. MONC played a leading role in the Summit’s planning, which brought together industry leaders, practitioners, technical experts, and agencies related to nighttime planning and management to discuss this year’s theme: social economy recovery and revitalization.

Aside from the diverse panels, workshops, and networking opportunities featured, the Summit’s 125 organizations, 171 participants, and 65 speakers experienced some of the beauty, diversity, and charm that has made the nation’s capital a prime destination for tourists and entrepreneurs alike.

I participated on one of the panels on navigating the challenges of pandemic and future opportunities to revitalize the city's nighttime social economy. And I was so impressed by the exchange of best practices from the RHI conference participants - representing 51 cities, 28 states, Canada, Colombia, the United Kingdom, and Mexico. It offered a timely opportunity for reflection on the shared obstacles we have overcome, but it also helped me make various new connections that will lead to new partnerships to ensure the city’s continued recovery and revitalization.

Third, I am excited to talk about our work on streateries: The Mayor’s Office of Nightlife and Culture has been conducting outreach to establishments in targeted areas designated by DDOT where streateries with non-compliant structures/designs are located. This has been an opportunity for MONC to provide the operators with educational resources about safety and compliance regarding the temporary streatery guidelines. Since our streatery outreach began, DDOT has stated that several restaurants have contacted them regarding their permits to ensure their streateries are in compliance.

These past two days we have been working with DDOT, Walter’s Sports Bar, and the Mission and successfully provided them with Jersey barriers placed around the perimeter in time for the Nationals Opening Day.

Streateries have helped keep people employed and bring them back to work, while welcoming patrons to come to the establishments and enjoy the outside using innovative, fun, and winterized outdoor spaces.

So, what’s next?

SidebySideDC Initiative

Drawing on feedback from my listening tour and in alignment with Mayor Bowser’s priorities, my vision is to help restaurants and small businesses in the nightlife and hospitality industry recover from the pandemic and continue to provide them with the tools and guidance they need. My plan is called SidebySideDC.

First, MONC will work side by side with sister agencies to ensure that DC’s restaurants an nightlife establishments are compliant. MONC will partner with government agencies to provide compliance education.

1. Moving forward we will continue to serve as a point of contact for nightlife establishments to help them connect with DC Government agencies as they navigate through compliance issues
2. Because when the restaurants are open, customers will return, and they will generate revenue for the nighttime economy.

Second, we will work side by side with former, current, and prospective industry workers to incentivize their return to work.

We plan to host a diverse series of educational programs that promote not only job opportunities but assistance with:

* + Health insurance
  + Mental health and wellness
  + financial literacy resources

Third, we will work side by side with the nightlife ecosystem to help bring back the vibrancy of nightlife corridors. We will be working with the BIDS on the Return to City Life campaign and also working with Events DC and Destination DC to promote city-wide events to encourage people to rediscover the city. We are also creating a Pop-up Pilot Program that will allow creatives and entrepreneurs to utilize vacant spaces for a temporary period of time.

And lastly for residents we aim to promote constructive dialogue, including promoting mediation and conflict resolution services to address concerns that impact the nightlife ecosystem and the ANC’s quality of life concerns.

Lastly, I’d like to mention one of our current priorities - the presentation of Mayor Bowser’s 2023 Fair Shot Budget. This budget is one that reflects what we are hearing from DC residents – their concerns about public safety and affordability, about how we can better ensure all residents have access to safe and dignified housing, and about how we can make our roads safer and continue to rethink how we use public space and commercial corridors. The mayor’s budget also makes big investments in our young people, our schools and facilities, and significant investments in the nightlife and cultural industries. This $19.5 billion budget is the most equitable budget in the history of the District of Columbia and will give more DC residents a fair shot.

For those interested in seeing the full budget, we’ll be happy to share the links.

In closing, I look forward to continuing our momentum and building on our successes to support DC’s recovery and revitalization. Thank you for time, as well as your continued guidance and support, and I look forward to working with

* **Commissioner Updates & Open Conversation**

**Sarah Fashbaugh - ABRA Updates:**

**ReOpen DC Alcohol DC ACT:**

My first update is regarding license renewal. As many of you know we offered an extension on the deadline. Please sign up for our email updates at ABRA.dc.gov We will continue to send out information as we have it it's the best way to find out information as soon as it's available. I also want to mention the Glover Park moratorium zone was set to expire on February 10th but was granted a 90-day extension at the request of the ANC so if you already have feelings about that, definitely get them in. We do have an upcoming extended holiday hour weekend for Emancipation Day for DC that will be Thursday April 14th through Sunday April 17th so establishments can serve alcohol until 4:00 AM.

**Ris Lacoste:** I have a quick question, I own a restaurant, I’m a restaurant owner, and I forget how long a time the placards go up? Is it after May 2nd? YES. OK great thank you.

**Keith Slade:** DCRA will do a complete split come September the 30th of this year, so you see, I will become a part of dealing with buildings and the other part of DCRA will deal with licensing consumer protection. We may want to consider having another commissioner on the on the Commission board for the licensing side.

**V.B.:** Ok, is there anything else?

**Cristina Amoruso:** Ok, well, we can talk about Art All Night!!! Art All Night 2021 brought over 100,000 people. We're aiming for a lot more. We are working in conjunction with Arts and Humanities and Ian Calendar of Suite Nation, who is our Creative Director. We are going to be compliant, not because we haven't been in the past, but because the rules of have changed a little bit, and as we've gotten bigger, significantly bigger, we have currently 21 Main Streets participating and one BID so far. It will get a lot bigger. That means that we are going to have to figure out how to do this. It will be at least two days but with that we're looking forward to lots of partnerships. And with that, I’ll let Ian take over:

**I.C.:** As Cristina said..

**C.A**. …this will be 28 years of doing Main Streets and 11 doing Art All Night

**I.C.** So it’s not 2020 the year, but 2020 kind of vision, of what Art All Night is gonna represent   
since the mayor took it over in 2015. I'm really focusing on the Main Streets. I think this year in relation to last year, a lot of the BIDS saw Art All Night as an opportunity to amplify their specific neighborhoods so it's kind of like a tug-of-war full going on but what we wanted to do, very similar to what you had mentioned with the side-by-side approach, which is to get the main streets and the BIDS in similar efforts so that it’s citywide very similar to the cherry blossom festival. So that's kind of the approach that we're looking to take Art All Night and then have ABRA & DCRA of course being in alignment with our efforts, so you'll probably hear a lot more come Memorial Day.

**T.B:** From a tourism perspective, if we can just see have a sidebar conversation it would be great to build some stuff out on our website and get it started and promoted and then of course when the dates get closer, we can discuss social media and do whatever we need to. As we know, campaigns are starting and so when we get to the season, you know we’ll have to put the top 10 things to do this fall/winter/summer…whatever that is to make it awesome to have that as one of the highlights on their visit.

**C.A.** The goal is to attract visitors to DC. We’re looking at this as similar to Art Basil in Miami.

**T.B.:** It would be nice to involve hotels, give hotel deals and shows.

**V.B.:** Does anyone have anything else?

**R.L**.: I'm on the board of what we call Regarding Her, it's an organization started in Los Angeles called Regarding Her, with Mr. Milliken, Chef Mary Sue Milliken and others in LA & DC is the next chapter, the first chapter after LA, but just so that you're aware it's women supporting other women who are owners who love food businesses so whether they're making cakes or making ice cream or a restaurant owner like myself. You know Ruth Gresser, Jamie Lee...a lot of great people…Cork right down the street…Diane Gross…lots of great women…they're almost 150 or so 200 members. What’s beautiful is that there's lots of young women who are going from you know you…whatever starting out with the brick and mortars and going through all the trials and tribulations of opening up a business and carrying on and it started kind of through COVID to support each other and to bring each other business so we're you know selling things you know where you know all kinds of gift bags. You know, all kinds of things we could do during covid but now we're just trying to support each other and then teach the younger who are coming up, you know, what they need to know and help them. It’s beautiful. I know it's just really, really wonderful to see the support and all of that so just look it up RegardingHerDC.com and it's where we're in our initial stages so they're with us as we, you know, as we break through all of that but it's really kind of cool so I just wanted you to be aware of it. If you see things, you know with events, we know we'll put it together. Events were mainly a support team for each other but we will have to always find someone will have to do all those things, so we just want that support for women and just to be aware that it exists thanks

**V.B.:** So, from the restaurant and nightlife operator’s standpoint, I think one thing that's happened, and I know like this is almost like a larger step back, but I think over the pandemic in general, the point of this Commission in this office was to bring all the stakeholders to the table that were part of like the DC like nightlife economy community and cultural economy community. When we first started interviewing Shawn, he was like, a very interesting hire because he was representative for most of the operators only interactions with the city government was either for licensing or regulatory, so they never viewed the city as a partner or viewed the city as someone who is in invested in their growth. They view the city as someone who's regulating so when we were interviewing for the position of Executive Director Shawn T., we always joked for a long time with him like, every time he’d come into a final round meeting, I feel like NO. Just like, just because he represented ABRA and I always thought ABRA is like a regulator. But he was very, like you know, he's very persuasive when he came to the meeting and he said you know “Even when I was regulating, I saw myself as a partner with the establishments,” and I know that that's even the history of his relationship with Ian, who was one of the people who testified on his behalf when he applied and I think in now that it's been several years since this is started through the pandemic. One thing that's really happened and it's very, very clear, is nightlife and restaurant operators started viewed the city as a resource. I've always been this like, sort of run away from the city government, not run towards the city government except for the last several years but I think that the pandemic really changed things, like with the bridge fund and with all the stuff the city did…so many great things. The city as well as the Mayor's office started looking to operators as promoters to get the message out for the programs the city was putting out. So there's been this like very good and consistent relationship that's sort of starting to take place between the nightlife community from the operator standpoint and the regulators and I think everyone is actually very excited about that and this is a very good sort of speaks to the effectiveness of having this sort of Commission nationally. I think it's a good model for the nation and I think one thing, that when I'm speaking of restaurant operators and nightlife operators, even in advance of this to see we're having a meeting, the one thing that they're afraid of is like that now that things are starting to open again, is that it's gonna go back like this, this like, sort of the city is a resource but now it’s not. I know I can count on, I can call Solana or Shawn to help me and all that, but there's just a concern that now that there's gonna be some sort of peel back or like there's gonna be some sort of like return to regulatory mode. I heard from a couple of operators that, you know, we're getting our ABC renewal and the communities are like, why are you guys louder now than you were two years ago? And they're like, because we were closed two years ago!

**I.C.:** I’ve never seen the city government react so particular to specific platforms, you know the accessibility of not just personnel, but like directors. I haven't seen that ever, so to have that continue, you know, until something like what happened with Walters is how we all heard about it online and then like that day like people were there and then like the next day there was a result. If that happened to Walters, I feel like if that came up with another establishment, they would want the same type of touch point. You know, something that may not have reached social media, so I think that's a key point.

**V.B.:** I think it’s great that agencies of the district have been able to contact operators to utilize them, almost as promotors, to do things such as activate vaccination clinics. It’s such a new way for government agencies and hospitality industry to interact.

Does anyone have anything else?

**T.B.** I would to add just add one thing, if you all are interested, in a future meeting, if you want me to do a quick presentation on the $4.5 million that we're doing for a marketing and advertising for the city for this summer which is going to be launching around the main time period, it might be, you know, great to all to see what the campaigns are gonna be and really what we're doing and then hopefully by then we'll have some data just to kind of let you all know how we're pacing for the summer, and it does look pretty strong. Hotels are still running like you know 50% at this point but they're slowly inching up and I'm happy to do any kind update. If there’s anything we can do to help support, you know, we're just trying to find as much content as possible to start loading up and we're seeing people are booking starting this weekend.

**I.C.:** Do students contribute to a part of the recovery?

**T.B.** No. They are staying in MD/VA. Also, they’re still suffering staffing issues. So “100%” is often actually 70-90%.

**I.C.** What’s the logic with your marketing campaigns?

**T.B.:** Everything is always about trying to drive people into the city, so predominantly, you know, we look at what our feeder markets are usually doing, like the northeast, there's a big feeder market in Chicago and even California is a big feeder market for us during certain seasons, and you'll see when you go to the website that there's campaigns that run in the winter. We have particular campaigns: we just did Date Nights DC for February right? And then spring will run from the beginning of March through the end of May and then summer starts and it's always trying to drive people to, you know, build their hotel packages into the city and letting them know all the activities in advance that are going on. So you know in February, you know, you could put in an events calendar to see what's happening in the summer but predominantly we're trying to we look at, you know, the booking patterns of when people are coming in and you know you know what kind of traveler are they you know during certain seasons you know obviously summer family travel so your ads are going to be geared but our campaigns be hired on an ad agency January 3rd is the name of that agency So it's kind of interesting we hired a company called January 2nd because this but our summer campaign, but it’s gonna be the capital of like the “capital of half smokes” or the “capital of this” and it's kind of putting a twist that people know Washington right, and they know Washington DC but literally getting them to know DC has all these really unique personalities of the people that actually live here in each of our neighborhoods. You know we have a whole DEI district in there, really highlighting DEI businesses, that women thing that you and I have been talking about. I would love to load them up on our website so we're trying to look uniquely at the types of travelers that are coming in and what kind of vacations that they're looking for when they're traveling here and they still can be local and you know, coming in from Baltimore, people do staycations and things like that but obviously we want people to stay for long weekends and really kind of take advantage of all the activities and loads of stuff we have to offer .

**R.L.:** You know, do you work with the older folks? Or is there anything that we as a city do for them? I mean I sit on the board (on yet another board, too many too many but that's OK I love what I do) from foggy bottom West End Village and with the DuPont circle Village, but you know you, we don't consider them for nightlife, but certainly for culture, but it's just that the moving away from isolationism and just really getting them out and involved in things. So I'm just curious if there's any angle that you or anybody in the government does for the Villages. It might be a consideration. You know, many of them are of means, and many of them not just want to stay in the same place. We know the Villages, and there's quite a few Villages in the District, so I think that maybe that's something to take a look at and do something for them. I don't know the answer.

**I.C.:** Suggested master Village

**V.B.:** Next meeting date June? We will send out options. Is there any other business? If not, is this meeting adjourned?

**I.C.:** Second.

**V.B.:** This meeting is adjourned.