

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
International Intergroup Relations

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12/10/2020  
Start: 9:17 AM  
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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

B E F O R E: JAMES G. VAN BRAMER  
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Justin L. Brannan  
Margaret S. Chin  
Peter A. Koo  
Karen Koslowitz  
Brad S. Lander  
Kalman Yeger

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

1  
2 WILLIAM MARTIN: PC recording has  
3 started. According to the Cloud it's all set. Thank  
4 you.

5 SERGEANT POLITE: Back-up is ready.

6 WILLIAM MARTIN: Thank you and Sergeant  
7 Polite if you would be able to start with your  
8 opening statement.

9 SERGEANT POLITE: Thank you. Good  
10 morning and welcome to the remote hearing on  
11 Cultural Affairs, Libraries and International Group  
12 Relations. Will all Council Members and staff  
13 please turn on their videos at this time. Thank you.  
14 To minimize disruption please place all cell phones  
15 and electronics to vibrate. Chair, we are ready to  
16 begin.

17 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much.  
18 Good morning everyone and welcome to today's  
19 hearing. I'm Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer, Chair  
20 of the Committee of Cultural Affairs, Libraries and  
21 International Intergroup Relations, and we are now  
22 in session. Today the committee will be voting on  
23 two important bills, and I'm thrilled that we're  
24 joined by the entire committee this morning,  
25 Majority Leader Cumbo, Council Member Mark Gjonaj,

1  
2 Council Member Joe Borelli, and Council Member  
3 Francisco Moya. The first of the two bills is Intro  
4 2034-A related to coordinating the use of open space  
5 for arts and cultural programming sponsored by our  
6 colleague Majority Leader Cumbo, and I'm proud to be  
7 a co-sponsor of that legislation. Secondly, Intro  
8 2068-A or Open Culture as we've been calling it,  
9 which I'm proud to be the lead sponsor on as related  
10 to a temporary use of outdoor space for artistic and  
11 cultural events. Before I defer to Majority Leader  
12 Cumbo for a statement on her bill, I just want to  
13 say that I would like to thank all of my colleagues  
14 as well as the cultural community, the artists and  
15 advocates for their tireless efforts and partnership  
16 in responding to the crisis that our community's art  
17 and cultural sector has been experiencing this year.  
18 2020 has seen the worst pandemic in our lifetimes  
19 for sure, but as we all know while culturalists have  
20 never truly closed, the hard truth of the matter is  
21 that the city's art and cultural institutions were  
22 among the first to be forced to be close their doors  
23 particularly for Coronavirus venues of all kinds,  
24 and it has been a difficult road. We've lost at  
25 least 260,000 cultural sector jobs in the last nine

1 months. Just think about that for a second. They  
2 need these bills to pass. The cultural community and  
3 culturals are a major contributor not only to our  
4 economy but to the heart and soul of the city. We  
5 you think of the this city the iconic images and the  
6 moments that New Yorkers come to value and remember  
7 it's often art and culture in communities in the  
8 neighborhoods where they live, which brings the  
9 greatest joy, culturals while being the life of our  
10 city have been fighting resiliently to survive this  
11 moment even with limited reopenings and performances  
12 that we've seen over the last several months, but  
13 artists then use an institution many of which are  
14 small businesses themselves, of course, are in dire  
15 financial circumstances. Many have closed. Many more  
16 are at risk of closing, and that's why it's so  
17 important that we pass these bills today, and why we  
18 introduced Open Culture. Open Culture responds to  
19 crisis directly by allowing eligible art and  
20 cultural institutions and at-risk to be approved for  
21 use of open space, and I just want to say that 2068-  
22 A is not just a cultural bill, it's s small business  
23 bill. It's a jobs creation bill. It's all of those  
24 things in one creating a one-stop shop for expedited  
25

1 permits that allows for donation based and paid  
2 ticketed events wherein cultural organizations  
3 artists including individual artists to charge for  
4 those performances and actually start to receive  
5 income for the art that they create and produce once  
6 again, and this will be in conjunction with SACO and  
7 DOT opening up open streets and other areas in  
8 consultation with local Council Members, which is a  
9 really important piece of a bill that's been added  
10 and there are thousands of arts organizations,  
11 individual artists that are available to  
12 participate, but also non-DCLA funded organizations  
13 can and will be able to access this program as long  
14 as they partner with any one of the 2,000 arts  
15 organizations and individual artists including the  
16 Five Borough Arts Council. So virtually everyone can  
17 access this program and start performing as early as  
18 March 1st as we get this program up and running and  
19 it is incredibly exciting to be able to have dance,  
20 music, poetry, opera and a comedy breaking out to  
21 literally all over the City of New York in the  
22 street. As the weather gets a little bit nicer we  
23 hope for the best with COVID, but we are going to  
24 save a lot of arts organizations, and put to work a  
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1  
2 lot of artists and allow them to get paid for their  
3 work because the days for performing for free often  
4 the time have got to be over. Artists deserve to get  
5 paid for their performances and their work, and this  
6 allows for that to happen. So, I want to thank  
7 everyone in the community for working with us. I  
8 want to thank Majority Leader for her support of  
9 this bill and also for her additional intro that  
10 she'll talk about in a moment, and I want to thank  
11 my Legislative Director Jack Bernatovicz who worked  
12 incredibly hard on this piece of legislation. It's  
13 his first piece of legislation that we've seen  
14 through from beginning to end, and my Chief of Staff  
15 Matt Wallace, the Art Committee's Principal  
16 Financial Analyst, Aliya Alli, our Policy Analyst  
17 Christy Dwyer and Art Committee Counsel Brenda  
18 McKinney who I know worked incredibly hard on this  
19 piece of legislation and worked back and forth and  
20 back and forth multiple times. So we're very excited  
21 for this day, very excited about this bill and to  
22 hear more about her incredibly important bill Intro  
23 2034-A, I would like to invite Council Majority  
24 Leader Cumbo to say a few words. Majority Leader  
25 can you hear us?

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MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: I can hear you now.

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CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Great.

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MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: You ready for me?

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CHAIR VAN BRAMER: We are ready for you.

7

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Hello and can you hear

8 me?

9

CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Yes, I can hear you.

10

MAJORITY LEADER CUMBO: Okay, perfect. Good

11

morning and good morning to the entire committee

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today. This morning I'm so happy to be here with all

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of you and to our Committee Counsel Brenda McKinney

14

who has worked tirelessly throughout this entire

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pandemic to make our legislative visions a reality.

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Ove the past seven months COVID 19 has impacted

17

every sector within our city's economic structure

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with arts and culture being one of the hardest hit.

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Prior to the pandemic the cultural sector in New

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York City was one of the largest industries in New

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York City employing nearly 400,000 workers paying

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them \$31 billion in wages and generating \$110

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billion in economic activity. Yes, we are talking

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about the life line of New York City, the heart and

25

soul, our cultural economy. In merely seven months



1 employment within this sector had fallen over 60%  
2 with 95% of organizations being forced to cancel  
3 some programming. In light of the obstacles our  
4 cultural sector is facing it is critical that we  
5 meet this moment by passing Intro 2034 in the spirit  
6 of innovation and progressing towards a reimagined  
7 approach to how we enjoy arts and culture in New  
8 York City and beyond. Intro 2034 will require the  
9 coordination of relevant city agencies to create a  
10 mobile application that will provide information  
11 about and coordinate the use of opens space for art  
12 and cultural programming as well as providing  
13 information about low cost or free public programs  
14 in such locations. We have seen first hand the  
15 success of opening spaces for entertainment purposes  
16 most especially with the use of open streets for our  
17 restaurant industry. Now, it is time that we rise  
18 to the occasion and provide public spaces for  
19 performance so that every New Yorker can enjoy the  
20 rich and diverse cultural enrichment that our city  
21 has to offer in a socially distant setting, and I  
22 just want to conclude by saying: These are only  
23 first steps towards many that we are discussing and  
24 planning to make sure that the cultural economy  
25

1 comes back to New York in an incredible and amazing  
2 way. There's so much work that needs to be done.  
3 We've been hearing you. We are listening, and we  
4 are working toward solution. This is simply a first  
5 step towards that movement. I also want to add that  
6 I want to thank at this time Speaker Corey Johnson  
7 as well as Jason Goldman who have worked incredibly  
8 hard on this during a pandemic with there being so  
9 much need in the city of New York. I applaud them  
10 for recognizing that we can lift up the City of New  
11 York and support the cultural community at the same  
12 time. It is possible and that we have to make sure  
13 that we bring back the arts and cultural community.  
14 I want to thank also my Legislative Director Jason  
15 Hunt as well as Alicia Mercedes my Communications  
16 Director, and Tasha Young my Chief of Staff. So, I  
17 thank all of you today for being on this hearing.  
18 We've got a lot of work to do, but we are moving in  
19 the right direction, and thank you so much, Chair  
20 Jimmy Van Bramer for hosting and organizing this  
21 particular hearing.  
22

23 CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much Majority  
24 Leader Cumbo and if there are no other comments from  
25 members of the committee, I would now like to ask

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Billy to call the role for a vote on both Intro  
2034-A and Intro 2068-A.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Good morning. (coughs)  
Excuse me. Good morning William Martin Committee  
Clerk, roll call vote Committee on Cultural Affairs.  
Both items are coupled.

CHAIR VAN BRAMER: I vote aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Cumbo.

COUNCIL MEMBER CUMBO: I vote aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Gjonaj.

COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Moya.

COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: I vote aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: Borelli.

COUNCIL MEMBER BORELLI: I vote aye.

WILLIAM MARTIN: By a vote of 5 in the  
affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions  
both items have been adopted by the committee.  
Thank you.

CHAIR VAN BRAMER: Thank you very much to  
everyone, and congratulations to everyone, and with  
that, this hearing of the Cultural Affairs Libraries  
and International Intergroup Relations Committee  
hearing is adjourned. (gavel)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date December 17, 2020