



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission

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Executive Director**
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NOTICE OF MEETING AND AGENDA

January 26, 2021, 5:00pm – 6:30pm

Pursuant to the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, Mass Gen. Laws. ch. 30A, §18-25, notice is hereby given of a meeting of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Asian American Commission.

Register in advance for this meeting:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83782540166>

Meeting will be held via teleconference in compliance with the Governor's Executive Order on the Open Meeting Law and COVID-19

Present Commissioners are marked with *. Absent Commissioners are highlighted yellow.

Included in meeting packet:

- FY21 Budget Recommendations

Staff present: Jessica (Jay), Kamalani, Lily, Sheila
Meeting is recorded

1. FY21 Budget - VOTE

Sam opens the meeting at 5:05pm and asks if Commissioners have input or questions about the draft FY21 state budget.

Betty proposes to add a \$10K line item to do a general audit of the AAC's finances and operations.

Sam asks whether she is suggesting an audit of the nonprofit or state appropriation side.

Betty says both, and the nonprofit budget should be accurately called a trust account.

Sam confirms that we are focusing our conversation today on the FY21 state appropriation.

Betty noticed in the FY20 Budget, under AAC programming, the AAC spent \$250 on the CMAA Khmer Memorial Scholarship, and \$500 on the AAPI Mental Health Forum. Betty believes that these items are mislabeled because the AAC did not run these events. Betty suggests that this category be re-labeled as event sponsorships. Betty also asks for clarification about a \$25 fee for a streamyard subscription.



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Jay responds and says that this cost was to support streaming during remote meetings. However, since then, we decided to use Zoom exclusively.

Betty asks for clarification about the catering cost for the swearing-in ceremony in the FY20 Budget.

Betty has technical issues and is unable to hear. She dropped off the meeting at 5:17pm.

Jay states that whenever the AAC hosts an in-person event providing event refreshments in common practice. This event was at the State House last year, and we used the State House catering services for convenience and to ease the transition between our Feb monthly meeting and the swearing-in ceremony.

Betty re-joins meeting at 5:20pm

Bora states that we have used this caterer for past year's swearing-in ceremonies because it is the most convenient option.

Philjay affirms Bora's point and adds that given how many people and dignitaries attended last year's swearing-in ceremony, this cost is justified.

Sam affirms that we're focusing on the FY21 state appropriation at this meeting. And that questions about the past budget can be addressed in a separate meeting with Betty, Sam, and Haniya, and whoever else is interested.

Sam asks for questions and input from other Commissioners who have not yet spoken.

Mary Lee asks for clarification about Sam's point, and says that the separate meeting to address questions on the FY20 budget would be helpful.

Megha asks about the \$10K allocated for the strategic planning consultant in the FY21 budget. She wonders if that amount should stay that high given we may be unable to spend all of it in light of the pandemic.

Jay clarifies that in 2018, the AAC spent between \$3-5K for a strategic plan. The new EC was elected, but the Commission never followed through with the strategic plan that was created. Therefore, Jay agrees with reducing that amount.



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Mary Chin asks about the separate meeting that Betty suggested because it's important to look at past year's spending to inform decisions on this year's budget.

Bora agrees with Mary Chin's point about understanding overall budget trends from the past year, but states that it doesn't make sense to use our time today to question very detailed \$25 line items.

Betty says forget the \$25 line item, and she instead would like to address the \$10K in spending on exigent staff expenses in the FY20 spending.

Sam opens the floor for commissioners who haven't yet spoken.

Ekta asks about the differences between community resources fund and COVID-19 grant fund.

Vira states that the COVID-19 grant fund would be dedicated to small businesses and nonprofits that have been financially affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Haniya states that the community resources fund would help support agencies and organizations that are serving the AAPI community across MA. Danielle affirms that the proposed COVID-19 grant fund would be similar to the grant program that the AAC launched and implemented last year.

Nate asks about FY21 staff reimbursements which is currently budgeted for \$3,500 and mentioned that this is lower than in past years.

Sam reviews the line items under the FY21 administrative expenses budget category. The travel reimbursement category has been reduced significantly in light of the pandemic.

Betty said that last year in FY20, we spent \$5,000 on laptops and cellphones to help staff during the COVID crisis. Jay and Bora state for the record that funding was not spent cellphones, only staff laptops to support virtual work.

Mary Lee asked about liability insurance costs. Philjay says that last year, Jenny got quotes from liability insurance companies. We only got one quote for \$4,600. The other companies were hesitant to give the AAC a quote given the pending investigations and ethics complaints against the Commission.

Mary asked how much we spent on legal fees last year, without the liability insurance.



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Vira says that as far as she knows, no invoices have yet been submitted to the AAC. Vira clarifies that these complaints were filed by Commissioner Betty King, and the AAC voted to retain legal counsel to help address these complaints.

Vira says that for the FY21 Budget, these are all projected amounts. And if circumstances change, we would be able to repurpose funds and reallocated amounts as needed, contingent on a vote from the AAC.

Mary Lee asks for clarification whether this is a projected budget. Bora says yes, this is a projected budget and can be modified as needed -- and the Commission can take a vote to modify it. Any modifications to the budget would require a majority vote from Commissioners.

Betty applauds the new Executive team for aiming to be as meticulous as possible for the projected FY21 budget. Betty asserts that it did not happen last year.

Bora disagrees and states that Jenny prepared and distributed monthly budget statements all of last year. Danielle agrees that the process also happened last year and it was similarly transparent. Sam requests that we do not make accusations of individuals who are not currently present at this meeting.

Mary Chin states her support for allocating money for a potential audit on the AAC's nonprofit side. Sam asks if she has a dollar amount estimate. Mary Chin suggests getting proposals from three different auditors.

Sam proposes that Jay reach out to the state auditor's office to ask if they are reviewing and auditing our state spending.

Danielle states that we should consider funding for an audit via our nonprofit budget, and not the state appropriation. Megha agrees.

Betty states that this should be a recurring annual cost for the AAC. Mary Chin agrees and says that this expense would not be necessary if this is already happening via the State Treasurer's office, so it would be helpful to check.

Megha states that if this is already happening via the State, then we shouldn't use our state appropriation to pay for it. We can revisit this suggestion when we discuss the nonprofit budget.

Cinda leaves meeting



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Vira states that Cassandra Steinkrauss is the budget manager for the State Treasurer's office and tracks our spending and finances annually. Bora states that the AAC also submits a request annually to the House and Senate Ways & Means fiscal analysts and we need to prepare and submit a workbook. They meet with every agency that is funded by the State.

Jay affirms Bora's point and states that we need to go through Cassandra and Minot Powers to request any spending via our state appropriation

Betty asks to see our annual report that includes a spending summary. Jay and Sam point Betty to refer to it on our website. Betty states that the State Auditor has never audited the AAC.

Sam moves the meeting along to review and discuss the staff salaries.

Betty proposes allocating \$10K from FY21 state appropriation to pay for an audit. Sam asks where this \$10K should come from. Betty says \$5K could be reduced in the strategic planning consultant, and that AAC programming and COVID-19 community resources fund can also be reduced partially.

Sam recommends cutting the strategic planning consultant to \$5K, and re-allocate that to staff salaries. \$2K to Jay (Interim-Executive Director), \$2K Sheila (Marketing and Communications Coordinator), \$1K to Kamalani (Western MA Coordinator)

Vira supports increases to staff salaries, but we should also consider community engagement opportunities. She asks if funds can be allocated to anti-racism training and programming.

Megha asks Vira if that should be a separate category or fall under an existing budget line item.

Vira says that she was envisioning that it be a new line item under the AAC programming budget category.

Mary Lee agrees that staff deserve higher compensations, but is wondering if that can be done through the nonprofit budget.



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Philjay says that we'd need to explore the implications of stipending staff via the nonprofit side. This would affect payroll taxes and benefits.

Bora states that the reason we don't use the nonprofit budget for salaries is because the staff get benefits and payroll done via the Treasurer's office.

Danielle affirms that since the Treasurer's office handles all of the benefits and payroll for our full-time staff, we should keep full-time staff salaries from the state appropriation. Moving their salaries to the nonprofit side would add additional administrative burdens and potentially financial costs for the AAC.

Mary Chin agrees.

Vira states that our state appropriation isn't guaranteed, so the nonprofit budget gives us a cushion in case the public funding doesn't come through or is cut significantly.

Mary Lee asks if we can explore whether the nonprofit side can be used to increase staff salaries.

Nate asks in chat if as a compromise, we could explore performance bonuses for staff via our nonprofit budget.

Sam closes the discussion and motions to vote on the budget amendments, Bora seconds.

Betty motions to approve an amendment that would allocate \$10K from the state appropriation for a general audit of operations and spending, by reducing \$5K from strategic consultant, \$1K from AAC programming, \$1K for food banks, \$2K from Community Resources Fund, \$1K from COVID grant fund. Mary Lee seconds.

No: Sam, Bora, Danielle, Ekta, Haniya, Nate, Philjay, Megha, Vira (9)

Yes: Betty, Mary Lee, Mary Chin (3)

Motion fails.

Sam motions to approve an amendment that would reduce \$5K from strategic planning consultant and reallocate \$2K to Jay (Interim-Executive Director), \$2K Sheila (Marketing and Communications Coordinator), \$1K to Kamalani (Western MA Coordinator)

Megha seconds



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Yes: Sam, Bora, Mary Chin, Megha, Ekta, Haniya, Nate, Philjay, Vira, Danielle (10)

Abstain: Betty, Mary Lee (2)

Motion passes

Vira withdraws the third motion to reallocate funds to anti-Asian racism training and programming

Sam motions to approve budget as amended

Vira seconds

Yes: Sam, Bora, Ekta, Haniya, Megha, Nate, Vira, Philjay, Danielle (9)

Abstain: Mary Lee, Mary Chin, Betty (3)

Motion passes.

Mary Lee asks if it is possible to take a vote to explore using the nonprofit budget for the purpose of increasing staff salaries beyond the \$5,000

Danielle leaves meeting

Vira says that we cannot entertain any other amendments because we already voted

Mary proposes a supplement to amendment

Sam suggests to discuss Mary's recommendation at February 16th meeting

Betty leaves meeting

Sam motions to adjourn meeting

Bora seconds

Yes: Sam, Bora, Vira, Megha, Ekta, Philjay, Nate, Haniya

No: Mary Lee

Abstain: Mary Chin

Meeting adjourns at 6:37pm

2. Next Commission meeting: February 16, 2021

3. Other Community updates & Meeting adjourned



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