



City of  
**OAKLAND**  
California

**Media Contact:**

Harry Hamilton  
Marketing Coordinator  
hjhamilton@oaklandca.gov  
510-238-6766

News from: **Economic & Workforce  
Development Department**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 19, 2020

**Oakland Cultural Affairs Commission Re-Established**

*Oakland, CA* – Last night, the Oakland City Council [confirmed](#) Mayor Libby Schaaf’s appointments to the Cultural Affairs Commission. The Commission is an advisory council to the Mayor, City Council and City Administrator on all matters affecting cultural development in Oakland. The Commission members’ primary role and responsibility will be to act as ambassadors and advocates for arts and culture in Oakland. Re-establishing the Commission, following a nine-year hiatus, was an important action called out in the City’s Cultural Plan, [Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan](#).

“Oakland’s rich arts ecosystem yielded an amazing roster of dedicated residents to serve on the re-animated Cultural Affairs Commission,” said Mayor Libby Schaaf. “These individuals represent all seven City Council Districts and embody *belonging* with their deep connections to Oakland through their personal and professional experiences. The importance of arts and culture in creating a vibrant and just city is shown by the breadth of experience of the commission members who are dancers, musicians, curators, cultural strategists, educators, non-profit administrators, lawyers, publishers, writers, storytellers, community organizers and civil engineers.”

The 11 individuals who will serve on the re-established Commission are:

**Roy Chan** was raised in Oakland, is a Council District 4 resident and is an urban planner who practices community oral history to inform how we plan our neighborhoods in culturally inclusive ways. Roy previously served as co-director of the Oakland Asian Cultural Center and is currently the planning manager at Chinatown Community Development Center. Term expires September 30, 2022.

A classically trained pianist who studied jazz, Council District 2 resident **Key Choice** is a dedicated and prolific hip hop M.C. and lyricist. He has been involved in the Oakland Arts scene for more than 20 years as a musician, artist, promoter, educator and advocate. He has performed with internationally acclaimed musicians, and is a cultural historian and urban griot dedicated to cultural expression and the art of making quality music. Term expires September 30, 2021.

Oakland’s vibrant arts scene is at the center of who **Jennifer Easton** is and the work she pursues. Currently, Jennifer is developing a new BART art program to build on the system’s legacy of integrated art and design by predominantly local artists. Raised in Oakland and a Council District 4 resident, she previously worked for the City of San Jose’s Public Art Program for nearly 12 years and also has both non-profit and grassroots experience. Term expires September 30, 2022.

(more)

**J. K. Fowler** is the founder and executive director of Nomadic Press, a community-focused literary and arts non-profit. He serves as the Oakland Peace Center's Director of Communications for Peace and Partnerships and serves on the center's board. J. K. currently co-chairs the board of North Atlantic Books and sits on Cogswell College's English and Humanities Professional Advisory Board. This Council District 3 resident is writing a book on events and publishing. Term expires September 30, 2021.

From Oakland's Council District 1, **Michelle "Mush" Lee**'s expertise is in organizational storytelling, internal and external communication strategies, and equity-informed, anti-racist models of professional learning. Mush has appeared on HBO's Def Poetry Jam, and was a Harvard University Project Zero Fellow. She is CEO of Whole Story Group, a narrative-based, organizational consulting agency. An artist of color and child of voluntary immigrants, Mush has thrived by telling, and retelling, her own story. Term expires September 30, 2021.

From a proud lineage of Black librarians, MATATU founder **Michael Orange** found his purpose early in the preservation and presentation of heirloom truths. His commitments are meditative actions of personal and public inquiry within the Afro past, present and future. A City Council District 5 resident, Michael is an Association of Performing Arts Professionals Leadership Fellow, 2020/2021 Art House Convergence Conference Co-chair and executive producer of the forthcoming sci-fi musical, "Neptune Frost." Term expires September 30, 2022.

A Bay native and Council District 5 resident, **Richard Santos Raya** returned home to Oakland after attending college in St Paul, and law school in Boston. By day, he works as Program Coordinator for Centro Legal de la Raza's Youth Law Academy teaching law and history to high schoolers. By night, Richard pursues his passion as a standup comedian. Both endeavors, along with myriad other interests, inform his love and understanding of what makes Oakland's culture vital. Term expires September 30, 2020.

**Charmin Roundtree-Baaqee** is an Oakland native, mother and owner/founder of Art Is Luv, which provides exposure and advocacy for artists through exhibition, marketing and branding. Her work with local, emerging and established artists and nonprofit organizations is a testament to her unyielding desire to maintain the pulse of Oakland's lively, diverse and economically sustainable Arts scene. Charmin has been an engineer, art curator and small business owner, giving her a unique, thoughtful perspective. Term expires September 30, 2020.

Born in Oakland and a third generation Fruitvale resident in Council District 5, **Diane Sanchez** currently works as a consultant/advisor in the Philanthropic & Arts/Culture sector. She has 25 years of experience as an arts program officer, advisor to foundations and individual philanthropists, board member at cultural organizations and arts panelist at the local, state and national levels. Diane has extensive experience in strategy development, management, board relations and community engagement. Term expires September 30, 2021.

(more)

**Vanessa Whang** is a researcher, program designer, evaluator and thought partner to funders and organizations engaged with culture and arts. Her work includes the role culture and arts play in advancing social justice and racial equity, including serving as lead consultant on the City of Oakland's first cultural plan in 30 years, *Belonging in Oakland*. Vanessa has worked as an artist and as a cultural equity advocate at the local, regional, state and national levels. Term expires September 30, 2022. (District 6)

An Oakland native with Southern roots, **Theo Aytchan Williams** got his first introduction to African drum and dance as a child in Mosswood Park. He went on to found SambaFunk! in 2010. As an artist, producer and advocate invoking the arts in relevant political and social justice causes, Theo's activity in the arts community goes beyond Carnaval. His vision is to share African Diaspora culture through dance, drum and music with new audiences. Term expires September 30, 2020.

### **About the Cultural Affairs Commission**

On June 13, 2019, the City Council passed [Ordinance No. 13561 C.M.S.](#) which re-established the Cultural Affairs Commission as an advisory body of eleven members appointed by the Mayor, with City Council approval.

More than 90 applications to serve on the Cultural Affairs Commission were submitted by Oakland residents. Following a careful review and deliberation of submittals, interviews were conducted with the finalists.

For the initial appointment only, four members shall be appointed for a three-year term, four members shall be appointed for a two-year term, and three members shall be appointed for a one-year term. Thereafter, all appointments shall be for three years. No person shall be appointed to serve more than two consecutive terms. These positions are volunteers and unpaid.

Diane Sanchez has been appointed as Chair of the Commission by Mayor Libby Schaaf, and the Vice Chair will be elected by the body at the Commission's first meeting on April 27, 2020.

The diversity of Commission members is a reflection of Oakland, not only geographically, but also demographically. More than three-quarters of the commissioners are people of color: 36.3% Black or African American, 27.3% Asian and 18.2% Latino/a. Commissioners range in age from young adults to senior citizens.

The Cultural Affairs Commission will work to meet the objectives of [Belonging in Oakland: A Cultural Development Plan](#), which seeks to lift up the role of culture in building a just and equitable city, and positions diversity at the heart of the work of City government.

# # #

### **About the Cultural Affairs Division**

The Cultural Affairs Division is housed in the City's Economic & Workforce Development Department. The division includes the City's cultural funding program, which provides approximately \$1 million in grants to support the arts in Oakland; the public art program, which has more than \$1 million in funds currently dedicated for public art installations across Oakland and staff working on special events, film production permitting and a walking tours program.