

LIBRARY COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION 20240429-3

Date: 04/29/2024

Subject: Establishing an adult Poet Laureate program to be managed by the Austin Public Library

Recommendation

Establish an adult Poet Laureate program for the City of Austin to be housed and managed by the Austin Public Library Department.

Description of Recommendation to Council

Requesting that the Austin City Council use their authority to direct the City Manager to establish an adult Poet Laureate program to be housed in and managed by the Austin Public Library department, and add additional budget funds as needed to create and support this program.

Rationale:

The City of Austin is known for its love and celebration of the arts. For decades many local organizations have developed Austin's poetry scene. Additionally, the University of Texas at Austin is a nationally recognized Masters of Fine Arts program that nurtures and produces many wonderful artists and poets.

Poet Laureate positions have existed in cities, states and countries since the 1600s, and are designed to be stewards of poetry, art and storytelling. Austin is the only major city in Texas without an adult Poet Laureate program. An adult Poet Laureate can use this role to promote literacy across the city, use poetry to engage with Austin's history, politics and culture, as well as continue to grow and support Austin's community of artists, with the potential to amplify Austin poets of all ages.

Austin Public Library is a natural home for a program like this. A Poet Laureate has the potential to encourage via performances, teaching and public speaking the importance of reading, writing and literacy. Reading and information literacy are core to the library's mission and the library is a well known and trusted institution in the city. According to Literacy Texas, Texas ranks 46/50 for adult literacy. The adult literacy rate is 81%, with 19% of adults lacking basic prose literacy skills. Creating this program can help close the gap, and inspire Austin residents to read and write.

Austin Public Library has branches strategically located across the city and is accustomed to creating programs and events across all of its branches allowing for maximum impact for this new program. They have also proven to be good stewards of city funds, and have many collection, personnel and budget needs to consider. We ask that you also provide financial support to create and sustain this much needed program so this does not impact the facilities, programs and projects already underway across the library department.