

Advisory board due on cultural funding

Poloncarz to name panel for review of 2013 requests

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Erie County Executive Mark C. Poloncarz will create a new advisory board to review funding requests from arts and cultural groups for 2013.

The panel — expected to be named in the next few weeks—will make recommendations for how to distribute millions of dollars of county funding based on a three-page application the nonprofit organizations will be asked to submit, said Maria R. Whyte, the county’s commissioner of environment and planning.

The new panel will revive a competitive application process for county arts and cultural dollars that then- County Executive Chris Collins ended two years ago with a controversial decision to fund only 10 organizations he determined were “regionally significant” because of their ability to draw tourists from outside the region.

“We have been really hard at work just on reviving the application process,” Whyte said.

Whyte detailed the new application process during a forum Monday organized by the Partnership for the Public Good, where she said Poloncarz has proposed keeping county funding for arts and cultural groups at about \$5.4 million a year in his four-year financial plan.

“It really is exciting to have it be a new day, to have a sense of possibility,” said Laurie Dean Torrell, executive director of Just Buffalo Literary Center. “In an environment where usually the news is cuts, to hear of a level funding commitment and the commitment to partnership is very, very buoying, I think, to all of us.”

Collins, in late 2010, pared the amount of operating funds the coun-

ty distributed and focused the money only on large organizations such as the Buffalo Zoo and the Buffalo Museum of Science.

The County Legislature, working with Poloncarz as he prepared to take office late last year, inserted about \$930,000 back into the 2012 budget for 37 small-and medium-size organizations that the Legislature had attempted to fund in 2010. Without an application process, however, groups that weren't on the original list had no chance of getting funds this year.

Tod A. Kniazuk, executive director of the Arts Services Initiative, said representatives from the arts and cultural community who volunteered on the Poloncarz transition team emphasized the need for a cultural funding process no matter how much money is available.

“The more important part was having a good process so that whatever dollar amount was allocated, we knew there would be a fair review, that the outcome was going to be based on the merits of the organizations,” Kniazuk said.

The county will mail out applications Friday to arts and cultural organizations that have received county funding in recent years and will make the document available on the county's website by early next week.

That application will have 12 essay questions that will start by asking organizations to describe their mission and explain how they meet it, Whyte said. The county Department of Environment and Planning will hold a briefing for potential applicants at 2 p.m. June 5 in Room 1404 of the Rath County Office Building.

Applications will be due by July 6. A final determination on arts and cultural funding for 2013 won't be made until late fall, when Poloncarz and the County Legislature finalize the annual budget for next year.

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