12-12-1982


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Interest conflicts on arts council?

By CHANNING GRAY
Journal-Bulletin Arts Writer

The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts met last month and gave out nearly $50,000 for some 30 arts projects sponsored by local nonprofit groups. It was a routine session except for one thing: the council declined several recommendations by its expert advisory panels — declined them in favor of arts groups with board members who also sit on the council itself.

The council, of course, has every right to vote its mind, but the number of council members connected with arts groups, coupled with the fact that some of those groups benefited from the changes made during last month’s meeting, raises at least the appearance of a conflict of interest.

At least five of the council’s 12 members are directly affiliated — either through employment or board membership — with eight arts groups that regularly receive money from the agency. Three of those groups made out pretty well at last month’s meeting.

TAKE THE Rhode Island Philharmonic. It submitted two grant proposals, one for $4,000 for its youth orchestra, another for $4,000 to help underwrite the cost of tickets for the economically disadvantaged.

In both cases, the music advisory panel was critical of the proposals and said in its written comments that neither was well thought out. In the case of the application for ticket-subsidy money, the panel said the Philharmonic had not come up with a specific plan to develop new audiences.

Its recommendation: no money for the youth orchestra; $1,800 for the ticket subsidy.

The council, however, gave the Philharmonic $6,000, — $2,000 for the youth orchestra and $4,000 for the ticket subsidy. The $4,000 grant was approved on a motion by Roberta Holland, whose husband, Marvin, is a Philharmonic board member.

In addition, two Philharmonic board members sit on the council, Dorothy Licht, whose husband, former Gov. Frank Licht, is president of the orchestra’s board, and Ernest Falciglia, who also is on the boards of the Rhode Island Civic Chorale and Festival Ballet of Rhode Island.

Mrs. Licht, who was present, did not vote; Falciglia arrived after the vote was taken.

Mrs. Holland said her motion to give the Philharmonic the amount it requested had nothing to do with her husband’s position and that

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