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## **CITY OF PORT TOWNSEND ARTS COMMISSION ANNOUNCES 2024 POET LAUREATE CONNER BOUCHARD-ROBERTS**

PORT TOWNSEND – The City of Port Townsend is pleased to announce Conner Bouchard-Roberts as the City’s first Poet Laureate. The Poet Laureate Pilot Program will begin in January 2024 and is a collaboration between the City Council Culture and Society Committee and the Port Townsend Arts Commission (PTAC), in partnership with the Port Townsend Public Library.

Bouchard-Roberts is a local poet and publisher who collaborates with many other local literary artists. He will work closely with community partners, the Port Townsend Arts Commission (PTAC), and the Port Townsend Public Library in cultivating the new program and bringing it to life. The scope of the Poet Laureate’s work is three-fold: ceremonial, educational, and inspirational. Bouchard-Roberts says, “The position of Poet Laureate is about adding the language and depth of poetry to civic space. There’s a certain quality of language that can come from putting poetry in a place where it doesn’t usually find its way because it’s so often in books. Language is exciting to play with.”

The program launched in May 2023, with PTAC member Lindsey Wayland stewarding it forward. The appointment of the inaugural Poet Laureate is based on a recommendation from a five-person selection panel, including Wayland, City Councilmember Ben Thomas, and three literary artists, Ellie Matthews, Lisbeth White, and Shin Yu Pai.

White, one of the selection panelists, said of the appointment, "I'm so excited that Port Townsend is reclaiming the tradition of poetry being a community art form, which is in fact how poetry has been for most of its history. Bouchard-Roberts has already been such a steward for poetry in this way-- his conscientious way of creating space for communal creativity is inspiring. I can't wait to see his work going forward and am glad the City can uplift someone who brings such art."

The Poet Laureate, appointed by the Mayor with Council concurrence, will begin in January 2024 with the possibility to extend the appointment into 2025. During the year the Poet Laureate will receive an honorarium of \$1,200, provide publicly accessible events, write poems about a theme integral to the City, work with the Port Townsend Public Library on educational programming, and create a special project for the City.

Melody Sky Weaver, Director of the Port Townsend Public Library, is looking forward to working closely with the Poet Laureate on programs and showcasing their poetry at the library in April for National Poetry month. She says, “Bouchard-Roberts will be able to foster excitement around the creation and enjoyment of poetry and literary arts to a wider audience while raising awareness of the power of the written and spoken word.”

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