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### **Club Head Skips Hearing**

By PIA CATTON

The National Arts Club's former president, O. Aldon James, did not attend the club's internal hearing to decide his membership status on Monday. Mr. James, as well as his brother John and their friend Steven Leitner, have been battling with the Gramercy Park institution for months over charges of harassment and misuse of club assets.

The group's lawyer did not respond to requests for comment.

The club's lawyer, Roland Riopelle, said the trio, known as the "James Group," submitted a written response to the charges, reiterating what had been argued in New York State Supreme Court. When the men did not appear at Monday's hearing—which they had attempted to prevent with their lawsuit—the panel and the witnesses waited for about 30 minutes before proceeding.

"They did contact us in the middle of the day by email to ask that they be provided with a transcript of the proceeding," said Mr. Riopelle.

Though the James Group was allowed to call its own witnesses—and their lawyer could have cross-examined witnesses—they declined that option by not attending. As a result, the hearing, which could have gone on for days, concluded at about 6 p.m. Monday. The subcommittee will review the transcript—about 350 pages—and submit a finding to the club's board, which will decide whether disciplinary action needs to be taken.

Board member Cherry Provost submitted testimony to the committee and described the mood during the proceedings as "somber."

"We were called in individually. I was asked a question or two, and that was it," she said. "People were taking it seriously."

Drama Committee chair Marguerite Yaghjian testified about being harassed by John James. "It was very businesslike," she said of the hearing. "It's emotionally draining to talk about being attacked like that."

As to why the former president and his cohorts didn't appear, Ms. Yaghjian said: "They don't have normal reactions. They are just so paranoid. They can't admit what they did is wrong."