



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – Sept. 23, 2020 Agenda Item 1

Presentation

Public Art Projects Work Plan

Recommended Council Action

Review *Public Art Works* plan and allow staff to use available funds for the work

Context with Key Issues

Public art is very popular with city residents because it improves the quality of life and sense of community, especially during times of crisis such as the current pandemic. Public art supports local artists, stimulates local businesses, generates tax revenue, and promotes Takoma Park's reputation as an arts-friendly city. The approval of the *Public Art Works* plan also will uphold the Council's commitment to the City's Cultural Plan, which the Council unanimously approved in 2018.

The City's public art projects were put on hold in the spring of 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic restrictions so not all of the FY 20 capital public art funds were spent. No additional capital arts funds were included in the FY21 budget, but the \$49,000 in FY20 arts funds were carried over into the FY21 budget via the first budget amendment of the fiscal year. As part of the Council's action on the budget amendment, the Council stated, "The Public Arts funds will not be expended without Council discussion and direction."

The Arts and Humanities Division has developed a *Public Art Works* initiative using these funds to incorporate public art into new public works projects and to provide needed maintenance of existing public art installations. The plan features proactive planning between several City departments and allows for greater dispersal of public art throughout Takoma Park to address race equity in availability to public art.

The *Public Art Works* program would integrate public art into infrastructure projects as they are designed and constructed. These projects have a longer timeline as they involve planning with multiple departments and often require requests for proposals from artists. If the Council approves staff to move ahead with the *Public Art Works* program, that coordination and planning work may begin. Projects that meet the City's purchasing threshold will come to Council for approval.

City staff are researching a sidewalk poetry program where poems could be imprinted in new sidewalks or sidewalk repairs across the city. Public art could be included in bus shelters, bike racks, crosswalks and other public works projects. These projects would allow for a fairer distribution of public art across the city. These efforts can also involve many people in the art process. For example, a poetry contest may be held to select poems for the sidewalks that are written by local residents to reflect the creativity and diversity of Takoma Park.

Like streets and sidewalks, public art must be maintained as it ages from the elements. There are two art maintenance projects we would like to undertake. One is the refurbishment of the *Guardians of the Neighborhood* mural at B.Y. Morrison Park which has become severely damaged by stains, mold, and graffiti. The mural celebrates Takoma Park's diversity by featuring people of color playing

musical instruments. The artist, Jim Colwell, can refurbish the mural, which is painted on movable panels that could be moved to another location at a later time if needed. The cost of the work is \$9,900. The other maintenance effort, at much less cost, is repair of Little Free Libraries throughout the community that have had damage to their doors or need other repairs and cleaning. We wish to be able to use funds to do these smaller maintenance projects as they arise.

Council Priority

A Livable Community for All

Community Development for an Improved and Equitable Quality of Life

Engaged, Responsive and Service Oriented Government

Environmental Considerations

To be decided with each public art project

Fiscal Considerations

The carryover of the FY 20 public art funds has been approved by the Council. The Council appropriated these funds in 2019 specifically for the creation and maintenance of public art projects across the city. No additional FY 21 capital public art funds were budgeted so the carryover funds are the only funding that is available to continue the City's capital public art programs.

Racial Equity Considerations

The *Public Art Works* program will allow for greater distribution of public art across the city, so that neighborhoods with higher percentages of people of color will be able to have more access to art.

The renovation of the deteriorating *Guardians of the Neighborhood* mural is needed so the City can be respectful in its depictions of people of color in City-funded public art installations.

Attachments and Links

Public Art Works Program Summary and Supporting Documents

[Council Resolution Adopting Cultural Plan](#)

[Empowering a Creative Community Cultural Plan](#)

PUBLIC ART WORKS

Submitted by Arts and Humanities Coordinator Brendan Smith

The Arts and Humanities Division has developed a new initiative called *Public Art Works* to incorporate public art in new public works projects across the city. City Manager Suzanne Ludlow, Public Works Director Daryl Braithwaite, and Planning and Development Manager Rosalind Grigsby all support this innovative plan.

Public Art Works will enhance racial equity by locating public art across the city in a proactive manner. Public art is one of the most popular programs offered by the City for many reasons. Public art supports local artists, stimulates local businesses, generates tax revenue, improves the quality of life, and upholds the City Council's commitments from its unanimous approval of the City's Cultural Plan called [*Empowering a Creative Community*](#).

Racial Equity

Many City-funded public art projects have been located in the downtown area or historic district where residents are predominantly white, wealthier, and older than residents in other neighborhoods. While some public art has been located downtown for logistical reasons, a greater emphasis is needed on placing public art across the wards of the city.

Public art is more crucial during times of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic because it provides a creative outlet, emotional support for the community, and a means of protest for social justice and racial equality. Public art meets people where they live and is available for everyone to enjoy while art museums are closed and personal interactions are limited due to social distancing.

The Arts and Humanities Division has been promoting racial equity through several recent projects, including the installation of five new Little Free Libraries in neighborhoods outside the historic district which didn't have any little libraries. Two local artists painted the little libraries which feature portraits of four groundbreaking female authors of color and one lesbian author.

Upcoming Projects

The Arts and Humanities Division is coordinating with the Public Works Department to incorporate public art into public works projects from their inception as an integral part of these projects rather than treating public art as a later addition. We are already developing two new projects with more projects to follow if funding is available.

Renovation of *Guardians of the Neighborhood* Mural

Like streets, sidewalks, and other public works projects, public art must be maintained as it ages and deteriorates from the elements. Our first priority is the refurbishment of the *Guardians of the Neighborhood* mural at B.Y. Morrison Park which has become severely damaged by stains, mold, and graffiti. The City-funded mural was installed in 1992 and has been a source of pride for more than a generation as the most prominent public art installation in Takoma Park.

The colorful mural promotes racial equality and the City's diversity by featuring several people of color dancing and playing instruments. A contract has been written with local artist James Colwell to remove and fully refurbish the mural panels before reinstalling them. The mural is painted on movable panels that can be easily installed in another location if the park is ever reconfigured.

Sidewalk Poetry Project

City staff are working with Takoma Park Poet Laureate Kathleen O'Toole on a sidewalk poetry program that would imprint short poems in new sidewalks or sidewalk repairs across the city. Similar to a [program in St. Paul, Minn.](#), the project would provide a fair distribution of public art across the city and a unique way to share poetry with the community. A poetry contest may be held to select poems written by local residents to reflect the creativity and diversity of our city.

More Project Ideas

There are many other public art projects that could be incorporated into public works projects with available funding and staff time. Some ideas include:

Crosswalks and Street Designs

Thermoplastic can be used on streets to create designs that celebrate immigrant communities, such as [traditional Chinese symbols](#) in Washington, D.C. [Paint the Pavement](#) projects have used professional artists and volunteers to paint colorful street designs which also serve as [traffic calming measures that may reduce pedestrian deaths](#).

Bus Shelters

Bus shelters are an ideal location for public art and a way to encourage public transportation which reduces the impacts of climate change. Some examples include the [bus shelter art program in Arlington](#) and the King County Metro system in Seattle where murals on [more than 3,000 bus shelters](#) have reduced vandalism.

Bike Racks

Bike racks can encourage bicycling as an environmentally friendly means of transportation. Artistic bike racks also help revitalize neighborhoods and bring visitors to local businesses, such as recent projects in [Pittsburgh](#) and [Nashville](#).

Funding Commitments

Most public art projects aren't completed in one year, and our entire public art program was put on hold in the spring due to pandemic restrictions so several projects weren't completed.

There are many opportunities to create public art across the city to foster a greater sense of racial equity and spur the imagination and creativity of city residents. We just need the available funds to make it happen.

09 September 2020

RE: Arts & Humanities Funding in Takoma Park

City of Takoma Park, City Council Members:

To address the need to fund the arts, first, one must ask what is the value of art in our world? And second, would the political optic be okay?

COVID-19 has given us a glimpse of life without museums, concerts, and movies. Art has value because it removes barriers and because it is for everyone. Why would Takoma Park, a city known for inclusiveness, remove a fundamental avenue for barrier-free inclusion? Art is not decorative. It is, and always has been, a human expression to be shared. In witness of the current social media, we have seen more examples of people expressing themselves to combat loneliness and depression. This shared creativity underscores that art is an innate human need, and an important way of allowing us to connect with each other and our community.

During COVID-19, art has been deemed "non-essential", but the lack of art is having a negative impact. The relationship between the arts and mental health is well established in the field of art therapy. In Nov 2019, WHO published a report stating that "the overall evidence base shows a robust impact of the arts on both mental and physical health". In the time of COVID-19, it is politically important for the City of Takoma Park to demonstrate its care for the mental health and well-being of its citizens and provide community-based coping mechanisms, especially during this stressful time.

The above points have been well documented with various publications. Please see attached documents for additional research statistics. The Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission provides free art exhibitions, concerts, and movies for the greater community to connect with each other without barriers, and cope together.

I implore you to please do not defund the arts.

Sincerely,

Gloria Tseng Fischer
Vice Chair, City of Takoma Park Arts and Humanities Commission



10 Reasons to Invest in Your Local Arts Agency During a Crisis

Local arts agencies—arts *councils*, arts *commissions*, *cultural affairs departments*—are an essential tool for community leaders as they rebuild their economies and promote social cohesion. The nation’s 4,500 local arts agencies (LAAs) support, present, and promote the dynamic value of the arts. Through their partnerships and leadership, LAAs are building healthier communities through the arts in the following ways:

1. **Support a robust jobs sector.** Arts and culture is an \$878 billion industry in the U.S. (nonprofit, commercial, education)—a larger share of the nation’s economy (4.5%) than transportation, tourism, and agriculture (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis). The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$166.3 billion in economic activity annually—spending by organizations and their audiences—which supports 4.6 million jobs and generates \$27.5 billion in government revenue. 1-in-10 LAAs are based in the city’s economic development agency.
2. **Drive commerce to local businesses.** 72% of Americans attend arts or cultural events, such as the theater, museum, zoo, or a musical performance. Arts attendees spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission (meals, retail, and lodging)—vital commerce for local businesses. Nationally, total event-related spending by arts audiences is \$103 billion. 49% of LAAs partner with their Chamber of Commerce to strengthen local businesses.
3. **Grow the creative economy.** 60% of employed adults say that the more creative and innovative they are at their job, the more successful they are in the workplace. Creativity is among the top five applied skills sought by business leaders, per the Conference Board’s *Ready to Innovate* report (72% say creativity is of high importance when hiring). Engagement in the arts is among the top indicators of creativity. More than one-third of LAAs produce programming that serves the business community (e.g., employee engagement, business volunteers for the arts, artist in residency).
4. **Promote tourism.** As travel restrictions begin to lift, arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences. 34% of arts attendees live outside the county in which the arts event takes place; they spend an average of \$47.57 apiece. 14% of nonlocal attendees had a lodging cost and spent \$162 per person. 62% of LAAs partner with their Convention and Tourism Bureaus.
5. **Unify communities.** The arts provide shared experiences in public spaces. 72% of Americans believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity;” 81% of the population says the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world;” and 73% agree that the arts “helps me understand other cultures better.” More than one-third of LAAs use the arts to address social equity, racial awareness, or civic engagement.
6. **Partner in education.** 76% of LAAs provide arts education programs or services in the community. Students with an arts education have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and more college-going as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students regardless of socio-economic status.
7. **Improve civic pride.** Public art enhances the identity and character of the community and promotes tourism, which attracts and retains new economy workers and businesses. 70% of Americans believe that the “arts improve the image and identity” of their community. 54% of LAAs manage a public art program.
8. **Support the health and well-being of the military.** The arts heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military servicemembers and Veterans as well as aid in their reintegration into the community. Creative arts therapies are consistently ranked in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments for effectiveness. 26% of LAAs engage with military or Veteran constituencies in their community.
9. **Promote healthy communities.** 21% of LAAs use the arts to address physical and mental health issues in their community. Nearly one-half of the nation’s hospitals provide arts programming for patients, families, and staff because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication. 73% of the population feels the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in.”
10. **Build social cohesion.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates. 67% of LAAs are delivering artistic content to raise community spirits and morale and strengthen community cohesion during the COVID-19 crisis.



10 Reasons to Support the Arts in 2020

The arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us—fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. The arts bring us joy, help us express our values, and build bridges between cultures. The arts are also a fundamental component of a healthy community—strengthening them socially, educationally, and economically—benefits that persist even in difficult social and economic times.

1. **Arts unify communities.** 72% of Americans believe “the arts unify our communities regardless of age, race, and ethnicity” and 73% agree that the arts “helps me understand other cultures better”—a perspective observed across all demographic and economic categories.
2. **Arts improve individual well-being.** 81% of the population says the arts are a “positive experience in a troubled world,” 69% of the population believe the arts “lift me up beyond everyday experiences,” and 73% feel the arts give them “pure pleasure to experience and participate in.”
3. **Arts improve academic performance.** Students engaged in arts learning have higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and college-going rates as well as lower drop-out rates. These academic benefits are reaped by students regardless of socio-economic status. Yet, the Department of Education reports that access to arts education for students of color is significantly lower than for their white peers. 91% of Americans believe that arts are part of a well-rounded K-12 education.
4. **Arts strengthen the economy.** The production of all arts and cultural goods in the U.S. (e.g., nonprofit, commercial, education) added \$877.8 billion to the economy in 2017, including a \$29.7 billion international trade surplus—a larger share of the nation’s economy (4.5%) than transportation, tourism, and agriculture (U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis). The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$166.3 billion in economic activity annually—spending by organizations and their audiences—which supports 4.6 million jobs and generates \$27.5 billion in government revenue.
5. **Arts drive tourism and revenue to local businesses.** Attendees at nonprofit arts events spend \$31.47 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and babysitters—valuable commerce for local businesses. 34% of attendees live outside the county in which the arts event takes place; they average \$47.57 in event-related spending. Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences.
6. **Arts spark creativity and innovation.** Creativity is among the top five applied skills sought by business leaders, per the Conference Board’s *Ready to Innovate* report—with 72% saying creativity is of high importance when hiring. Research on creativity shows that Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged in the arts than other scientists.
7. **Arts drive the creative industries.** The Creative Industries are arts businesses that range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and design companies. A 2017 analysis of Dun & Bradstreet data counts 673,656 businesses in the U.S. involved in the creation or distribution of the arts—4.01% of all businesses and 2.04% of all employees. (Get a free local Creative Industry report for your community [here](#).)
8. **Arts have social impact.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates.
9. **Arts improve healthcare.** Nearly one-half of the nation’s healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78% deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.
10. **Arts for the health and well-being of our military.** The arts heal the mental, physical, and moral injuries of war for military servicemembers and Veterans, who rank the creative arts therapies in the top four (out of 40) interventions and treatments. Across the military continuum, the arts promote resilience during pre-deployment, deployment, and the reintegration of military servicemembers, Veterans, their families, and caregivers into communities.



Public Art in Takoma Park Female Authors Featured in Little Free Library Project

In a public art project celebrating cultural diversity and women's empowerment, two local artists have painted five new Little Free Library boxes with portraits of groundbreaking female authors and activists.

The little libraries have been installed in areas of Takoma Park where there aren't little libraries nearby to provide more free books to local residents.

The City of Takoma Park's Arts and Humanities Division commissioned artists Samantha Contrino and Katie Macyshyn to paint the little libraries that were built by Walter Mulbry, the secretary of the Friends of the Takoma Park Maryland Library, who won a national award for his volunteer work building more than 20 Little Free Library boxes.

Three of the new little libraries celebrate Takoma Park's Ethiopian and Hispanic communities with portraits and inspiring quotes from Ethiopian legislator Senedu Gebru, Guatemalan human rights activist Rigoberta Menchu, and children's book author Juana Martinez-Neal. Black author and activist Maya Angelou and lesbian English author Virginia Woolf are featured



on two more little libraries.

"Public art is more than decoration or a pop of color. It inspires us and breaks into our daily lives to make us think," Takoma Park City Manager Suzanne Ludlow said. "Public art also tells the world that we value art and the challenges it brings."

Contrino and Macyshyn responded to a call for submissions with their proposal to portray female authors on the little libraries. "We realized we knew many prominent authors but not necessarily what they looked like," Contrino said. "We

hope that putting faces to the names will inspire local writers and artists."

Macyshyn hopes women, especially young women, will recognize themselves in the portraits on the little libraries and do their own research to become more activated global citizens. "There is a collective amnesia when it comes to the accomplishments of women because the social structure is most often maintained by men," she said. "It's heartening to see that people are starting to recognize systemic 'isms' for what they are."

You can see more artwork by the artists at samcontrino.com and katiepaintsportraits.com. More City-funded public art projects (including a giant knitted octopus and the Bird Calls Phone) are featured at takomaparkmd.gov/arts/public-art.

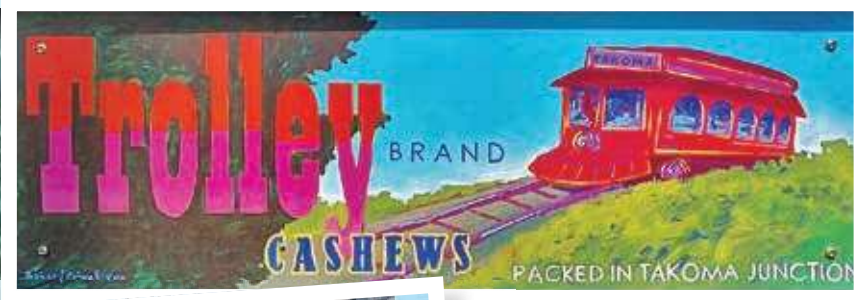
Public Art Signs Open Gateway to Local History

Colorful and quirky hand-painted signs featuring local history, or twists on it, were installed in 2010 on information kiosks and gateway structures across Takoma Park. Roscoe the Rooster, smiling tomatoes riding a seesaw, and a giant mango all make appearances.

After a decade of wear and tear from the elements, the local artist couple, Alison Baker and James Colwell, has printed their original designs on durable aluminum panels that were installed over the fading paintings last month. The City of Takoma Park's Arts and Humanities Division commissioned the installation of 23 new aluminum signs, so they would be preserved for many years to come. "We are thrilled to see the new signs reflect the color and vibrancy of the original designs," Baker said.

For the original City-funded public art project in 2010, Baker and Colwell thought of vintage crate labels as a way to feature the history of Victorian-age Takoma Park. The couple did some research and painted fruit crate label signs that represent aspects of

the city's history. A sign featuring "1883 Oranges" notes the year that Takoma Park was founded. A sign for "Trolley Cashews," which features a red trolley, was placed



on Carroll Avenue across the street from a former trolley stop and a building once used for the Barcelona Nuts roasting facility. A sign with oak trees called "B.F. Gilbert's Old Oaks" celebrated the founder of Takoma Park.

The preservation of the signs and the history which inspired them has been gratifying, Colwell said: "Over the past decade, many people have told us they like the signs and learning the back story behind them."



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