

Promoting Public Art

The working group *promoting public art* met January 23 at noon at Café Verde in the Peoples Food Coop. John Kotarski and Allison Buck attended. Colleen Crowley had a work conflict.

This was an organizational meeting and it was agreed that John Kotarski would lead the group by identifying meeting dates/places/times, creating an agenda, and reporting deliberations to the art commission.

It was decided that the inventory of artwork currently being assembled by Venita was essential before any effort could be directed to promote the art. We need to know what and where Ann Arbor's cultural assets are located before we recommend a course of action.

However, promoting Ann Arbor's public art would benefit from a strategic concept which we can explore before the completion of the inventory. This concept is similar to what was done for the Ann Arbor Downtown Historical Exhibits. Don Hammond was the graphic designer for the Downtown Historical Exhibits and John was tasked to reach out to Mr. Hammond so he might recommend a first step.

There was also discussion about the value of asking a public relations representative to address the art commission to suggest ways commissioners might engage public criticism. The challenge is would this be perceived as strategies for conflict resolution or talking points for media spin.

Meeting with Don Hammond:

John met with Don Hammond February 11 to discuss how the art commission might approach our goal of identifying and promoting public art.

Background:

Don is the graphic designer for the Downtown Historic Street Exhibit Program. He also has considerable experience working with UM, DDA, and local businesses.

He recommended:

1. Define the project and its goals

The value of an overarching program concept: creating a mission statement, aligning public art with other cultural elements, connecting strategic partners, as well as short and a long-range goals.

2. Define the process of the project implementation

Launching the project in phases: design charrette, pilot project, select rollout, etc.

3. Define and expand the meaning of "public art"

Expand the definition of public art to include design projects that exist as part of our physical environment, such as alternative energy projects, stormwater management projects, wayfinding and placemaking, pedestrian safety, etc.

This attempts to align the cultural elements of public spaces, including ecological and sustainability projects, within an overall coherent program that recognizes the diverse array of public art and design projects in Ann Arbor. Promoting public art and other projects within a coherent overall program could create stakeholder synergy.

This could be done with simple ID tags leading to online digital narratives. Expanding a promotional campaign that incorporated public art with wayfinding, alt energy, and pedestrian safety would promote a type of thoughtful design for Ann Arbor's public spaces moving forward. This could leverage stakeholders who might not be as enthusiastic if we just limited the promotional campaign to public "fine art"—paintings, murals, mosaics, sculpture, etc.

The physical ID markers and the online portal for all public art and design projects would look very similar. This expansion to a concept that includes all examples of public art and design would also serve to reinforce our mission of incorporating creative design in municipal construction projects.

4. Collaborate with educational institutions

Connect with educational institutions like U-M Stamps School of Art & Design to investigate possible collaboration. Faculty-led student teams could plan and design media elements that would be incorporated into our promotional campaign for public art. These elements would be real-world projects published to an online portal promoting Ann Arbor's public art and design. Real world projects embedded into class assignments is the gold standard for instructional design.

5. Plan efficient and appropriate on-site identification

Minimizing the physical labels to title, artist, number, and a QR code. This QR code would keep the physical label simple but allow for a portal to an online explanation/presentation/encyclopedia. This online digital media could be edited and expanded as needed. Since most of the work under this concept would be digital, it could be built in phases without noticeable changes to the physical label.

6. Planning for professional involvement

Front loading the cost of the project as an initial design fee could be attractive to a business (e.g. Duo Security) or a foundation (e.g. AA Community Foundation) as a major donation while locating the ongoing administration and production of media projects to a educational partner. Municipal oversight could be distributed throughout existing staff. This might be a way of managing costs to get professional results without burdening the City's general fund.

Don is willing to offer a simple outline of how we might move forward but it will not be a fully developed plan. To get a professional plan we need to pay a professional fee; which may be a part of our recommendation to staff.

More discussion will be held in the working group before making a recommendation.

Recommendation: We do not have any recommendations to make at this time.