

CITY OF ANN ARBOR

ANN ARBOR PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

2026 - 2027 Work Plan & Priorities

Ann Arbor Public Art Commission (AAPAC): Mary Thiefels (Chair), Sarah Fuller (Vice-Chair), Cynthia Harrison (City Council Liaison), Jamall Bufford, Allison Neal, Marietta Porter, John Kotarski, Peggy Leonard, Jenna Carter, and John Jourdan

I. Overview

Per Chapter 24 of the Ann Arbor Ordinance section 1:838 2B, “the oversight body shall by February 1 of each year, submit to City Council a plan detailing potential projects and desirable goals to be pursued in the next fiscal year, including enhanced projects and any proposed expenditure of donated grant, or other funds. The plan shall also include a recommendation as to which projects from the current Capital Improvements Plan are appropriate for designation as enhanced projects” The following is the information identified above. Each of these working groups works to achieve the tasks set forth in Chapter 24 of the [Ann Arbor Ordinance 1:838 \(2\)](#).

2026 Major Charge and Goal: Launch the AAPAC Mini Grant Program

In 2026, the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission’s primary charge is to design and launch a pilot Mini Grant Program that expands community participation in public art creation across the City of Ann Arbor. The program is intended to complement Capital Improvement Program-funded public art by supporting small-scale, community-initiated public art projects that activate public spaces, encourage local creative expression, and broaden access to public art resources.

Through this initiative, the Commission will focus on lowering barriers to participation in public art, fostering partnerships with residents, organizations, schools, and local businesses, and supporting temporary, experimental, or performance-based public art that may not be feasible within traditional capital project timelines. The Mini Grant Program is designed as a scalable pilot, allowing the Commission to test an accessible funding model while maintaining administrative feasibility and alignment with the duties set forth in Chapter 24 of the City Code.

II. Working Groups + Goals/related ordinance

1) Capital Improvement Project Work Group

Members: Sarah Fuller, Allison Neal, Mary Thiefels, Jenna Carter & David Esau (non-voting member)

Purpose: The Capital Improvement Project Work Group supports the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission’s advisory role related to public art integration within City capital projects. The group’s work focuses on identifying opportunities for enhanced projects, coordinating with relevant partners, and informing Commission recommendations to City Council and City administration in accordance with Chapter 24 of the City Code.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, the CIP Work Group will focus on the following activities:

- a. Foster a more regular and direct relationship with the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority (DDA) to better understand and support their public art projects;
- b. Continue to make recommendations to City Council for CIP projects that make sense for design enhancements
- c. Provide research and examples to help reinforce the importance of and show new ways/places public art has been seen/been successful in other cities.
- d. In the absence of the Design Review Board, identify opportunities to enhance “placemaking” (e.g. engage with the Planning department and/or the DDA).

Related Ordinance Authority:

- 1:838 (B) The plan shall also include a recommendation as to which projects from the current Capital Improvements Plan are appropriate for design as enhanced projects.
- 1:838 (C) Work with city staff to determine which capital improvement projects are appropriate for designation as an enhanced project and what type and amount of public art may be appropriate for such projects.
- 1:838 (D) Make recommendations, subject to the approval of the City Administrator, regarding disbursement of public art funds to acquire, produce, install, maintain, alter, alter, relocate, or remove public art.

2) Communications Work Group & Outreach Work Group

Members: Jamall Bufford & Marianetta Porter, & Sarah Fuller

Purpose: The Communications and Outreach Work Groups support the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission’s responsibility to promote awareness of public art, encourage public engagement, and strengthen relationships with the community and partner organizations. The groups’ work focuses on visibility, education, and connection rather than project delivery or policy advocacy.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, the Communications Work Group will focus on the following activities:

- a. Continue to promote the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission through continually updating the AAPAC website, Public Art Tour¹, and social media pages
- b. Explore the possibility of in-person Public Art Tours of the city’s collection
- c. Continue updating the [Public Art Idea Book](#) to stimulate imagination and inspire Public Art and Design projects for inclusion with private developments. Include periodic presentations of ideas at Design Review Board meetings.
- d. Identify opportunities to increase earned media coverage related to public art and Commission activities and explore appropriate metrics to track outreach effectiveness.

In 2025-26, the Outreach work group would like to achieve the following goals:

- a. Continue to engage with youth in the community to add non-voting youth to the commission.
- b. Continue to explore the AAPAC Leadership Forum to bring awareness to the AAPAC and collaborate on current and future projects.
- c. Continue to support and collaborate with local artists, arts organizations, and arts spaces to bring awareness of the AAPAC and forge strong relationships with local artists and the art-appreciating community (e.g. Creative Washtenaw, pARTy, and NCECA).
- d. Continue to communicate with local and possibly Statewide arts and cultural organizations to draft a statement of cultural freedom of expression, and on ways we might jointly protect and nurture the arts in the face of non-profit budget cuts and other headwinds, both proactively and after the fact. In other words, to prepare on behalf of the City Council, if they agree, a statement of principle for the Arts and Culture sector, attesting to our freedom from Federal Government interference and adhering to the First Amendment right of free speech in art, culture, historical research and interpretation, and that every voice may contribute peaceably.
- e. Connect with specific developers in town where appropriate and designate a liaison from AAPAC to participate in their public art and design project planning.
- f. Publicize the Fund – create a press release to share this opportunity with the community

3) Fundraising Work Group

Members: Allison Neal, Sarah Fuller, Mary Thiefels, and John Jourden

¹ <https://www2.a2gov.org/GIS/MapAnnArbor/PublicArt/>

Purpose: The Fundraising Work Group supports the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission’s responsibility to steward existing public art funds, recommend the use of endowment distributions, and identify opportunities to expand non-taxpayer funding for public art initiatives. The group’s work emphasizes sustainability, transparency, and alignment with the Commission’s advisory role under Chapter 24 of the City Code.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, the Fundraising Work Group will focus on the following activities:

- a. Continue to plan for stewardship of endowment - strategize around using interest earned by endowed funds for mini-grants and establish application protocols.
 - i. Hold first open application window for mini grants to support public art projects
 - ii. Publicize and build awareness to grow the Fund with the AACF in partnership with the Communications and Outreach Working Group
 - iii. Keep in contact with the AACF

Work to identify additional funding sources for CIP enhancement projects

4) Nominations/Leadership Review Work Group

Members: John Kotarski & Mary Thiefels

Purpose: The Nominations and Leadership Review Work Group supports the effective governance and continuity of the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission by facilitating member recruitment and annual leadership review in accordance with the Commission’s bylaws and applicable City requirements.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, the Nominations and Leadership Review Work Group will focus on the following activities:

- Identify and support the filling of Commission vacancies to maintain the authorized nine-member Commission, consistent with appointment procedures established by the Mayor and City Council.
- Facilitate an annual, confidential feedback process among current Commission members to support leadership reflection and continuity.
- Based on member feedback, assist the Commission in identifying and nominating candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair in accordance with Commission bylaws.

5) Special Projects Work Group

Members: Jamall Bufford, Peggy Leonard, & Sophie Grillet (non-voting), Jenna Carter

Purpose: The Special Projects Work Group supports discrete, non-CIP public art initiatives that advance public awareness, recognition, and experimentation in public art. The group focuses on special programs and partnerships that complement the Commission’s core responsibilities while remaining consistent with the Commission’s advisory role and available staff capacity.

During the 2025–2026 fiscal year, the Special Projects Work Group will focus on the following activities:

- a. Facilitate the biennial nomination and selection process for the Golden Paintbrush Award, consistent with established Commission practices and public engagement expectations.
- b. Explore options for introducing an additional annual physical award that recognizes contributions to public art or creative placemaking, subject to feasibility and Commission approval.
- c. Continue to enhance the online Public Art Tour by identifying opportunities to reference or link to other public art collections, where appropriate, without expanding the City’s ownership or maintenance responsibilities.
- d. Identify opportunities to incorporate performance-based public art, such as music or dance, into existing City celebrations or festivals through coordination with staff and event partners.
- e. Support coordination with Creative Washtenaw related to the Mini Grant Program by assisting with outreach, application promotion, and information-sharing, while recognizing that final administration, jurying, and contracting responsibilities remain subject to Commission approval and City processes.

III. Conclusion

Through the 2026–2027 Plan, the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission intends to carry out its advisory and oversight responsibilities as established in Chapter 24 of the City Code. The Commission will focus its efforts on supporting public art integrated with capital projects, stewarding existing public art assets, promoting public awareness, and launching the Mini Grant Program as a new tool to expand community participation in public art.

By organizing its work through clearly defined focus areas and working groups, the Commission aims to provide informed recommendations to City Council, coordinate effectively with City staff and partners, and responsibly use donated and endowment funds to advance public art in Ann Arbor. These efforts are intended to remain within the Commission’s authorized role and aligned with the goals and priorities identified in this plan.