

Public Arts Board

Rooms 202 and 203 Birmingham City Hall – October 18, 2017

Meeting called to order at 6:33 PM.

A) Roll Call –

Members Present: Rabbi Baruch Cohen, Jason Eddleston, Barbara Heller, Monica Neville, Anne Ritchie, Mary Roberts, Linda Wells

Student Members Present: Celeste Demps-Simons, Cecilia Trella

Audience Members: Mark Garrison, Cindy Rose

Administration: Sean Campbell, Assistant City Planner
Jana Ecker, Planning Director

B) Approval of Minutes – August 16, 2017

Motion by Linda Wells, seconded by Monica Neville to approve the August 16, 2017 minutes with no changes.

Yeas: 7 Nays: 0

The motion carried.

C) Unfinished Business

Proposed Sculpture Donation – *President Ford Memorial Wolverine*

Sean Campbell presented his memo on the President Ford Memorial Wolverine sculpture as proposed by Douglas Radcliffe North. The application was reviewed at the August 18, 2017 Public Arts Board (PAB) meeting during which members expressed their interest in the proposed donation but raised several concerns. Specifically, the Board requested to hear more information on the costs associated with constructing a foundation for the piece, whether and to what extent the artist had created duplicates of the wolverine sculpture, and if the artist had plans to donate this sculpture to other nearby communities.

Mr. Campbell explained that he contacted Mr. North via email about these issues and promptly received a response. With regard to the costs, Mr. Radcliffe had indicated **In response to the Board's questions at the October meeting, Mr. Radcliffe**

~~explained in an email that he would transport, install, and construct a foundation at no costs to taxpayers but delegate the responsibility of performing routine maintenance to the City. He added that he was currently proposing wolverine sculptures in 14 different Michigan communities and that his production scale would allow him to install a total of 61 sculptures around the state by December 31, 2018. Mr. Campbell recalled that Board members took issue at the number duplicates potentially taking away from the sculpture's value in Birmingham, but that they did not feel strongly enough about it to reject the application altogether.~~

~~Mr. Campbell routed the artist's application and supplementary materials to all the relevant City departments for preliminary comments. In the meantime, he explored various locations at the request of the PAB. There was discussion during the August 18, 2017 about having the sculpture installed within the close proximity of a civic building or monument. To assist the PAB in its review of possible locations **Following the direction of the Board**, Mr. Campbell took pictures and put together diagrams of recommended sites locations within proximity of a civic building or monument. The locations are as follows: the northeast corner of the City Hall front lawn; the northwest corner of the City Hall front lawn; the space west of the flagpole outside Baldwin Public Library (BPL); and in the main lobby inside BPL.~~

Mr. Campbell recalled that Board members took issue at the number duplicates the artist has indicated in his application. Several Board members maintained these feelings toward the proposed loan. Specifically, the concern was that the artist's envisioned number of sculptures around the state would take away from the uniqueness of the donation in Birmingham and that President Gerald Ford's connection with Birmingham is not deep enough to justify that.

~~Barbara Heller expressed her dislike for the sculpture, stating that she could not identify its connection with Birmingham. She expressed hesitance over accepting a sculpture that that could hypothetically have 60 other duplicates and that she was unsure of Mr. North's qualifications as his background appeared to lack any artistic experience.~~

~~Linda Wells echoed Ms. Heller's comments regarding the number of duplicates, adding that in theory there could be one in almost every county in the state or at least several installed in the more immediate region. If President Gerald Ford had a deeper connection with Birmingham, then she would be more open to the idea regardless of how many duplicates there were. Ms. Heller agreed by remarking that President Ford's history, as stated on the proposed plaque, does not seem especially important to Birmingham.~~

~~Mary Roberts commented that it is fine if the Board does not like the sculpture for what it is, but questioned whether it was possible to name other approved sculptures and their connections with Birmingham. She also felt that it is unfair to call his qualifications into question if he still sculpted something that could be considered art.~~

~~Anne Ritchie stated that she thinks that it dilutes the integrity of the sculpture to have 61 of them installed across the state.~~

Some members did see the potential value in having the sculpture serve as more of a commemorative plaque of a president who lived in the state instead of a normal art piece. It was conjectured that the sculpture has as much connection to the city as the other sculptures currently installed on public property.

~~Rabbi Baruch Cohen stated that he views the sculptures as something that commemorates a president who lived in the state. He went on to say that it is more of a plaque than an art piece. He was not sure if it could be considered as a normal art piece, but felt that if placed within the City's civic area that it would render it some honor.~~

~~Ms. Ecker commented that there is no rule that dictates what is and is not art. If he made the piece, he is arguably an artist. But his prestige, experience, and education can all be taken into consideration. She advised that it is up to the PAB to decide whether to recommend the donation to the City Commission. The City Commission will make the final decision, but will consider the PAB recommendation.~~

~~Ms. Ecker suggested that the PAB could approve the sculpture but not what is written on the proposed plaque.~~

~~Rabbi Cohen recommended passing the application on to the City Commission with the note that the Board does not deem it meritorious as an art sculpture, but perhaps as a commemorative piece.~~

~~Cecilia Trella stated that regardless of the sculpture's aesthetic value, its backstory, or the president it represents, seeing the sculpture in numerous Michigan cities would not reflect well on its placement in Birmingham.~~

Audience member and local resident Mark Garrison presented his opinion on the proposed donation. He stated whether the applicant is an artist or not, it seems that he gave someone a prototype to mass-produce it. Anything that is produced in large quantities like that, takes away from it.

~~Ms. Roberts brought up the iconic sculpture "The Thinker" as an example of a widely replicated piece. She contrasted this thought by saying that the community wants pieces that are unique to Birmingham and not those that are cast and produced for several other locations.~~

Audience member, resident, and representative of the Community for Barnum Park Cindy Rose believes that it will not reflect poorly on the Public Arts Board if they accept it. ~~She added that there are commissioners who will view it as a donation to the City and not the PAB because it commemorates a Michigan president.~~ In her opinion, it is reasonable to not love it, but she echoed Rabbi Cohen's suggestion of forwarding it to the City Commission with the note that it is meant more to commemorate a historical figure.

Ms. Ecker explained that if the PAB recommends rejecting the application but the City Commission contradicts that recommendation by approving it, the sculpture would come back to the PAB to determine a location.

~~Ms. Wells asked whether the PAB is required to provide an exact reason for why they do not recommend approval for the sculpture. Ms. Ecker answered no but stated that it would be a good idea because the City Commission may ask.~~

Motion by Jason Eddleston, seconded by Linda Wells, to recommend to the City Commission to not accept the President Ford Memorial Wolverine sculpture due to its mass production and that it would not be a unique piece in Birmingham.

Yeas: 7 Nays: 0

Mr. Eddleston commented that rejecting this sculpture might give an idea to other artists what the PAB considers to be significantly unique and relevant to the City.

D) New Business

Proposed Sculpture Donation – *Pioneers*

~~Mr. Campbell presented his report on an application that the City received from Mark Diem proposing to donate his sculpture "Pioneers."~~

The general consensus of the Board was that the sculpture was favorable. As discussion ensued, the Board became curious of the sculpture's history, whether it was one-of-a-kind, and if it had a theme. ~~Rabbi Cohen was particularly curious as to why the applicant had no information on the artist.~~

Rabbi Cohen asked whether ~~someone should assess the condition of the sculpture before accepting it and if the Board is required to choose a location before moving the application forward to the City Commission.~~ Mr. Campbell explained that it is not uncommon for the PAB to inspect sculptures as a part of their review. He added that a location would have to be selected before taking it to the City Commission. Ms. Heller agreed that it would be a good idea to inspect the sculpture to determine what the structural and maintenance needs are. ~~the PAB could postpone action on the application until someone takes a look at the sculpture and ascertains any further information about it.~~ Anne Ritchie recommended ~~making a motion to research the sculpture further and explore locations before recommending approval~~ **this effect**. Ms. Ecker advised that ~~the Board does not have to make a motion to do that~~ **this would not require a motion**, but the Board could instead direct staff to arrange a time and date for no more than three members to visit the sculpture at the applicant's house.

Mr. Garrison commented that it would be nice to obtain information on the artist and the story behind the work. That way, more information could be inscribed on a plaque for passersby to read.

Rabbi Cohen, Celeste Demps-Simons, Ms. Heller, and Ms. Ritchie volunteered to inspect the condition of the sculpture. Mr. Campbell would coordinate with Mr. Diem to get him in contact with the volunteers so that they could determine a date and time for the sculpture visit.

E) **Committee Reports**

Public Space Activation Subcommittee Report

Mr. Campbell explained that the Public Space Activation Subcommittee met the evening of October 17.

Rabbi Cohen provided a summary of the ~~discussions that took place at the meeting.~~ He noted that they discovered that both Baldwin Public Library and St. James Church were holding rock painting projects of their own. In addition, ~~he explained that~~ in early October he stumbled upon a an art fair stretching up and down Old Woodward that he was completely unaware of. **He brought up Community House's events as another example.** ~~These discoveries lead the subcommittee to feel~~ **In sum, the Subcommittee feels** that the PAB is left out of the loop when it comes to art-related programming in the community.

~~The consensus was that there is a need to unify the artistic vision for the City by integrating these efforts under the Board's objective of overseeing art education and~~

~~programming. He brought up the Community House's events as another example. The Subcommittee would like to become aware of more ways to involve the PAB in these efforts in a participatory capacity. He noted that the Subcommittee has specific interests of its own, such as enriching the alleyways with art, that would do better with the help of the community organizations and sponsors.~~

Ms. Ecker sensed that the Subcommittee's goal was to enhance communication with other art entities or organizations in the local area. She explained that some groups, despite not being art organizations per se, put on art fairs as fundraisers. She further explained that events on public property require a Special Event license which falls under the purview of the City Commission.

~~Ms. Heller noted that the Board intentionally schedules the Birmingham In Stitches event to occur in conjunction with the art fair. She stated that two art fairs occur during the year, one to raise funds for the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Center and the other to raise funds for Common Ground. Ms. Rose explained that Common Ground raises funds towards legal and to assist underserved communities.~~

~~Monica Neville commented that she wishes to avoid situations where the Board discovers an event that they could have participated in after it is already organized or underway. She added that it could go both ways insofar as other community organizations may be aware of programs or events in the name of the PAB. Moving forward, she envisions better communication and cooperation. She would like to know more about what is out there in terms of art-related events.~~

Ms. Ecker explained that Special Event applications are circulated to each City Department. ~~Ms. Ecker noted that there is a~~An email list notifies subscribers about upcoming events. The City keeps track of all details regarding upcoming events and contact information. She advised that staff could prepare a list of all art-related events to aide the Board in its efforts to integrate public art more around the City.

Mr. Eddleston also brought up the Subcommittee's discussion on putting together a survey to send out to all department heads as a way to get everyone the same page when it comes to art projects. He remarked that it would strengthen communication between City departments and the public boards ~~they are responsible for~~ to allow for more collaboration. No further discussion was had to this end.

Birmingham in Stitches

As chair of the program, Ms. Ritchie gave a summary report of the Birmingham In Stitches event. She reported that the event garnered 16 volunteers, two of which were new. Despite the success of the event, Ms. Ritchie felt that she was not able to put her

best foot forward as the lead organizer due to limited time and resources. She explained that attempting to obtain a sponsor presented a significant challenge for her. Further, she expressed that in order to retain the momentum of the program, it would be advantageous to hold the event annually instead of bi-annually. ~~To this point, she remarked Michael's and Walmart have changed their policies for sponsoring events, which created a hurdle in the process. There were also a few hiccups in terms of unapproved yarn installations and coordinating de-installation on the final day.~~

Ms. Heller took the opportunity to thank all of the organizers and volunteers of the event. She handed Mr. Campbell a recommended timeline for the event to keep on file for continuity purposes.

Ms. Ritchie had announced that there are still bins filled within yarn at the DPS storage facility that need to be picked up. Ms. Ecker advised that she would speak with DPS to take care of the situation.

F) Communication

Barnum Park Sculpture Pad

Ms. Ecker announced that the Barnum Park sculpture pad had been poured earlier that day. Ms. Rose added that City workers were guarding the site so it would not be defaced.

Ms. Roberts asked if there was a sculpture planned for this site. Ms. Rose replied that there was, but that she would have to check with the artist to see if he was interested in re-applying.

Damage to Dennis Oppenheim Sculpture

Mr. Campbell explained that the City discovered that one of the iridescent glass panels on Dennis Oppenheim's *Journey Home* had gone missing. ~~Staff reached out to the Hill Gallery, the gallery for the late artist, to this matter to their attention. After reaching out for question, the City received word from The Hill Gallery that they removed the pane after discovering that it was shattered. The Hill Gallery informed staff that they had removed the shattered remains of the panel after it had sustained what appeared to be an act of vandalism. Rocks and other debris were also found within the interior space of the glass-enclosed metal sculpture.~~ On September 17, John Sauve contacted the City on behalf of the Gallery to advise that he would be responsible for temporarily de-installing the sculpture to make the necessary repairs off-site. On Friday, September 22, Mr. Sauve, under the supervision of Department of Public Services, removed the sculpture from its site at the Baldwin Public Library. ~~Mr. Sauve is~~

~~unable to provide an estimated date of re-installation at this time as the sculpture needs to be completely redone. No details about when the sculpture would return are available at this time.~~

G) Public Comments

Mr. Garrison asked the Board if they were considering conducting a project similar to that of Royal Oak's which involves people submitting art ideas to be juried. The ideas ranged from paintings, to murals, to sculptures. He reported that there were a lot of submissions to this program. Ms. Heller asked if they had funding for this. Mr. Garrison said that the City paid the artists stipends. Ms. Heller stated that the City has very limited funds for public art. Ms. Ritchie explained that Birmingham decorated empty storefronts for a period of time. Ms. Heller liked the idea Mr. Garrison brought up, but they would have to look into sponsorship opportunities if they wanted to get anything off the ground.

H) Adjournment

With no further business being evident, the meeting was adjourned at 8:05 PM.