

2021 Public Arts Commission Annual Report to City Council

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Public Arts Commission. I'd like to report briefly on the projects we have under development, and also give you an idea of our goals for the coming year. I want to acknowledge and thank the volunteers serving on the commission both past and present. It is a pleasure to announce that after a few months of membership transition, the PAC is back to capacity and able to move more efficiently in decision making processes and governance. I want to acknowledge the efforts of Andy Stallman who graciously and tirelessly kept the projects and goals of the PAC on track during this most difficult year of local and global turmoil.

2021 continues to challenge all of us in unexpected ways. Like every entity and business affected by the coronavirus, drought, and the unrelenting effects of wildfires, we are faced with the task of trying to do more with less. Our funding, as mandated through the Transient Occupancy Tax, is significantly less than in previous years, but fortunately, the projects underway are paid for through our portions saved from healthier years, and we are presently able to continue our work towards enriching public art in Ashland.

After years of planning, the "Marking Ashland Places" project for Ashland's Railroad District is in its final stages. The PAC and Historic Commission have partnered on this project for several years with the purpose of providing a connection to the history of Ashland on today's landscape using site markers and artwork honoring specific places, events, and people throughout Ashland's 4 Historic Districts.

Five bronze medallions are currently being manufactured for this project and will be set into the sidewalks within the Railroad District. They depict some of the more iconic buildings captured in Terry Skibby's extensive collection of historic photos, as well as honoring a well-respected Chinese man and his family who were instrumental in the development and subsequent popularity of the Railroad District. We anticipate installation along A street and 4th street within a few months following production.

In partnership with these medallions will be the installation of a Railroad-themed piece of artwork honoring this transformative period in Ashland's history. It will be placed within Railroad Park at the bottom of 7th street, close to the walking and biking path. The Call for Artists went out at the end of 2020 and projects were reviewed thoroughly by a selection panel in early 2021. Their recommendation was to endorse the proposal submitted by Oregon artists, Jennifer Corio and David Frei. The PAC and the Ashland City Council both enthusiastically endorsed the selection.

Artist's Jennifer Corio and David Frei have consulted with their structural engineer and are in the early phases of fabrication. We anticipate that this sculpture will be installed in 2022. We look forward to working with the Historic Commission, APMC and other departments to plan a celebratory community event which commemorates these additions to the Ashland landscape.

The PAC showcased the newly created video presentation titled “The Power of Public Art” through Zoom in June. By using fantastic images of public art throughout the world, and thoughtful, informative narratives, this wonderful presentation illustrates how public art can:

- 1) ignite the viewer’s imagination and stimulate thought about our place in society
- 2) allow the viewer to physically engage with the artwork and enjoy a larger space in unique ways
- 3) celebrate the local spirit and history captured within the artwork while reinforcing civic pride
- 4) fuse an iconic image with a monumental event or a well-known cultural site

The commission has already begun to offer this presentation to various community groups and organizations in Ashland, around the valley, and virtually beyond. I would like to give special thanks to those who worked tirelessly to create this presentation: Councilor - Stephen Jensen; Associate Planner and Staff Liaison - Aaron Anderson; past commissioners - Andy Stallman, Sandy Friend, Tom Furmark, Allison Renwick, and Dana Bussel; Actor – Anthony Heald; Audio Engineer – Josh Harvath; and Promotor - Peter Finkle.

In July, the BIPOC Celebration Mural was approved by both the PAC and the Ashland City Council. This 171foot mural is currently being installed at Ashland High School along South Mountain Avenue. It aims to not only remind our community of the senseless death of Aidan Ellison and encourage Ashland citizens to do better, but also honors the work of influential BIPOC community members and celebrates their legacies.

This mural is being produced by a variety of community members whose goal is to help bring conversations to the surface and make clear that both Ashland and Ashland High School are places to honor the necessity of inclusivity. Its placement in our community will remind Ashland of its antiracist responsibilities and create a more inviting and inclusive space for BIPOC. The mural should be complete this fall and a dedication celebration is scheduled for November 23, 2021, which is also the anniversary of Aidan Ellison’s death.

Many members of the PAC have served on the commission for less than six months. We will be coming together in the next few months to structure a new strategic plan. We remain committed to promoting art in Ashland and building strong connections within our community. Furthermore, the PAC is dedicated to fostering relationships with other commissions, celebrating the history of Ashland and highlighting its diverse communities.

Once again, we thank you for your continued support and confidence in our work. The opportunity to be of service to our community is a great pleasure for all of us.