

Council Business Meeting

September 20, 2022

Agenda Item	Approval of Public Art in Ashland Creek Park	
From	Joseph Lessard	City Manager
Contact	joe.lessard@ashland.or.us ; 541-552-2103	

SUMMARY

Beginning in early 2020, a volunteer citizen group began meeting with the objective of creating a permanent public art installation inspired by the Say Their Names Memorial. The project of creating a Say Their Names Memorial was presented as a collaborative project sponsored by individual community members, along with Black-led organizations: SOARB, BASE, SOBLACC, and SOEquity. In March 2022, based on this independent process, the Say Their Names Coalition selected Micah BlackLight’s sculpture proposal, “*Ancestor’s Future: Crystallizing Our Call*”. The proposal has received support from the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission and the Public Arts Commission, and it now moves to the City Council for final approval.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

- Public Arts Master Plan
- Comprehensive Plan – Transportation Element: Policy (10.15.06) #7 Encourage public art along multi-modal travel corridors.
- Resolution No. 2021-01 – A Resolution Declaring the City of Ashland’s Commitment to Social Equity and Racial Justice and Repealing Resolution No. 2020-15

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

On August 16, 2022, the council received numerous public comments of support for the sculpture proposal, “*Ancestor’s Future: Crystallizing Our Call*”.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Proponents for a permanent Say Their Names art installation approached the City in mid-2020 after the T-shirt installation at Railroad Park was abruptly removed overnight. In October 2020, volunteer representatives of the groups proposing to create the Say Their Names public art installation met with City Staff to discuss the project. Staff in attendance included Ashland City Attorney David Lohman and Associate Planner Aaron Anderson. It was expressed by the volunteer group at this meeting that the call for submissions was intended to be limited to submissions from local artists that are members of the BIPOC community. At this meeting, Mr. Lohman clarified that a governmental solicitation and selection process could not include any such selection criteria relating to the race of respondents. Given this clarification the proponents of the Say Their Names public art project pursued their own non-governmental solicitation process independent of the Public Art Acquisition process as described in the Ashland Municipal Code. By initiating a process independent of the City, to seek out an artist within the BIPOC community, and to present artwork to the City as a gift, this independent action was not subject to a City run selection process. These volunteers formed the Say Their Names Coalition in February 2021 and undertook their own solicitation and selection process which included community involvement as well as establishment of a selection panel inclusive of Black members of the community. In March 2022, based on this independent process, the Say Their Names Coalition selected Micah BlackLight’s sculpture proposal, “*Ancestor’s Future: Crystallizing Our Call*”. According to the BASE project web page the final artwork proposed to be gifted to the City is intended to be:

“A public, community-oriented art installation around the theme of Black Lives Matter in the Rogue Valley. This theme includes but is not limited to: a reflection on the Black Lives Matter movement and this important chapter in our nation’s history, an illumination of the experiences of Black residents in the Valley, and an homage to the life of Aidan Ellison.... The aim of this endeavor is to create a dialogue about race, bring together Rogue Valley residents of all backgrounds, and serve as a declaration of our commitment in Ashland and the Rogue Valley that Black lives matter. We hope that through continued



conversation, recognition of our shared history, and this public avowal, that we can work towards becoming a more united and inclusive Rogue Valley community.”

On June 17, 2022, the Public Arts Commission (PAC) reviewed the conceptual sculpture and recommended the Ashland City Council endorse the proposal and accept the final completed sculpture as a gift to be included in the City’s Public Art collection. The PAC further recommended that the City Council allocate funding to support this sculpture and its installation.

On July 13, 2022, the Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission (APRC) considered proposed locations for the sculpture and approved the location of the sculpture to be Ashland Creek Park, if accepted into the City’s Public Art collection. The APRC further supported the artist’s request for financial support from the City of Ashland for engineering and installation.

Subsequent to the Public Art Commission and Park Commission reviews of the proposal, concerns were raised regarding the selection process that took place to select the artist and conceptual artwork. To evaluate these concerns the PAC discussed the issue at their August 20, 2022 PAC meeting and clarified their motion. The updated motion from the August meeting reads as follows:

Commissioners Preskenis/Bloom m/s to recommend that the Public Arts Commission endorse the sculpture design concept of Micah BlackLight’s “Ancestor’s Future: Crystalizing Our Call” as the Say Their Names Collectives gift to the City of Ashland, and that the art concept will have a final review for quality upon completion, and in solidarity to the message of social and racial justice that the Public Arts Commission recommends that the City Council allocates the funds or labor required for the site preparation and installation of the sculpture.

Voice Vote: Commissioners Preskenis, Englund, Bloom, AYE. Commissioner Smith abstained. Motion passed 3-0.

It is important that the city of Ashland acknowledge its history of supporting racial discrimination and conflict, and that the City acts to repudiate that past by advancing efforts to build a future where everyone belongs; where every individual is welcomed, accepted, and recognized for their individuality and contribution to building a better society.

The Public Arts Commission's is commended for their review and support for the Say Their Names art installation as a direct offer of donation to the City Council, and appreciation to the Parks and Recreation Commission for approving the Say Their Names installation in Ashland Creek Park.

As this piece did not follow the usual donations solicitation process, it still needs to be modeled and engineered to completion so that it can be fabricated and permanently installed. It also needs time for the solicitation of funds to be completed, which can now proceed with the knowledge that the City will fulfil its role of providing a location, installation base, and landscaping for the installation.

In advance of the next steps to developing the “*Crystallizing Our Call*” art piece, it is requested that the Park Commission continue to consider the final location of the installation within the Ashland Creek Park, in consultation with Mr. Blacklight, for possible alternative green-space areas with the proposed community-decorated stepping-stones potentially providing a contemplative pathway to its viewing and thoughtful consideration.

Finally, in accepting the Say Their Names concept it is suggested that Mr. Blacklight and the installation's supporting donors work to complete the project's development for final installation. It is requested that this effort include providing at least two public presentations to the community to be hosted by the Public Arts Commission (or subsequently established Public Arts Advisory Committee) as part of their efforts to build bridges of art understanding and appreciation within the Ashland community. These presentations can serve to lead the effort of asking community members to participate in decorating, and ultimately placing, the pathway stepping-stones to the art installation—an effort which may be able to proceed in advance of the final public art installation. Presentations are also important for art such as “*Ancestor's Future: Crystallizing Our Call*” as a mean of actively pursuing inclusion by engaging with the community through informational, educational, and participatory outreach. This art should act as a catalyst for dialog, awareness, and healing; to building community awareness of our past, and of our vision for the future.

FISCAL IMPACTS

The art piece is offered as a gift to the City. It will require time for the fundraising, modeling, and engineering to be completed prior to the permanent installation of the proposed sculpture. The City will then fulfil its role of providing funds for installation, landscaping, and associate costs from restricted TOT Funds in the 2023-2025 Biennial Budget.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends acceptance of this site-specific sculpture subject to the suggestions referenced above.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

I move to provisionally accept the proposed art piece, “*Ancestor's Future: Crystalizing Our Call*” into the city of Ashland public art collection subject to the following steps to be completed prior to final acceptance:

- That the Park Commission, in consultation with its artist, Mr. Blacklight, consider the final location for the art piece that will best showcase the art installation within the Ashland Creek Park;
- That at least two public presentations of the sculpture proposal be hosted by the Public Arts Commission (or subsequently established Public Arts Advisory Committee) to act as a catalyst for dialog and awareness of our past, and of our vision for a just and inclusive future; and
- That the art concept have a final review and approval for quality upon completion by the Public Arts Commission, and for the identification and resolution of any installation requirements by the City's Park and Recreation and Public Works Departments.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

- Design Proposal
- APCR Draft Meeting Minutes – July 13, 2022

