



Council Business Meeting

May 7, 2024

Agenda Item	Playwright Walk Initiative			
From	Brandon Goldman Jennifer Chenoweth		Community Development Director Associate Planner	
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Item Type	Requested by Council <input type="checkbox"/> Update <input type="checkbox"/> Request for Direction <input type="checkbox"/> Presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Consent <input type="checkbox"/> Public Hearing <input type="checkbox"/> New Business <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unfinished Business <input type="checkbox"/>			

SUMMARY

The Playwright Walk initiative aims to celebrate playwrights by placing plaques along city sidewalks that contain quotes from a variety of playwrights. Approval from the Council is sought for the project's implementation on City property or right of way.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

- Belonging through mutual respect and openness, inclusion and equity
- Quality of life that underpins the City's economic vibrancy

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ashland City Council is requested to approve the Playwright Walk project, enabling collaboration between Barry and Kathryn Thalden, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Southern Oregon University Center for the Arts, the City of Ashland, and the Ashland Chamber of Commerce. This approval would facilitate the ongoing selection, production, and installation of plaques without further council action. The initial plaques will be funded through a generous donation from the Thaldens, with future installations expected to be sponsored by community members, businesses, or other organizations. Approval would also confirm that the use of public rights of way by this project is appropriate and supported, promoting continued community involvement and expansion of the Walk.

This project aims not only to enhance the visual and cultural appeal of Ashland for residents and tourists alike, but also to offer quotes on the plaques that uplift the human spirit and delve into the human condition. By presenting these enduring themes, the Playwright Walk aspires to provoke reflection and foster a deeper connection among community members and visitors.

The fiscal sponsorship from private benefactors and the Ashland Chamber of Commerce Foundation significantly streamlines the procurement process for the Playwright Walk compared to a traditional public procurement process or a request for proposals that the City might undertake for a City sponsored public art project. This accelerated approach enables the expedited production of plaques featuring selected quotes. The collaborative framework establishes clear parameters for the program: Oregon Shakespeare Festival (OSF) and Southern Oregon University (SOU) provide the quotations, SOU art students offer graphic design support, and the City of Ashland facilitates access to public right of way locations and manages the cataloging of the plaque inventory. This efficient coordination ensures that



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all elements of the project are seamlessly integrated, thereby enhancing the cultural landscape of the community. Furthermore, the City could support this initiative by developing a "story map" tour of the Playwright Walk. This GIS-enabled self-guided walking tour would be similar to the existing [Public Art map](#) and would be hosted on the City's website, enhancing accessibility and engagement with this enriching experience.

Any installation of plaques within public sidewalks must adhere to the requirements set forth by the U.S. Access Board and the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) to ensure ADA accessibility, particularly regarding the height of letters and changes in elevation. Additionally, the depth of the plaques must be flush with the surrounding sidewalk, and all sidewalk panels installed as part of this project must meet the specifications and standards outlined by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The City of Ashland Public Works Department will provide guidance in the development of the prototype plaque to ensure compliance with these standards.

The Public Art Advisory Committee and the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee have both evaluated the Playwright Walk proposal at their regular meetings and have each provided their endorsements. Additionally, the Public Arts Advisory Committee recommends that the final plaques be accepted into the Public Art Collection, and the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee has shown a strong desire to be actively involved in the review and advisory process for the final prototype plaque prior to its installation on the Playwright Walk.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Funding for the initial round of plaques for the Playwright Walk has been generously provided by a local philanthropist, ensuring the project's launch without financial impact on municipal resources. Additionally, the Ashland Chamber of Commerce Foundation has agreed to serve as the fiscal sponsor for the program, overseeing the financial aspects and further donations. At present, there is no direct funding request being made to the City. This arrangement allows the project to proceed with minimal financial risk to the city while leveraging private support to enrich the community's cultural environment.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS, MOTIONS and/or OPTIONS

Motion option 1:

"I move to approve the Playwright Walk initiative as presented, allowing the use of City property and public rights of way for its implementation, and to accept the future plaques into the City's public art collection."

Motion option 2:

"I move that the following amendment(s) to the Playwright Walk project are incorporated as follows : _____, and thereby allow the use of City property and public rights of way for its implementation, and to accept the future plaques into the City's public art collection."

Council action is required to enable the Playwright Walk project to proceed utilizing public property or sidewalks within public rights of way; failure to approve this project will result in the project being unable to move forward as envisioned.



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REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

- **Playwright Walk Concept Plan**
- [PAAC minutes March 21, 2024](#)
- [HPAC minutes April 3, 2024](#)

Playwright Walk Conceptual Plan

April 2024



ABSTRACT

This concept plan explores an idea to create a Playwright Walk in Ashland that will encourage locals and tourists to walk and explore a designated route, viewing plaques that celebrate a diverse range of local and famous playwrights from different periods and backgrounds. The quotes will offer insight into universal themes of life, love, struggle, and triumph. The concept is being made possible by fostering partnerships between philanthropists, local organizations, and government entities.



Summary and Background information

This conceptual plan outlines a process for initiating the establishment of a Playwright Walk in Ashland, Oregon. The intent of a Playwright Walk in Ashland is to encourage locals and tourists to walk and explore a designated route, viewing plaques that celebrate local and famous playwrights. This proposal is a partnership between Barry and Kathryn Thalden, City of Ashland, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Chamber of Commerce, and Southern Oregon University. The proposal is not city initiated, rather a private entity is bringing this idea forward. Funding for the first set of plaques would be through philanthropic donations.

An initial meeting was held on January 12, 2024, to present the idea and discuss the next steps for moving the project forward. During the January meeting, Barry and Kathryn Thalden explained that they recently visited Iowa City, Iowa and were inspired by the *Iowa City's Lit Walk*; a literary walk where the sidewalks are marked with quotes and images of writers who have ties to Iowa. The markings are all unique in style and design. See last page for a few example installations of the Lit Walk in Iowa City, Iowa.



Photo: City of Ashland sidewalk near Plaza and Lithia Park.

Players

The Thaldens, City of Ashland, Ashland Chamber of Commerce, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Southern Oregon University

Possible Email List

Barry and Kathryn Thalden

City of Ashland: Tonya Graham, Sabina Cotta, Bob Kaplan, Brandon Goldman, Scott Fleury, Jennifer Chenoweth

City of Ashland Public Arts Advisory Committee:
Ken Engelund



Photo: Example of Lit Walk plaque set in sidewalks in Iowa City, Iowa

City of Ashland Historic Preservation Advisory Committee: Beverly Hovenkamp
City of Ashland Chamber of Commerce: Sandra Slattery
Oregon Shakespeare Festival: Tim Bond, Tyler Hokama
Southern Oregon University: Andrew Gay, Jackie Apodaca, David Bithell

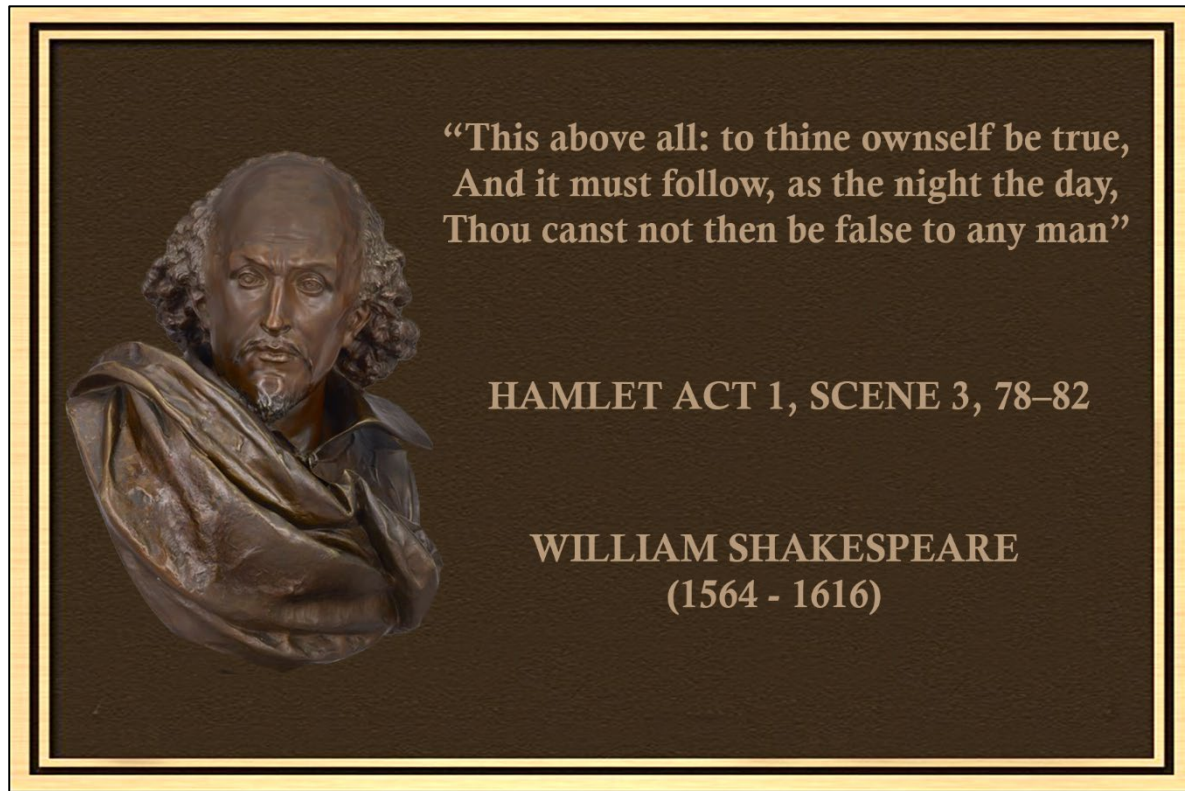


Photo: Mockup example plaque by Oregon Shakespeare Festival staff (February 2024).

Concept Core Elements

Plaques with Quotes: Install bronze plaques at various locations in a culturally vibrant area.

Each plaque features a quote from a famous playwright that reflects on the human condition.

- The selection of quotes to be suggested by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in collaboration with the Southern Oregon University Theatre Department to represent a *diverse range of playwrights* from different periods and backgrounds, offering insight into universal themes of *life, love, struggle, and triumph*.
- The design of the plaques for the Playwright Walk could be creatively assisted by the Southern Oregon University Art Department, ensuring a coherent style and vibrancy that resonates with the artistic and cultural ethos of the project. SOU art students may have the opportunity to work with a local foundry artist in the hands-on creation of these plaques.
- The Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with the City, can strategically select key, highly visible locations for the plaques in Ashland, not only to showcase the significance of the Playwright Walk but also to assist in directing foot traffic through Ashland's bustling commercial areas, enhancing the vibrancy and accessibility of the community.

- The Chamber of Commerce can (and has been approved to) receive donations for this project to the Ashland Chamber Foundation, a 501 c3.
- The project is designed to reflect the City of Ashland's core Values: *Belonging through mutual respect and openness, inclusion and equity, and Quality of life that underpins the City's economic vibrancy.*



Photos: Examples of Lit Walk plaques set in sidewalks in Iowa City, Iowa

Interactive Story Map: The City of Ashland as a partner on this project could develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) Story Map that visitors can access online. The Ashland Playwright Walk would focus on the educational and interactive exploration of playwriting through technology and art, providing an engaging experience for visitors to connect with the timeless themes portrayed in theatrical works.

- **Tour Guide:** The map acts as a digital guide, allowing users to explore the locations of each plaque in a logical, self-guided tour.
- **Playwright Information:** For each plaque location, the Story Map provides detailed information about the playwright, including their biography, key works, and the context of the selected quote.
- **Multimedia Content:** Incorporate photos, videos, and audio clips where visitors can watch performances of the plays, listen to readings, or view interviews and documentaries about the playwrights.
- **User-Friendly Interface:** Ensure the Story Map is easy to navigate with



Photo: Example of Lit Walk plaque set in sidewalks in Iowa City, Iowa

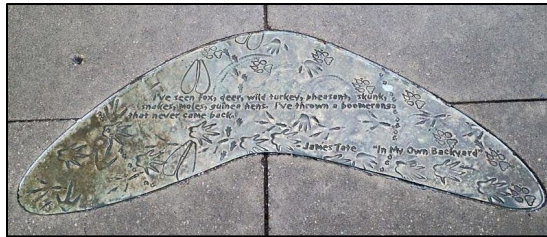
a user-friendly interface, suitable for a wide range of audiences, including students, tourists, and theater enthusiasts.

- **QR Codes:** Each plaque features a QR code that links directly to the corresponding section of the Story Map. Scanning the code with a smartphone allows visitors to instantly access a wealth of information and multimedia content about the playwright and the quote on the plaque.

Theme

Ashland's Theatrical Legacy: Reflecting Humanity, Inspiring Community

This potential theme for the Playwright Walk in Ashland, Oregon, captures the city's deep-rooted theatre tradition, focusing on selected quotes that offer profound reflections on the human condition. It aims to inspire and unite the community, celebrating our shared experiences and emotions through the timeless art of playwrighting.



Photos: Example of Lit Walk plaques set in sidewalks in Iowa City, Iowa

Example Quotes

The following example quotes were provided by Oregon Shakespeare Festival staff in collaboration with Southern Oregon University Theatre Department staff.

Additional quotes will be included from other playwrights like Lillian Hellman, Anton Chekov, Tennessee Williams, Henrik Ibsen, Karen Zacarias, etc.

1. "Confront the dark parts of yourself, and work to banish them with illumination and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing."– August Wilson
2. "One cannot live with sighted eyes and feeling heart and not know or react to the miseries which afflict this world."– Lorraine Hansberry
3. "I have been interested in people living in the margins of society, and I do have a mission to tell the stories of women of colour in particular. I feel we've been present throughout history, but our voices have been neglected."– Lynn Nottage
4. "Let everything on the stage be just as complicated, and at the same time, just as simple as in life...people are having a meal—just having a meal—yet all the time their happiness is being made or their lives are being broken up." – Anton Chekhov

5. "One must never lie. Art has this great specification one can mislead the public or even God; but there is absolutely no lying in art." – Anton Chekhov
6. "The artist must not judge his characters or their words. He must only be an impartial witness." – Anton Chekhov

Timeline

The project could be implemented in phases.

- Phase I (Winter 2024–Spring 2024): Initial concept, coordination, presentations, designs, and approvals.
- Phase II (Spring 2024–Fall 2024): Design and casting of plaques
- Phase III (Fall 2024–?): Installation

Next steps

Cost Estimation:

- Obtain general estimates for the cost of producing and installing each plaque, considering materials, labor, and any unique design elements.

Committee Presentations:

- Present the overarching concept of the Playwright Walk to the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee (HPAC) and the Public Arts Advisory Committee (PAAC), highlighting its vision and the broader impact it could have on the community.
- Seek preliminary approval and general feedback from these committees.
 1. During the March 21, 2024, regular PAAC meeting there was a presentation of the Playwright concept and the following motion passed unanimously, *"The Public Arts Advisory Committee endorses the Playwright Walk Project as a gift to the City from philanthropists, Barry and Kathryn Thalden, according to AMC 2.29.110 and as outlined in the attached Concept Plan. PAAC recommends approval [of the project's concept] to the City Council and to include that the final plaques be accepted into the Public Art Collection."*
 2. During the April 3, 2024, regular HPAC meeting there was a presentation of the Playwright Walk Concept Plan, and a motion passed unanimously to support the concept of the Playwright Walk with the notion that they will be actively involved in the review and advisory process for the final prototype plaque prior to its installation on the Playwright Walk.



Photo: City of Ashland sidewalk on Main Street

City Council Engagement:

- Approach the City Council with a general presentation, supported by the positive responses from HPAC and PAAC, emphasizing the project's overall benefits and goals.

Mapping and Permits:

- Explore potential locations and routes for the plaques and research any necessary permits or coordination requirements, especially for sensitive areas.

Coordination with ODOT:

- Initiate discussions with the Oregon Department of Transportation for installing plaques in public areas, ensuring all regulations are met.

Plaque Design Process:

- Develop a basic framework for selecting the content, materials, and design themes of the plaques, prioritizing durability, and relevance. This would be achieved in collaboration with Southern Oregon University, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and Chamber of Commerce.
- *Organizational Roles*
 - Collaborate with Oregon Shakespeare Festival to leverage their expertise in theatrical arts and to gain insights into engaging the public with dramatic literature. OSF to provide curation and selection of playwrights and quotes.
 - Partner with Southern Oregon University for academic and artistic insights. SOU to provide artistic graphic design options for the selected plaques.
 - Work with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure the plaques contribute to local business vitality and are integrated into the commercial landscape of Ashland.

Student and Community Involvement:

- Consider a design competition or program for SOU students and local artists, perhaps in collaboration with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, to foster community engagement and creative input. As of 3/7/2024, SOU students to begin design process through art class starting in April 2024.
- Consider using a local foundry so that students can learn hands-on skills of making the plaques. As of 3/7/2024, local sculptor, Jack Langford will create a sample plaque for evaluation of process and expenses.
- Consider student created video to capture the art making process.

Preliminary Specifications & Installation

- Size and shape of plaques...coming soon
- Height of letters in the quotes will need to meet requirements of the US Access Board and the Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) to maintain ADA accessibility
 - Change in elevation (**R302.6.2 Changes in Level**) is an important factor.

Changes in level of ¼ inch (6.4 mm) maximum shall be permitted to be vertical. Changes in level between ¼ inch (6.4 mm) and ½ inch (13 mm) shall be beveled with a slope not steeper than 1:2 (50.0%). Changes in level greater than ½ inch (13 mm) up to 6 inches shall have a 1:12 (8.3%) maximum slope. Changes in level greater than 6 inches (150 mm) shall comply with R407.

- Depth of plaques in the sidewalk must be flush with the surrounding sidewalk
- For sidewalk panels that are poured as part of this project, the standards/specifications will need to meet the ODOT Standard Specifications and ODOT Standard Drawings and Details

Curtain Call Summary

This project, under an established yet flexible framework, has the potential to evolve and endure through time, maintaining a dynamic canvas for creativity and adaptability, allowing it to continuously resonate with and reflect the changing tapestry of the community and the arts.



Photos: City of Ashland sidewalks downtown.