

George Kramer

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Ashland Public Arts Commission
c/o Margaret Carrington, Chair
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RE: Gateway Island Art Project

Dear Ms. Garrington & Members of the Commission

Travel prevents me from attending the Sept 10 public presentation by the three finalists for the "Gateway Island" art project. Please consider this my public testimony on this issue and add it to the public record.

While I appreciate the value of public art in general, I am unimpressed and disappointed with the choices that the Commission has made and the direction you are attempting to take the city with this project.

The three finalists are, uniformly abstract metal sculptures that have absolutely nothing to do with Ashland. I suspect that is probably your point. Simply put, these designs amount to Art for Art's Sake, which may be fine, but I simply cannot support them in the location you propose. I am flummoxed by the Commission's repeated insistence on ignoring the context of its installations, as if Ashland were somehow a blank canvas for the random insertion of art.

This particular location is, by your own language, intended as a "Gateway." To what, I might ask? I can only assume that you are referencing the downtown core. The historic downtown core is an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its architecture, design, and relationship to the HISTORY of Ashland. The commission's previous efforts at Public Art in the downtown have uniformly ignored that history and its traditional aesthetic by design. I believe that approach is wrong-headed, naïve, and will be at best short-lived. Now, with this project, however, the commission is contemplating a violation of downtown Ashland's **scale** as well. These three proposed works, whatever their merit, are simply too large, ranging from 12' to 30' feet in height. Each would be happily at home in front of an upscale office park or corporate headquarters, surrounded by a small landscaped island at the head of acres of parking. They do not belong at that head of Ashland's historic downtown core. It is bad enough that they have absolutely nothing to do with Ashland's downtown, something the Commission apparently prefers, but their sheer size makes that incompatibility entirely egregious.

The Commission suggests a goal of creating a work that is "iconic" for Ashland. Sadly, that may well be accurate. But if this sort of thing is "iconic" of what Ashland has become and reflects what Ashland believes is appropriate for its downtown " it is probably more "ironic" than you realize. Better that we have nothing in the island and leave it alone for the funky "progress thermometer" of the next community fund-raiser than waste \$100K of public money on another piece of non-local, non-related, plop art.



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C: Mayor John Stromberg, Greg Lemhouse, Ann Seltzer (via E-mail)