

BUFFALO ARTS COMMISSION

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POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR PLACEMENT OF PUBLIC ART ON CITY PROPERTY

INTRODUCTION

The Buffalo Arts Commission is established under the Buffalo City Charter to advise the Mayor, Common Council and City Departments concerning all matters in the visual and performing arts.

The members of the Arts Commission are appointed by the Mayor of Buffalo and the Buffalo Common Council from recognized experts in many fields of art. In addition, appointments are made to assure a broad representation of Buffalo's varied artistic and cultural communities. The diversity of backgrounds and experience represented on the Commission permits the board to make well-considered judgments when making recommendations to City officials.

PURPOSE

Art can take many forms, from traditional statuary and painting, to temporary installations and exhibits, and out-of-the-ordinary applications such as unique designs and material applied to public spaces, buildings or fixtures. This may include signs, plaques, utilitarian objects such as benches, bike racks, light fixtures, and water fountains, and monuments, memorials.

Whenever the gift, acquisition or placement of an artistic work is proposed on City property, the Buffalo Arts Commission must review the work for appropriateness. This document discusses the considerations and reviews that must take place before a work of art may be placed on public property of the City of Buffalo.

OBJECTIVES

Arts Commission review is designed to assure that public art reflects the highest standards of artistic achievement, that works are placed in appropriate settings, and that they do not offend Buffalo's community standards of propriety in civic art.

CONSIDERATIONS

Artistic Merit

The Commission is charged with assuring that art works placed in the City's public places represent the highest achievements of our time. The City of Buffalo is particularly proud of its national and international reputation as a thriving center of contemporary art. In reviewing civic art, the Commission recognizes its responsibility to the people of this City to allow our artistic community the opportunity to put its best foot forward for the enjoyment and edification of our citizenry and the ever growing numbers of people who visit expressly to experience our wealth of artistic and architectural treasures. The Commission membership is made up of a broad range of artists, curators, scholars and educators representing many fields of art. Their deliberations take most seriously a public responsibility to promote the best achievements of our highly diverse artistic community, as well as the need to introduce our citizenry to the best work of local and nationally recognized artists.

The Commission's deliberations on artistic merit are informed by the broad and informed knowledge brought to the Commission by each member.

Appropriate Placement

Even when a work is recognized as being of high worth, placement is a very important consideration. Context of placement may detract from a work instead of enhancing the visual experience. A work may be too large or too small for a proposed site. A poor placement may lead the viewer to perceive the work as visual clutter instead of enjoying it for the achievement it represents. Works in protected landscapes, in and adjacent to historic districts and buildings, and in public parks are particularly sensitive as these are themselves recognized as artistic works to be protected. Juxtaposition of art against the wrong background may create unintended messages in the minds of the public that may diminish appreciation of the work or even cause it to become a subject of mockery or derision.

In addition to visual context, the Commission is mindful of the practicalities of placing art works. They must not be placed in a manner to cause public safety hazards such as tripping or blocking pedestrian or motorist views.

Community Standards

The Commission is careful to consider whether a work will be generally perceived to be appropriate for overall public acceptance. Civic art, unlike art in educational institutions, museums, galleries and private collections, is subject to varying degrees as to what can be considered for overall public display. The Commission will advise against placement of a work which the board feels that the public may believe or perceive to promote a negative perception of an individual or group of people.

In such questions the determination of the Buffalo Common Council is final.

Preservation and Maintenances

In contributing art to the City of Buffalo, the Commission will review the durability of the piece. Construction must be sound in order to assure that the work is solidly mounted and made of materials that will withstand weather and regular wear and tear without creating significant maintenance expense to the taxpayer. Donors should know that with a donation, funds must be contributed to the ongoing maintenance of the artwork.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

The City of Buffalo is a historic city that has been the site of many nationally and internationally notable events. In addition, the City has been home to thousands of people who have made major contributions to the betterment of local, state and national progress, including such fields as art, architecture, civil rights, education, engineering, literature, manufacture, military, politics, philanthropy and philosophy science,.

Commemorating major events and great contributors to our civic, state and national life are important elements of our civic pride and provide our residents and visitors with a deeper appreciation for the history of Buffalo and the feats that can be accomplished by men and women who hold firmly to an ideal.

Historical Markers

At present two types of historical markers are generally approvable: Those placed by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, using their standardized blue and gold cast metal design, are generally acceptable because they meet objective standards of historic research and significance. These are subject to restriction for reasons of public safety and subject to approval by the Department of Public Works and Common Council, and, where applicable, the Buffalo City Preservation Board.

“Buffalo History and Architecture” historic interpretive boards, as now placed in various locations through the City, and bearing a standard design, are approvable subject to the same restrictions applicable to Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society markers.

War and Veterans Memorials

New war and veterans’ memorials should be placed in the City of Buffalo Veterans and Servicemen’s Park. The design and placement of such memorials shall be subject to the general review of public art works.

Memorials signifying specific military events or actions that took place within the City limits shall be marked in the manner of historic markers as near as practicable to place of the event.

Memorials to individual war heroes will be limited to honor only those who have been cited by their respective service branches for exceptional heroism or leadership. These may be placed in

the Veterans and Servicemen's Park, or where appropriate, at the residence or residence site of the honoree.

Police and Fire Memorials

The present program of memorializing Firefighters and Police Officers who died in the line of duty with a memorial sign at the place of the death shall be continued.

Other Memorials

Memorials honoring the life and achievements of late citizens of Buffalo shall be treated in the same manner as historic markers. The Arts Commission, in consultation with the Preservation Board, will recommend only those that honor persons who have made exceptional contributions to the life of the City, State or Nation. Such memorials should be placed at the residence or residence site of the person memorialized or at a place closely associated with the achievements for which the honoree is recognized.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERMANENT SIGNAGE/BANNERS

The Buffalo Arts Commission recognizes and supports the need for permanent signs and/or banners that identify important heritage and cultural sites, significant historical events and individuals, and those places that define Buffalo. We encourage signage that is aesthetically pleasing, appropriately scaled to the site and does not duplicate nearby signage. We encourage standardizing signage and those planning a sign should review existing signs and styles such as those used by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and those recognizing architecturally important buildings such as signs outside the Darwin D. Martin House and the Mansion.

Some of the criteria used in the Commission's consideration of an application for a sign include the following; aesthetic characteristics, content, durability, importance of the event, place or person being recognized, legibility, maintenance issues, public safety, scale, citing, standardized appearance, and other characteristics and factors that may be relevant. Directional signage will not be considered by the Art Commission.

The Application for the Acceptance of Permanent Public Signage and Banners must be completed prior to the presentation at a Buffalo Arts Commission meeting. The installation and location of all signage and banners placed in the city right-of-way must be reviewed and approved by the Department of Public Works, Parks and Streets. Applicants must also submit a maintenance plan with designated contacts.

PUBLIC ART IN PARKS

The City's parks are a protected resource, held in trust by the City for its citizens. Buffalo's Olmsted park system is world recognized as one of Buffalo's most important cultural resources.

All of the City's parks are subject to the State Constitutional requirement that they be used for park purposes only. When public art is placed in a park it must be assured that the work is consistent with the specific park use and aesthetic. It must be designed to be an enhancement to the park. The following considerations apply:

Olmsted Parks

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks are owned by the City of Buffalo and under the jurisdiction of the City Parks Division. They are, in addition, subject to a management agreement between the City of Buffalo and Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy. The park system also constitutes a Landmark District of the City of Buffalo subject to the jurisdiction of the Buffalo Preservation Board. As such, any proposal to erect, place or alter any monument or feature in the Olmsted-designed parks is subject to the review, recommendation and approval of aforementioned bodies. Art works placed in these parks are likewise subject to the review and recommendation of the Arts Commission.

Other Historic Parks

Proposals for placement of public art in Parks located in historic districts are subject to review by the Parks Division, the Preservation Board and the Arts Commission.

All Other Parks

Proposals to place public art in any other public park are subject to review by the Parks Division and the Arts Commission under the general provisions for review and recommendation.

MAYOR'S COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON CIVIC ART

Because the placement of art in public places involves tremendous cooperation among many parts of City government, the Mayor has determined that is necessary to coordinate the efforts of all parts of city government to facilitate the decision-making process and to aid the citizenry in understanding the public arts process.

Applications

Whenever a request is made to place a permanent or temporary work of art on property owned by the City of Buffalo, an application form shall be submitted to the Buffalo Arts Commission.

The completed form shall be first reviewed by the Commission.

Following initial review, the Commission staff shall notify each involved unit of city government of the proposal and the need for participation or approval by that unit of the government.

Coordinating Committee Membership

The Coordinating Committee shall be comprised on an ad hoc basis depending upon the types of reviews and approvals needed. Units of City government that may be involved include: Buffalo Arts Commission; City Architect; City Engineer; Streets and Sidewalks; Parks; Buildings and Grounds, Planning Division; Planning Board; Preservation Board; other City functions as required.

Each department, division, or board shall select one member to meet and discuss the project, analyze problems raised, determine permissions required, and suggest methods by which the applicant's goal may be put forward. Note that not all proposed projects will be deemed feasible or appropriate.

Meetings

The Coordinating Committee shall meet six (6) times annually.

Reports

The Coordinating Committee shall report its findings and recommendations to each involved City department, together with an outline of actions required to complete the project.