



# Public Arts Advisory Committee Agenda

**March 21, 2024**

**Regular Meeting**

**4:00pm–5:30pm, Siskiyou Conference Room**

**51 Winburn Way**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

- a) Introductions
- b) Quorum count

**II. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

*"We acknowledge and honor the aboriginal people on whose ancestral homelands we work – the Ikirakutsum Band of the Shasta Nation, as well as the diverse and vibrant Native communities who make their home here today. We denounce the egregious acts of the colonizers and government and recognize the horrific impacts that still exist today. We honor the first stewards in the Rogue Valley and the lands we live and depend on: Tribes with ancestral lands in and surrounding the geography of the Ashland Watershed include the original past, present and future indigenous inhabitants of the Shasta, Takelma, and Athabaskan people. We also recognize and acknowledge the Shasta village of K'wakhaha – "Where the Crow Lights" – that is now the Ashland City Plaza."*

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a) February 15, 2024 regular meeting

**IV. PUBLIC FORUM** (for items not on the agenda; up to 3 minutes per speaker)

**V. LIAISON REPORTS**

Liaisons:

- a) City Council Liaison, Gina DuQuenne;
- b) APRC Liaison, Stef Seffinger; and
- c) Community Development Liaison, Jennifer Chenoweth

**VI. DISCUSSION ITEMS and MOTIONS**

- a) Playwright Walk Plaques – presentation on concept plan and motion the endorse project to City Council
- b) ODOT Controller Boxes – Update from the task committee on behalf of the selection committee (Tessa, Cassie, Peter)
- c) Crosswalk Project – entrance to Lithia Park; Ashland Parks and Recreation Committee (APRC) actions, next steps, motion recommendation to City Council and Request for Qualifications (RFQ)
- d) Marking Ashland Places (MAP) II – Update on APRC motions, discuss next steps, and

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Note: Anyone wishing to speak at any Public Arts Advisory Committee meeting is encouraged to do so. After you have been recognized by the Chair, give your name and City of residence. You will then be allowed to speak. Please note the public testimony may be limited by the Chair.





## Public Arts Advisory Committee Agenda

PAAC response motion for committee

- e) Golden Connections – Update on celebration event on May 18, 2024 at 10:00 am to 12:00 pm; HPAC awards and recognition, ribbon cutting for medallions, walking tour
- f) Pulse Check – open discussion of ideas (5-10 minutes total).

### VII. OTHER BUSINESS and UPDATES

- a) PAAC Strategic Planning Project – Susan and Ken provide update
- b) Velocity (bouncing ball sculpture) repairs – Update
- c) Micah Blacklight “Ancestors Future - Crystalizing Our Call” – Update
- d) John Pugh Mural “Where the Crow Lights,” Elks Building – Update

### VIII. ADJOURNMENT - Next Meeting Date: Thursday, April 18 @ 4:00 pm

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# Public Arts Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT



**February 15, 2024**

**Regular Meeting**

**4:00pm–5:30pm, Siskiyou Conference Room**

**51 Winburn Way**

**Minutes**

**I. CALL TO ORDER:**

- a) Introductions – **Liz Adkisson, SOU student and prospective student representative on the PAAC; Russel Copley, Director of the Oregon Fringe Festival (SOU) and prospective seat on the PAAC; Paige Gerhard, Administrator of the Ashland Gallery Association, and prospective seat on the PAAC. Peter Finkle, Walk Ashland.**
- b) Quorum count – **quorum achieved.**

<b>Committee Members Present:</b>	<b>Liaisons &amp; Staff Present:</b>
Chair, Ken Engelund	Jennifer Chenoweth, Associate Planner
Beca Blake	Councilor Gina DuQuenne (via Zoom)
Laura Bloom	
Tessa Elbettar	<b>Liaisons &amp; Staff Absent:</b>
Cassie Preskenis	Stef Seffinger, Parks and Rec Commissioner
Stanley Smith	
Heather Warden	<b>Special Guests:</b>
	Liz Adkisson
<b>Committee Members Absent:</b>	Russel Copley
	Peter Finkle
	Paige Gerhard

**II. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*“We acknowledge and honor the aboriginal people on whose ancestral homelands we work – the Ikirakutsum Band of the Shasta Nation, as well as the diverse and vibrant Native communities who make their home here today. We denounce the egregious acts of the colonizers and government and recognize the horrific impacts that still exist today. We honor the first stewards in the Rogue Valley and the lands we live and depend on: Tribes with ancestral lands in and surrounding the geography of the Ashland Watershed include the original past, present, and future indigenous inhabitants of the Shasta, Takelma, Athabaskan people. We also recognize and acknowledge the Shasta village of K’wakhaha – “Where the Crow Lights” – that is now the Ashland City Plaza.”*

**Read by Chair, Ken Engelund**

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a) January 18, 2024 regular meeting

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## Public Arts Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT

b) January 19, 20024 study session

**Cassie Preskenis motioned to approve the draft January 18, 2024, regular meeting minutes with no corrections and the January 19, 2024, study session draft minutes with no corrections. Beca Blake seconded the motion; All voice vote approved to adopt the January 18 regular meeting minutes and January 19 study session minutes.**

#### IV. **PUBLIC FORUM** (for items not on the agenda; up to 3 minutes per speaker)

a) **Liz Adkisson is a student in Sustainability studies with a minor in Native American Studies at SOU. Liz started a Sustainability Collective and Liz's student project is developing a Cultural Creators Commons: a public food forest and ceremony, artist, gathering space in the Ecos Community garden - across from the music and theatre building. The land is owned by SOU.**

#### V. **LIAISON REPORTS**

Liaisons:

- a) City Council Liaison, Gina DuQuenne; **Council DuQuenne notes that Brandon is the person to update the PAAC on budget questions. Gina found a potential location for an art mural on the south end of town. She will send Jenn the address to distribute to the PAAC members. The Council will not be holding a study session due to the upcoming holiday (President's Day). Gina may be attending the AAUW presentation with Ken. No other art updates.**
- b) Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission Liaison, Stef Seffinger; **no update, not in attendance.**
- c) Community Development Liaison, **Jennifer Chenoweth provided a budget update (on behalf of Brandon) for PAAC. The financial department clarified that there is 78k total available in the PAAC account of which 25k has been appropriated for both Fiscal Year (FY)24 and FY25. Therefore, in a given fiscal year, 25k can be spent for projects as needed. The remainder of any appropriated funds from FY24 will be carried to FY25. For example, if no funds were spent in FY24 there would be a total of 50k available for projects in FY25. The remaining 28k is restricted or on hold until the next budget cycle. If a project was proposed that required the use of the additional 28k restricted funds, then a supplement budget would need to be requested by the Council.**

#### VI. **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

a) Tasks Group Proposals – Prioritize study session task groups proposals and acknowledge volunteers on each. Discuss what will be worked on over the next year/expected date of project completion.

##### **Ashland as an Art Destination/Placemaking**

- **Outreach for content (surveys)**
- **ID locations for art installations**





## Public Arts Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT

- **Events (temporary performances)**
  - **Permits involved**
  - **Lithia Artisan Market and Farmer Market**
  - **Sidewalk sales potential street closure – Chamber of Commerce**
  - **Look at Southern Oregon Pride for guidance on event**
  - **Streamline permitting process for events**
- **Funding (explore next year)**
- **Fringe Festival expansion – working together and connect**
- **Contact of who to reach out to**
- **South end of town – what can we do and ID community to see if interest**
- **YMCA has some interest in collaborating in public art at one of their sites**

**Action item:** Task group to crystallize a proposal or project to present to the group next during the next meeting.

### **ODOT Utility Boxes**

- **Keep this as ongoing project**

**Action Item:** During the next meeting the task group will advise the group when the next call for artist can occur.

### **Crosswalk Project**

- **Ken and Beverly (HPAC Chair) presenting concept to Parks March 6**
  - **Entrance to Lithia Park location – first proposal**
- **Consider future crosswalk projects that could align with non-profits for funding**
- **Case Coffee on Siskiyou crosswalk belongs to the City – not under ODOT jurisdiction**

- b) **Placemaking Motion** – Chair Engelund to bring forward a motion to recommend to City Administration to identify a department and defined role in the charter with position descriptions to focus the City of Ashland's Placemaking – supporting the values adopted by the City Council and Administration to provide leadership and direction. **After deliberation, it was determined that the group can't pass this motion with the wording as presented. Next steps are to discuss further on how to present to council. Action item: Ken will send an email to Gina to review and help with wording.**
- c) **Public Works Appointment Motion** – Chair Engelund to bring forward a motion to recommend to the City Administration the appointment of a Public Works Ex Officio or Liaison to PAAC. **Ken will be in touch with Scott Fleury regarding this prior to approving the motion.**
- d) **Pulse Check** – open discussion of ideas (5-10 minutes total). **No items were discussed.**



# Public Arts Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT



## VII. OTHER BUSINESS AND UPDATES

- a) Student Representatives – Update on request to Ashland High School and Southern Oregon University Art Departments for nominating student representatives. **Chair Engelund has reached out to Ashland High School and Southern Oregon University administration regarding recruitment of student representatives. Tessa has reached out to SOU students.**
- b) Marking Ashland Places (MAP) II – Update from the task group. **No update.**
- c) ODOT Controller Boxes – Update from the selection committee meeting; artists selected announcement. **Five members of the selection committee chose the three artists from the applications submitted: The artists selected are as follows: AHS box, Juniper Christopher; Church/Montessori box, Adele Hiles; and SOU box, Sidney Reha. The selection committee will have a discussion with the AHS artist regarding “Hello My Name Is” design to gather more information about what is proposed to be included in the blank areas.**
- d) Golden Connections – Update on celebration event this Spring for the completion of the 5 medallions spokes project; may include a walking tour; HPAC and PAAC to collaborate. **There will be an award ceremony for the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee and ribbon cutting for Marking Ashland Places (MAP) at the Railroad Park on May 18 from 10:00 – 2:00. PAAC volunteers are Beca (maybe) and Heather.**
- e) Box Dive & Google Drive – Jenn and Tessa to provide an update on items in the shared drives. **PAAC has two drives where we can store and share data (outside of the City of Ashland network). The Box Drive has the most current data. The Google Drive has not been used since 2018 and is mostly photos (Gateway, Power of Public Art, Theatre corridor (Velocity) concepts, etc.). Jenn will work to migrate these photos/concept plans over to the Box Drive so that all the information for PAAC is in one location.**
- f) Velocity (bouncing ball sculpture) repairs – Update. **A welder has been found and Public Works is working on a contract for repairs. PAAC members asked 1). where the funding comes from to fix art such as Velocity, and 2). could funds be recouped through an insurance claim for faulty engineering? Jenn was unsure and will check with Brandon and report back during the next meeting. Update: 1). Funding for art repairs are paid from an account in administration for public art. Funds do not come directly from the funds dedicated to new art, but are within the art fund account as “other” so that expenses can be tracked. PAAC should anticipate maintenance costs of the public art collection. 2). Depending on the cost of the repair and deductible there may not always be an option for a claim. In this case, the cost for the repair is less than \$5,000 and the deductible is \$10,000.**
- g) Crosswalk Project – Update. **Ken will be attending an upcoming meeting on 3/6/2024 with APRC to present the concept of crosswalk location. Update: The**

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## Public Arts Advisory Committee Minutes – DRAFT

**APRC approved the concept of and location on Winburn Way at the entrance to Lithia Park. Approved motions to follow.**

- h) Micah Blacklight “Ancestors Future - Crystalizing Our Call” – Update. **Cassie provided information about two upcoming public forums requested by Council: 1). The Ashland Sunrise Project, “Uncovering Oregon’s Black History,” on March 18 at Carpenter Hall and 2). Juneteenth presentation. Cassie also noted how the sculpture could be incorporated into the Sunrise Project and idea of Placemaking.**
- i) John Pugh Mural “Where the Crow Lights,” Elks Building – Update. **Stanely recently met with John and a funding donor who agreed to take the lead for additional fundraising with a promotional video and event at the Ashland Springs Hotel this spring – with goal to raise \$250k.**

**VIII. ADJOURNMENT** – Next Meeting Date: Thursday, March 21 @ 4:00pm

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## **Motions**

1. Playwright Walk
2. MAP II
3. Crosswalk



## **Motion for March 21, 2024, Regular PAAC Meeting**

### **Playwright Walk**

*“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 to the City Council to include that the final plaques be accepted into the Public Art Collection.”*

Attachment: Playwright Walk Concept Plan, March 2024

# Playwright Walk Conceptual Plan

March 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

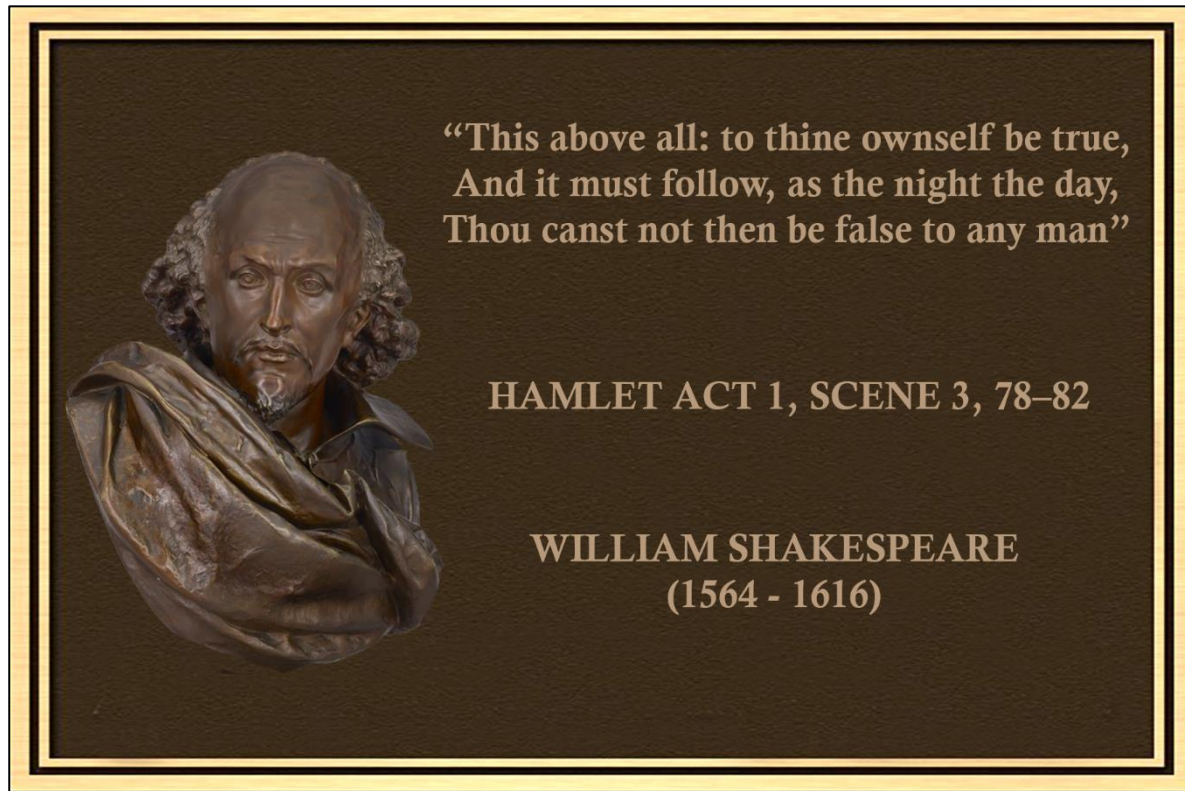
City of Ashland: Tonya Graham, Sabina Cotta, Bob Kaplan, Brandon Goldman, Scott Fleury, Jennifer Chenoweth

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



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

- **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 playwriting.



*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.

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

## 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.

### 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



*Photo: City of Ashland sidewalk on Main Street*

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.

**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.*



## **Motion for March 21, 2024, Regular PAAC Meeting**

### **Marking Ashland Places II**

*“The Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission has requested that the Public Arts Advisory Committee convene a Marking Ashland Places II **sub-committee** to develop a **robust community involvement plan** that allows for consideration and feedback to committees, commissions, and respective staff. The proposed Marking Ashland Places II provides a unique opportunity to locate an artwork “hub” in the Historic Downtown District near the entrance to Lithia Park. A clear description, specification, and depiction of the final artwork will be developed through a Request for Qualifications and vetted through a community involvement process. The sub-committee will consist of 1). a member of the Public Arts Advisory Committee, and staff, 2). a member of the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee and staff, a member of the 3). Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission and staff.*

Attachment: APRC Motions from 3/6/24 meeting.

## **APRC Motion** March 6, 2024 Meeting

### **Marking Ashland Places II**

2. I move to approve the **installation of the Marking Ashland Places hub plaque**, at grade, within existing sidewalk at the entrance of Lithia Park or adjacent to the sidewalk, surrounded by at grade concrete to minimize maintenance.
3. Whereas Lithia Park is considered by many community members to be the crown jewel of our community;

and

Whereas many community members have strong feelings about changes in Lithia Park;

I move to direct **APRC staff to work with City staff and Public Arts Advisory Committee to develop a robust community involvement plan** that allows time for contemplation and feedback to Commissioners before a decision is made related to location and form of an art installation. Further, that a clear depiction that **models the final art piece is available early in the community involvement process.**

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## **Motion for March 21, 2024, Regular PAAC Meeting**

### **Public Art Crosswalk Project**

*“The Public Arts Advisory Committee request to the Council to issue a Call for Artists - Request for Qualifications for a site-specific historic district image for public art installation. The installation is for a crosswalk on Winburn Way at the entrance to Lithia Park. The purpose of the crosswalk is to enhance the cityscape, attract tourists, and residents with a historic image and strive for traffic calming. An independent selection panel will be created to review and select the final design. The committee will present the selection of artwork and seek approval from the City Council prior to awarding the artist. The proposal will include parameters for torch-down thermoplastic material to be installed by the City’s Public Works Department. The selected artist(s) or artist led team will consult with the Public Works Department and receive an \$850 award at the time of selection. An additional consultation fee of \$150 would be awarded after the work has been installed.”*

#### **Attachments:**

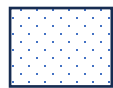
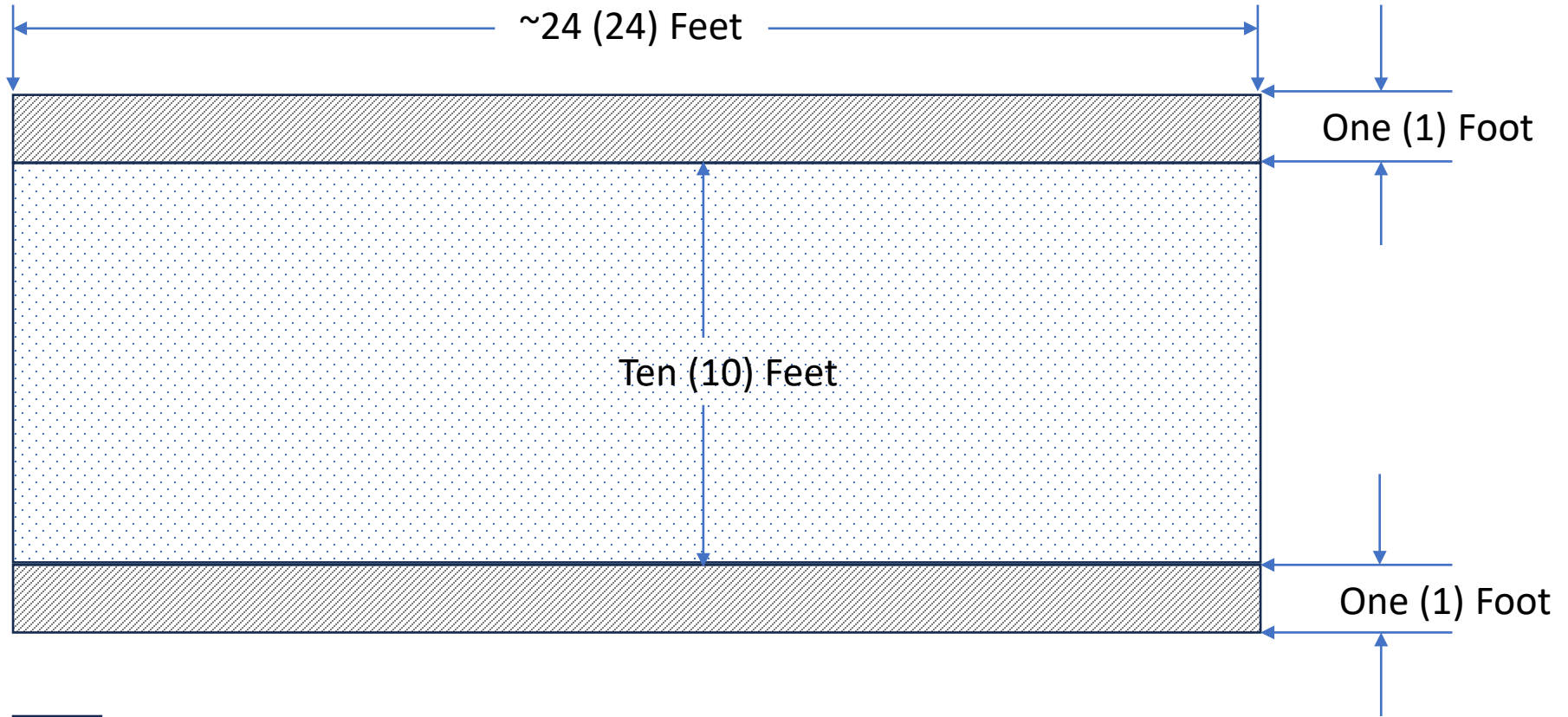
1. APRC 3/6/24 motion on Crosswalk
2. Public Works Crosswalk Layout (design/specs)
3. Photo of trees
4. Article on Art in Street Scape for Traffic Calming

## **APRC Motion March 6, 2024 Meeting**

### **Public Art Crosswalk**

1. *I move to approve the concept for a **public art crosswalk** with the following conditions:*
  1. *That an APRC staff member and a Commissioner be on the design selection committee.*
  2. *That the final design and proposal be brought before Commissioners for final approval.*

# Crosswalk Layout



Working Area (Art)



Solid White Crosswalk Markings  
(Border of Working Area)



## **Traffic Calming Article & Illustrations**

## Opinion **Want safer streets? Paint them.**

By Janette Sadik-Khan and Kate D. Levin

January 29, 2024 at 6:30 a.m. EST

Asphalt Art Initiative in Kansas City, Mo., 2022. (Bloomberg Philanthropies)

*Janette Sadik-Khan, former commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation, and Kate D. Levin, former commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, are advisers at Bloomberg Associates.*

Just as pedestrian fatalities in the United States have surged to 40-year highs, the Transportation Department delivered a December holiday gift: For the first time, federal guidelines explicitly include asphalt art projects as part of the roadway design tool kit that can be used on city streets. At last, cities have been given permission from the federal government to unlock their creative potential and roll out streets that engage the eye — and work better.

Asphalt art projects — collaborations between cities, community groups and artists — have taken off in the past decade, thanks to early-adopting cities such as New York, Seattle and Portland, Ore., with help from the National Association of City Transportation Officials and “tactical urbanism” firms such as Street Plans. They provide street designs that cue drivers to slow down, provide people on foot more interesting places to walk and create new local landmarks. They can even be used to widen sidewalks without digging up streets, giving space back to the public and making the whole street safer. To provide a road map for the increasing municipal interest, in 2019 Bloomberg Philanthropies produced the Asphalt Art Guide and launched the Asphalt Art Initiative (AAI), distributing grants to 90 projects in cities across the United States and around the world to produce and assess their own eye-catching street design projects.

Despite the overwhelming demand for projects such as these, until now they have colored just outside the lines of official street design guidance in this country. Previous versions of the DOT’s Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (with the ungainly acronym MUTCD) said next to nothing on the subject. The first attempt to fill the void was an infamously confusing 2013 interpretation memo on “Application of Colored Pavement” that became a roadway Rorschach test — both proponents and opponents of such projects found clauses that supported their points of view. Even worse, a now-removed part of the FAQ section explicitly prohibited such projects, asserting they had the “potential to compromise motorist safety by interfering with, detracting from, or obscuring official traffic control devices.”

Meanwhile, the growing number of local engineering officials who saw benefits in this kind of street art continued to look beyond the letter of the MUTCD and approve asphalt art projects, especially when they included long-proven traffic safety elements such as painted curb extensions and lane narrowings. Building on that, Bloomberg Philanthropies partnered with Sam Schwartz Consulting and Street Plans to produce a study of 17 past arts-driven projects as well as five AAI grantee projects. That found a 50 percent reduction in crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists and a 27 percent increase in drivers yielding to pedestrians with the right of way.



And that brings us to the latest MUTCD. The manual breaks some important new ground: It finally acknowledges that many such projects exist — a milestone in itself — and, far from prohibiting or discouraging them, it provides guidance on how and where to apply them.

Of course, the new guidelines aren't perfect: They could have gone further on designing streets to reduce speeding or encouraging bike and pedestrian infrastructure. But when it comes to creative projects such as asphalt art, regulators have filled in the once-blank canvas and the naysaying opposition can finally be brushed aside. We now look forward to seeing a growing number of asphalt artists paint the town in cities coast-to-coast as we work together to tackle the country's traffic crash crisis.

Asphalt Art Initiative in Kansas City, Mo., 2022. (Bloomberg Philanthropies)



Asphalt Art Initiative  
in Richmond, 2021.  
(Bloomberg  
Philanthropies)



Asphalt Art Initiative in Pittsburgh, 2021. (Bloomberg Philanthropies)



Asphalt Art Initiative in Long Beach, Calif., 2023. (Bloomberg Philanthropies)



Asphalt Art Initiative in Baltimore, 2022. (Bloomberg Philanthropies)

