

AMHERST PUBLIC ART COMMISSION

Fiscal Year 2014

The year began with the election of officers of the Commission. Rene Theberge was elected Chair unanimously. Rachel Hankinson will continue as Treasurer, and Bonnie Isman will continue as Secretary.

Recruitment of New Members/Organizational Issues

In August, Eric Broudy joined the Commission bringing membership to six members. Although recruitment efforts continued throughout the year, we were unsuccessful in bringing on an additional member. Commission members completed the Conflict of Interest form required of all Commission members.

A conversation with the Town Manager brought to light that there was a discrepancy between the number of Commission members (5) cited in the bylaw voted by Town Meeting to establish the Commission and the number that had been appointed for several years (7). After researching the subject, this difference was brought to the Fall Town Meeting, which voted to increase Commission membership to seven members as had been past practice.

Fundraising Report

Although there was a successful fund drive in the prior fiscal year to meet payment obligations for the Portal sculpture, an additional \$1,500 need to be raised to complete payment to the sculptor. This amount was successfully raised through fundraising efforts at the BID September Block Party as well as a number of generous donations from individuals and organizations. Payment was completed several months early in November 2013. The sculpture was formally dedicated in June of 2014 with a ceremony and a plaque listing donors of over \$500.00.

The Commission received a grant from the Amherst Cultural Council toward the costs of producing and publicizing its online and printed map of all public art works and art venues in Amherst.. An unsuccessful grant application was submitted to the Xeric Foundation in Northampton.

BID Block Party

Amherst Public Art Commission had a table with pictures of the Portal and a place for donations. People attending the block party were asked for their opinions about public art in Amherst. Commission members engaged in conversation with several dozen people through the course of the evening.

Work Plan for the Year

After much discussion, the following Action Plan for FY 14 was approved unanimously:

- 1) Develop an Inventory/Map/Brochure of Public Art in Amherst for publication and online at amherstma.gov. Include pieces at the colleges and university.
- 2) Develop APAC web presence either at amherstma.gov or as independent website.
- 3) Propose what we want to see for public art and call in others as needed. Develop proposal then present to stakeholders for comment.
- 4) Complete a study of what other Towns/Cities are doing to raise funds. Research and develop

- funding proposals and funding for art % idea.
- 5) Identify future sites for public art and those existing sites that need decommissioning. (This will be part of the inventory for the public art map.)
 - 6) Explore moving to more frequent showings at Town Hall (monthly or bi-monthly) by July 2014 to coordinate with Art Walk schedule and give more opportunities to local artists.

The Commission was successful in meeting most of these objectives in full or in part as described in other sections of this report.

Public Art Map of Amherst

Commission members met with Mike Olkin, GIS Administrator, to discuss how to develop an online map of public art on the Town's website. Following this discussion, which determined that this project was technically feasible, the Commission spent the remainder of the year developing a list of what would be included and excluded in this map, gathering photographs and information about each piece and developing a set of parameters for future inclusion or exclusion of new art work. The map will concentrate on artwork that is visible out of doors without going into a building and will designate museums, galleries and other art venues of interest. The following data will be collected on each piece: Name of artwork, its location, name of artist, type of work, who owns it, dates.

A few public art installations were determined to be in such poor condition that they will not be listed and instead the sites will be considered for re-use. These include 'Realignment Part' and the murals on the ramp into the underground parking garage.

Website update.

Commission members also met with the Town's IT department staff to discuss website development for the Commission. A new webpage for the Commission was developed and implemented.

Relationships with Other Organizations

The Commission began an effort to contact individuals and Amherst organizations that support public art to better understand their views about public art in Amherst and to see how we can work together. Various members of the Commission met with a wide variety of people and organizations to ascertain their interest. This included Town Manager John Musante, Tony Maroulis from the Chamber of Commerce, Stacey Lennard at the Youth Action Coalition, Ellen Kosmer, the Chair of the Amherst Cultural Council, Sarah la Couer of the BID, the Arts Walk committee, Jim Lescault, of Amherst Media as well as many individuals.

Funding for Public Art

Commission member, Eric Broudy researched public art funding and contacted eleven cities and towns to learn what they were doing to promote and fund public art. He did not find any other town with a public art commission like Amherst's. This research resulted in a detailed report entitled 'Public Art Committees in Western Massachusetts: An Informal Survey' on the various ways cities and towns in Massachusetts fund public art.

Eric found that Amherst appears to be nearly unique in having a volunteer Town committee devoted to promoting public art. His research seems to indicate that a sustained public art program, one that coordinates and initiates public art events, would require a paid administrator to manage it. Several communities conducted public surveys to determine local needs for public art offerings and what residents would like to see developed. An ongoing funding source for public art and designation of a Cultural District from the Mass. Cultural Council also contributed to a sustained program of arts activities.

After a discussion of the many ideas in the report, we decided to work toward convening a group for a brainstorming session to discuss the possibility of a community survey, a Cultural District, and an ongoing source of funds for public art. We agreed that a dynamic vision would be needed to attract community support, given all the competing needs for public funds in Amherst. The report was discussed with Town Manger John Musante and with staff from the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement District. Following these discussions, plans were made to hold a meeting of invited representatives of administrators and stakeholders in arts organizations. Mr. Musante agreed to convene such a meeting and invite the participants.

Town Hall Exhibits

In a major shift, the Commission agreed to switch to bi-monthly exhibits in starting in September. This allows up to increase the number of exhibitors from four to six per year, a 50% increase. The Commission also reviewed its guidelines and agreements with artist to show at Town Hall and revised them to reflect changes in media outlets for publicity, Town Hall requirements, the Amherst Art Walk, etc. We had a full slate of exhibitors with shows including photography, painting, and charcoal drawings. Several of the exhibits received good reviews in the Daily Hampshire Gazette.