

Let me begin by applauding the work you are undertaking to repair the confidence in our taxpayer supported public art program.

I want to work with you to improve a program that many dedicated Ann Arbor residents help create. I think it is important to consider alternative ways to administer and fund the program, and to examine models that have worked elsewhere so that we can adapt them to Ann Arbor. We also need to invent a better way for residents to provide input that is seriously considered.

As we work to better the program, we should keep in mind that Ann Arbor is the only city in the country attempting to fund all public art through a Percent for Art ordinance. Most cities that have Percent for Art have multiple funding sources for public art beyond a Percent for Art ordinance.

I propose that we first determine *how* Percent for Art could be made legal in Michigan and then temporarily make it a voluntary program. We should also make plans for an art millage, a robust partnership with businesses, and an online fundraising program modeled after crowd-funding used in recent political campaigns. Let residents donate money online for public art programs of their choice including art in neighborhood parks and playgrounds.

People who want to get rid of the Percent for Art program think it wastes dollars, but actually baking public art into our capital projects is the least expensive way to improve our town's visual aesthetic. Having a world-class city that is the model for other Michigan cities is important. It is consistent with Pure Michigan ads that promote Ann Arbor to the world as the cultural capitol of our region.

So, instead of mandating a set-aside for public art for streets and utilities projects, I propose we temporarily make it voluntary until we fix the program. At the end of the day, we have to value public art enough to voluntarily build it into our municipal capital projects. Building art into our capital projects should be a part of our city's culture. That means, city administrators in charge of our streets and utilities should have the choice of how to bake art into their projects. It is their city too. I am certain they take pride in the work they do to make Ann Arbor better. We need to let them be at their creative best - voluntarily. I bet we will be surprised.

We have a model for how that might work. The underground library parking structure has public art baked into its design. The wonderful curved glass canopies for the entrance and exits are not essential to the function of parking. Corrugated metal would work just as well. The stainless steel fence is not necessary; a PVC fence would do the trick. In fact, the lime green steel girder and plaques with quotes from authors are all gratuitous to the function of a parking structure. The designers did not put them in because of a public art ordinance. They did that because they value good design. And baked in public art is good design. It could have been improved: the glass could have been etched and the concrete could have been stamped, but this parking structure is uniquely Ann Arbor. And that is what we want: roads and

utilities that are uniquely Ann Arbor. We need to find a way to make that happen voluntarily, in all of our capital improvement projects. We can do that if our city leaders value it and let our municipal employees do it. Our residents clearly value an aesthetically unique Ann Arbor. They live here because Ann Arbor is unique. We need to follow their lead on this one and continue to make Ann Arbor a place that is uniquely creative.

I believe, like others, that our public art program was well intentioned at its start but lacked focus, vision, and administrative support. We have to reestablish the public's trust while reinventing the program. It will not be easy to do, but if any town can do it, Ann Arbor is up to that task. We have the talent and the resources to make our public art program world class. We should look at what we have and then build on it.

Like it or not, we are a college town and have been a college town since 1837. U of M is regularly ranked in the top 25 universities in the world. More than half of our residents are directly connected with the university. Learning is at the core of what we do. Our public art should reflect learning at all stages of life.

We need playgrounds filled with public art that teaches language skills through alphabets from around the world and art that teaches math skills using elegant geometry. Art is an arrangement of symbols that speak of beauty and truth. We can commission playground art that speaks of the beauty of diversity and the truth of mathematics. San Francisco's Exploratorium is a model for this with its Geometry Playground Project.

We should have a major art park to rival Winsor's Odette Park and Grand Rapid's Fredrick Meijer's Garden. Windsor and Grand Rapids use their art parks for walks and picnics. Ours can be a place not only for contemplation and recreation, but a place to learn and reflect on important concepts. We can teach science and alternative energy through interactive public art.

There is a model for such a park near Traverse City at Crystal Mountain Resort. It has received many awards and is called Michigan Legacy Park. It is the brainchild of Michigan artist David Barr who invited his artist friends to leave their legacy by creating art that reflected Michigan's history. The park is situated on a wooded trail and the park's staff creates classroom lessons based on the artwork. It is a magnet for K-12 field trips all year long.

We can create an art park that demonstrates science and technology through art.

We have a local artist teaching at UM, Michael Flynn, who has created interactive public art installed in Norway's Inspire Science Museum, New York's Hall of Science, Lansing's Impressions Five and in our very own Ann Arbor Hands on Museum.

We can create an outdoors hands-on-museum that teaches science through creative exhibits just like Ann Arbor Hands on Museum does with indoor exhibits.

These objects will be meaningless, however, unless we partner with our schools so that our young citizens understand why we are creating their cultural heritage. Building a sustainable public art program will take a long time. We will need to tag-team with our younger citizens. We need to invest in these young citizens now so that they can take charge of the public art program and make it better later. To that end, I propose we partner with schools to develop a curriculum that investigates, compares, and contrasts cultural cues like public art and explores the value and best practices for supporting public art. Project based assessment is viewed as the preferred way for students to learn, and close reading of culture (text-based, visual-based, and multimedia) is a part of the Common Core Curriculum adopted by Michigan to participate in Race to the Top funding. Our schools should welcome this effort.

Ann Arbor could host an international conference on all topics public art. Putting our young citizens on the same stage with international art-stars will build self-confidence in our future leaders.

In fact, we should make the process of selecting our public art an educational experience as well.

The public art selection process in place expects task force members, comprised of anyone who has the time and interest, to produce inspiring world-class public art. This is unrealistic. Enthusiastic, dedicated residents frequently lack the training to make informed decisions about public art.

We can create a system that uses both trained experts and volunteer residents. We need to build fail-safe choices first, and then solicit wide engagement from our community. We can do this by scaffolding the process we have in place. We should hire experts to write the original public art offering and winnow the field to several finalists. This process is widely used in government and industry to recruit executives. The community task force would then narrow the choice to three artists. The finalists should be offered a stipend, based on a sliding scale, to create a proposal and visit our city twice.

We should make the next step a learning process for all concerned. Each artist would be required to conduct a listening tour introducing themselves and their ideas about public art to our residents, while listening to resident's ideas and expectations about public art. After completing their proposal, the finalists would again conduct a presentation tour of our city and entertain feedback from residents.

The task force, in making their recommendation, should consider public input like surveys and straw polls from widely diverse groups. The Art Administrator should

additionally vet the final selection publicly to community groups before presenting it to City Council. A version of this process has been successfully used in Toledo.

We have the talent; we have the models; now all we need is the will to do it.

Where do we start? We should complete the projects now in progress: Justice Center, Stadium Bridges, Argo Cascades, and Kingsley Rain Garden, and we should incorporate the artist selection process I described earlier for those projects that still need artists.

We should then focus on what has been successful – first the Allmendinger Park model. I propose we program \$200K of the \$500K+ that is not programmed to fund 10 neighborhood gateways modeled after Allmendinger Park. We should contract Mary Thiefels to produce them over the next two years. These neighborhood gateways could be designed thematically to fit both the neighborhood and the capital funding source.

We need to spend the next two years carefully building a public art program by listening to residents. We need to make public art relevant to residents by situating public art in neighborhoods. We need signature gateways to our city but we need neighborhood gateways first.

We should also program \$200K from the street fund for a program with the schools that will support students designing 20 bus-stop benches and 20 manhole covers. A template for the benches could be in the shape of an open book. These are widely used in Istanbul, Turkey and Paris, France. These concepts could be adapted for Ann Arbor. Students could design the bench details relating to specific texts ranging from Canterbury Tales to graphic novels. The manhole covers could be modeled after a program in Japan that bicyclists and walkers love. It promotes a walk-able city. Both residents and visitors to Japan make wax rubbings of this sewer art.

We also need to find a municipal home for another very successful local art initiative: Festifools. Temporarily, I suggest we use a self-tax to demonstrate the broad-based community support for this city treasure.

I propose we publicly ask those residents who voted yes for the art millage to tax themselves \$10 and contribute online to one of two projects: Festifools or a playground art program.

Large monumental gateways, an art park, and streetscapes in our core city are important later goals and can be funded primarily by private donations. Tax dollars will be needed to administer and raise this private money, but our more wealthy residents should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their appreciation for art and for our city. The city can help immensely by providing the land and maintenance, as well as streamlining the permits and variances needed to accommodate these projects.

We have a model for privately funded public art with John Carver's commissioning Charles Magee to create the Spirit of Ann Arbor for his building on Liberty Street. We should leverage this private initiative.

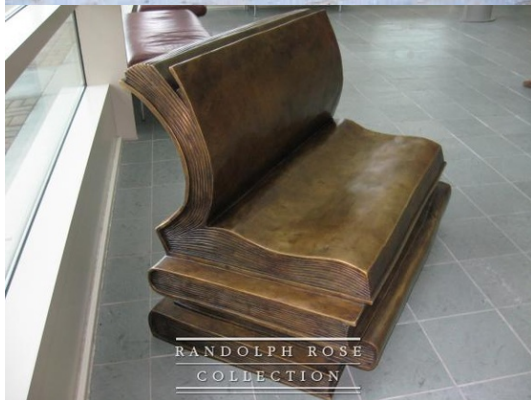
To align these and the many more ideas to come, we will need a public art master plan. We also will need a fully funded staff to administer this comprehensive program funded by multiple sources like Percent for Art dollars, an art millage, large money benefactors, and small crowd-sourced donations. A non-profit or a department of the city could administer this program.

To begin with, you should consider appointing a cultural affairs director situated in the mayor's office, who would begin the planning process. This person's goal would be to develop a public art master plan from extensive resident input, and then lead a public art millage campaign to support that plan.

I painted with a broad brush purposely. These ideas are intended to stimulate ideas from others, which will all need to be carefully crafted to fit what's possible into what's practical.

Let me again applaud your efforts to improve our city's culture. Generations to come will thank you for this.

# Book Benches





# Manhole Covers - Japan





