

Public Art

Public art humanizes our public spaces by bringing meaning, vigour, and agency to its constituencies. Its value is often demonstrated through the cultural and social impact it has on communities. Economically, public art is a source of income to cities that invest and adopt policies to support it. In our city, the City of Winnipeg's Public Art Program managed by the Winnipeg Arts Council (WAC) is the main channel

to promote public art strategically and comprehensively in the City. Public art can create civic icons, but it also can transform our playgrounds, bridges, traffic circles, parks, greenways, water treatment facilities, transit stops, and airports into more vibrant expressions of human imagination.

Public art by Indigenous artists can also play a role in furthering Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg. The WAC in

collaboration with the City has developed major commissions with Indigenous artists and Indigenous communities. These projects assert Indigenous presence on the land and provide opportunities for all to learn about Indigenous experiences in the city.

How can Winnipeg invest in and promote public art?

The Alternative Municipal Budget

Economics

Beyond the activation of an immediate economy in the immediacy of the public art, there are other economic benefits including the creation of jobs and the overall stimulation of the economy. Data strongly indicates that cities with an active and dynamic cultural scene are more attractive to individuals and businesses.

The WAC has faced sharp funding cuts alongside other community organizations who receive grant funding from the City. The WAC received \$500,000 per year in grant funding between 2004 and 2018. In 2022, the WAC is allocated only \$125,000, with funding set to be phased out to \$0 by 2024. The AMB recommends that the WAC grant be restored to 2018 levels and increased by 25 percent to bring public art funding more in line with other major Canadian cities, such as Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal.

Public art is a valuable investment to the municipality. It has financial-economic benefits, in addition to the many positive cultural and social impacts it has on communities. The AMB recognizes the economic, cultural and social impacts of public art, and not only proposes increased expenditure in grant funding for public arts projects (\$475,000), but also proposes a new funding source through a Percent for Art program.

A New Funding Source for Public Art

Whenever a city undertakes a capital building or improvement project, such as a school renovation or new firehouse, a percent of that project's budget could be reserved to create public art as part of the completed project. This is called a Percent for Art program. The designated percent would be used not just to pay for the artwork itself, but also for costs of the solicitation and jurying process, installation of the artwork, its maintenance and conservation over time, education of the public about the work, and administration of the program. The AMB recommends implementing a Percent for Art program for major construction projects in Winnipeg.

The AMB recognizes the cultural, social, and economic benefits of public art for the City of Winnipeg. Through increasing expenditures and creating new sources of funding, the recommendations of the AMB make it clear: public art matters because the rich experiences of people in public spaces matter.

Questions for your candidate:

- Why is Public Art important to Winnipeg?
- Would you support restoring grant funding to Winnipeg Arts Council to 2018 levels plus 25%?
- Would you support a "Percent for Art" program for all new city building or improvement projects?

There are alternatives. Budgets are about choices.
See the Alternative Municipal Budget at policyalternatives.ca