

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

3. Turning Construction Hoarding into a Canvas for Public Art in Vancouver

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. A quality public realm helps deliver dynamic, engaging and active urban and neighbourhood experiences at a human scale. It can encourage people to use sustainable transportation modes – to walk, cycle or use transit – by creating accessible and memorable spaces;
2. Vancouver's public spaces – our plazas, squares, streets, laneways, pathways, and waterfront – are where public life happens. These spaces are where we connect with the city and with each other. They are where community is created;
3. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on our city. Every resident and every business has struggled or had to adapt. Vancouver's response to the pandemic has been significant focusing on supporting and accelerating economic and community recovery, and on helping people, organizations and businesses recover and move forward;
4. The City of Vancouver and Vancouver City Council consider arts and culture to be vitally important to the city's liveability, and recognize the value the arts bring to the lives of residents and our city. The sector has been one of the hardest hit by the pandemic;
5. Vancouver is a city that prides itself on being alive with creativity, offering music, dance, new media, theatre, festivals, film, design, exhibitions, galleries, museums, and special events. The City encourages people to "Go out and explore arts and culture in Vancouver.";
6. In September 2019, Council approved a new culture plan. *Culture|Shift: Blanketing the City in Arts and Culture* provides a framework with strategic directions and actions that seeks to include previously under-represented voices and constituencies, build partnerships across communities and sectors, and develop strategies that place arts and culture at the forefront;
7. The City's support for public art takes many forms with a variety of Public Art Programs that support excellence in public art by emerging and established artists, in new and traditional media, and through award-winning commissions and artist collaborations that produce contemporary art for public spaces throughout the city;

8. In May 2020, amid the challenges presented by the pandemic, Council and the City reaffirmed Vancouver's commitment to supporting arts and culture during this crisis and noted that supporting artists and arts and culture organizations in our community continues to be a priority;
9. In terms of the economic standing of the arts and artists in Vancouver, the *Employment Lands and Economy Review* research conducted by the City last year noted that Vancouver "has the highest concentration of artists per capita of major cities with 8,800 artists making up 2.4% of the local labour force." The majority of artists live under the poverty line with 63 percent of artists reporting an income of less than \$40,000 per year. The median income of Vancouver artists is \$22,116, which is 44 percent less than all Vancouver workers. These workers face multiple barriers to participating in the Vancouver economy – the effects of COVID-19 have only added additional hardship for this sector;
10. In response to the challenges brought about by COVID-19 and social distancing requirements, a wide variety of public art expressions emerged serving as a beacon of hope and connection. For example, the Robson Street Business Association, Downtown Vancouver Business Improvement Association, and South Granville Business Improvement Association worked early on during the pandemic with the Vancouver Mural Festival to connect artists with business owners in order to create murals on temporary hoarding on storefronts that were forced to close due to COVID-19. Plain plywood was transformed into colourful murals and city streets became outdoor public art galleries;
11. In addition to support from local BIAs for hoarding murals and expressions of public art during the pandemic, the City of Vancouver and other sponsors helped to fund storefront mural projects by covering the costs of supplies and paying each artist an honorarium. As part of the City's Mural Support Program, the City was able to provide paint and supplies to the local businesses and artists spearheading this inspiring community initiative. To date, over 100 applicants have been approved to receive a \$400 voucher for paint and supplies to create a public art piece during the pandemic;
12. Plywood and other hoarding materials are not restricted to temporary storefront protection. Signs attached to temporary construction fences and temporary covered construction walkways are called "Hoarding Signs." The City of Vancouver has a guide that summarizes the regulations and permitting process for hoarding signs on private property (as a companion to but not as a substitute for the Sign Bylaw);
13. As we've seen during COVID-19 with storefront hoarding murals, construction hoarding offers a potential new "canvas" for the city's artists and arts and culture organizations to bring to life in terms of fostering a quality public realm that contributes to engaging, active cultural experiences in our urban spaces;

14. Currently, under the City of Vancouver *Sign By-Law* (and in the City's hoarding signs guide), hoarding signs may list the names of consultants or contractors working on the property, and may only be displayed while the project is being constructed. Hoarding signs must not be illuminated;
15. A City of Vancouver permit is required for all large hoarding signs and the signs are subject to size, height, and location criteria. The rules for large hoarding signs are the same for all Sign By-law Districts across the city, with the exception of residential properties along non-arterial streets. The allowed size of large hoarding signs is determined by a property's frontage. For each one metre of frontage, one square metre of sign copy area is permitted. Properties in the Residential Sign District along a non-arterial street are allowed 0.6 square metres per frontage;
16. In 2014, the City of Toronto implemented a new public art initiative that requires 50 percent of the surface area of construction hoarding along public right of ways be used for community art; the program has received positive public response and supported a number of artists to gain exposure and share their work with new audiences;
17. Toronto's construction hoarding mural art program operates at no cost to the City while enhancing the public realm and creating opportunities and support for local artists and arts organizations. Developers and construction site owners in Toronto commission local artists through a number of ways, including utilizing a non-profit arts group such as STEPS to connect with artists or by engaging directly with artists should they choose to do so; and
18. Given the high concentration of artists per capita in Vancouver and the multiple barriers they face to participate in the Vancouver economy, notwithstanding the additional hardships the arts and culture sector has experienced due to COVID-19, a program that would facilitate the use of construction hoarding as a canvas for Public Art could provide a significant and enduring source of income for many artists and creatives living and working in Vancouver.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT Council direct staff to explore and report back in Q1 2022 on options for requiring the use of portions or a percentage of construction hoarding on private property construction and development sites in Vancouver for murals and public art, with the goal of making these spaces available to local artists and arts and culture organizations to support recovery of the cultural sector and provide new opportunities for artists to show their work, including recommendations for any by-law changes to enable the permitted use of construction hoarding for public art;

FURTHER THAT recommendations and options aim to dovetail with the existing safety or engineering (structural/sightline) requirements for such hoarding, aiming for ease of administration within the existing hoarding requirements and permitting process;

AND FURTHER THAT staff consult with stakeholders as part of the exploration of options for a hoarding mural program including but not limited to the city's development and construction sector, representatives from the visual arts community such as the Vancouver Mural Festival, BIA's and the City's Public Art Committee.

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