

Memorandum

To: Arts Advisory Committee

Date: Thursday, August 10, 2023

From: Quyen Hoang, Public Art Coordinator

File: #2336279

Subject: **Downtown Mural Pilot Program**

Purpose

- The purpose of this memo is to share information about an active mural project; and
- Request feedback from the AAC regarding staff's approach to a pilot project that will facilitate the creation of new murals at strategic locations in the downtown neighbourhood.

Background

There have been numerous requests for murals in recent years from local artists who want opportunities to develop their skills and share their work, and community groups who envision murals that bring attention to climate action, social justice or promote diversity and belonging. In addition, citizens and businesses have raised concerns regarding vandalism, safety and livability of our downtown.

Although there are a number of murals around the City, currently only three (3) existing murals were commissioned by the City:

- *Sounding the Land*, 2023 by Jenny Hawkinson. A recently completed project in Queen's Park on shipping containers;
- *Flow*, 2017 by Sandeep Johal on the concrete barriers along Front Street. This was a design-only project meant to connect to the overall design of the Front Street Mews; and,
- *Puzzled*, 2013 by Steve Hornung. This mural was initiated by the City's Engineering Department to enhance the Pump Station on Brunette Avenue.

Challenges

- Existing grant opportunities do not provide sufficient funding to support large-scale murals;
- Artists are not being properly compensated for their labour;
- Lack of documentation around ownership, responsibilities and lifespans;
- Requirements for completing murals such as insurance, WorkSafe BC, lift certificates, traffic management, permits, etc. can be complex for community members and artists to navigate.

Opportunity

Staff have initiated a pilot project working with the Vancouver Mural Festival (VMF), a Metro-Vancouver non-profit arts organization to support the commissioning of a mural downtown. Working with a partner that specializes in the production of large-scale murals will be of benefit to artists, community organizations and the City.

About the process:

- Staff have been working with the VMF over the past year to explore opportunities and scout possible sites downtown (both City-owned and private);
- VMF provides curatorial and mural production services (project management, lead artist selection process, surface preparation, technical expertise, logistics, traffic management, insurance, WorkSafe BC clearance, lift certificates, anti-graffiti protection, etc.) so artists can focus on conceptual and creative parts of projects;
- VMF promotes the murals as part of their annual festival or year-round programming which elevates local projects and expands audiences, bringing interest and visitors to our city;

- VMF oversees logistics, provides artists with support and lift training, ensuring safety for all involved, as well as quality and successful outcomes for New Westminster.

The selected site:



- Purpose Society wall facing Alexander Street was identified as a strong opportunity (location, sightlines and potential for a meaningful project);
- Purpose Society owns the building and have for a number of years expressed a strong interest in having a mural to beautify the space, highlight the services provided at this location and help build understanding and compassion for community members who access this site;
- The Purpose Society will own and care for the mural with clear responsibilities documented in an MOU with the City.

The artist:

- Randall Bear Barnetson was selected from our 2022-2024 Artist Roster.
- Barnetson interprets matters of mental health and wellbeing through an Indigenous lens and has been identified as a great fit for this project.

Schedule:

- To be completed August 2023.

Discussion

The pilot can teach us about how best to support artists in implementing large-scale murals and create more opportunities for murals downtown.

Through this process we hope to identify the following:

- Areas for improvement on the mural production and commissioning processes;
- Level of interest from the community for more murals and an inventory of potential sites beginning with downtown;
- Support to provide funding for one mural per year from the Public Art Reserve within the multi-year capital budget that has been approved by Council;
- Potential partnerships and additional funding sources.

Staff request feedback, comments or suggestions regarding using this project to advance additional murals downtown through a similar process.