PROVIDENCE

ART IN LIFE

PLAN

Charting a Future for Public Art in the City of Providence
Providence Art in City Life Plan
Charting a Future for Public Art in the City of Providence
FROM THE MAYOR

At the start of my term as Mayor of Providence, if asked the question, “what is the Mayor’s job?,” I would have responded very differently than I would today. I would have said the Mayor’s responsibility is to run an efficient administration and to support the growth of our city. After three years, I would now answer that question with this simple answer: The Mayor’s fundamental job is to find ways to bring people together. And I believe there is no better way to bring people together than through the arts. The arts are our City’s life force, and I believe public art should play a major role in Providence.

In 2016 I established the Art in City Life Commission, which had been designated by ordinance in 1980. Almost immediately, the Art in City Life Commission and staff members from Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism articulated the need for a comprehensive plan for commissioning work in public space and/or with public dollars.

The Art in City Life Plan does exactly that. This plan was built by significant input from Providence public artists, arts administrators, residents, and members of both the public and private sector. Through the plan Providence will be empowered to commission public art initiated by local artists, dream and implement landmark iconic works, embed art and artists in our civic institutions and public infrastructure, and enhance our public realm with temporary works, like those produced at our signature arts festival, PVDFest.

Personally speaking, I love public art. I love the element of surprise in finding an interesting piece in an unexpected place. I love the way public art creates conversation and bridges across difference. I am so proud to have been a part in bringing more public art to life in our great City.

Mayor Jorge O. Elorza
FROM THE DIRECTOR

Public art enhances civic space, encourages us to slow down enough to appreciate with new perspective the place where the work is installed, and creates endless possibilities for shared experiences. Within this collective experience, every individual interaction with public art is a unique opportunity to respond. One of the amazing things about public art is seeing how artists develop ideas through their engagement and research into a place and community. The resulting work often challenges my assumptions and opens my eyes to new ways of thinking. Public art, unlike self-selected art experiences, is open and vulnerable to any curious individual to interact with or to ignore. Not every person will be comfortable entering a formal art space, such as a museum, gallery, or a theater, yet public art by its nature is accessible to all. Public art is courageous in intent and with the right administrative direction, equitable in its generation.

I am proud to put forward our Art in City Life Plan, the City’s first comprehensive plan for public art. This plan was supported and built with input from hundreds of residents, public artists and arts administrators, City staff, students, and neighbors. I am proud of the variety of opportunities and strategies recommended in this plan to bring public art to our neighborhoods, civic institutions, and public infrastructure. I am a realist; there are always more ideas than resources, and some of the opportunities in this plan will take more time to develop than others. But I believe this plan empowers our City office and our young Art in City Life Commission to commit to building a robust, diverse, and resonant public art collection.

The Department of Art, Culture + Tourism recognizes that inequity and exclusion have played a role in all aspects of our society and that the world of public art is not immune from these systems of oppression. We stand behind the principle of cultural equity and believe this plan, in its transparent and deliberate articulation of City-initiated public art commissioning processes, will allow the City to bring new art works to often overlooked pockets of Providence and elevate artists who have historically had inequitable access to public art commissions. We are committed to developing responsive calls for art in all neighborhoods, commissioning work by artists of color, women, and LGBTQ artists, and building diverse, responsive, and reflective selection committees. We also expect the public to hold us accountable as we recognize needs and prioritize strategies.

Providence is held up by our creatives. From the underground music scene to warehouse studio artists to muralists and street performers, Providence’s thriving arts ecosystem is bound by each artist’s ability to experiment and collaborate. The City is proud to be a part of this landscape and to have a bold plan for engaging public artists in new ways.

Stephanie Fortunato
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
In 2009, the City of Providence developed a Cultural Plan, which recognized that Providence’s cultural life is a cornerstone of its economy and a key element to the city’s unique sense of place, as well as a driver in its recent revitalization and future economic success. Investments in public art were recommended as a strategy to “build community and foster neighborhood vitality through increased access and diversified cultural participation,” one of the plan’s six overarching goals.

Fast forward to 2017. Interest in public art has continued to grow among Providence’s artists, arts organizations, developers, philanthropists, non-profits and City leadership. The City has begun to establish ways to support and respond to this growing interest in engaging with the public realm, most notably by commissioning temporary public art through PVDFest and establishing the Art in City Life Commission (ACL) to advise the City of Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism (ACT) on matters related to public art. Building on these developments, Mayor Jorge Elorza commissioned this Art in City Life Plan to give the City, the ACL, and the community the tools they need to be better positioned to make the investments in public art called for in the 2009 cultural plan.

The resulting plan is a blueprint for creating a public art program for Providence that builds on the city’s creativity, energy, resources and existing programs. It recommends a new public art initiative – ACT Public Art – be established within ACT to actively commission artwork. It includes a vision for this initiative and recommends four main types of projects that program should commission artists to create, including a prioritized list of recommended projects. The plan provides recommendations for ongoing approaches to communications and community programs, including specific ideas for engaging local artists. Finally, it makes recommendations regarding the administration and funding of the program including specific tools and processes for planning for and commissioning public art, reviewing donations and loans of artwork and memorials, and reviewing public art on private property.

What this plan does not do, however, is aim to govern all decisions about public art in Providence. It does not recommend that ACT or the ACL have any new influence or jurisdiction over public art projects spearheaded independently by artists, arts organizations, community organizations or private property owners. Nor does it recommend any new regulations or approval processes for these types of projects. It clarifies existing requirements for the limited cases in which public art created with private funds on private property is subject to City review and recommends shifting the responsibility for that review to the ACL, as was originally intended in existing City ordinances. It also provides a clear review process for individuals or other organizations interested in donating or loaning works of art to the City for permanent or temporary display on City property.

Overall, this plan recommends the creation of a City-managed public art program that adds to the robustness and strength of Providence’s already rich arts ecosystem by commissioning new work, creating new opportunities for artists and for community engagement, and supporting the growth of public art practice in Providence.

Vision

ACT Public Art will channel the creative energy of the city, manifesting it in a range of artwork and artists’ projects that:

• contribute to shaping the city’s visual identity,
• improve the quality of life for all residents, and
• create opportunities for engagement, connectivity and community building.
ART IN CITY LIFE PLAN

PROGRAM PLAN

The *Art in City Life Plan* recommends four main types of projects that together will form the core of ACT Public Art’s commissioning activities. Over time, through these four project types, ACT Public Art will build a diverse collection of permanent and temporary art that connects with residents all over the city and a reputation for working with artists in innovative and exciting ways. In addition to its commissioning activities, ACT Public Art should focus on communications and community programs that engage people with public art in Providence.

**Landmark Public Artworks**

ACT Public Art should take the lead in developing a small collection of Landmark Public Artworks — large-scale, signature, permanent works of art located in prominent areas that make strong visual statements about Providence and its neighborhoods and can come to serve as iconic images that represent the creative city. *Capital City Landmarks* should focus largely on downtown and project an image that speaks to the identity of the City of Providence as a whole, while Neighborhood Landmarks should mark important gathering places or entry points within communities and speak to the identities of Providence’s many neighborhoods.

**Public Art Residencies**

ACT Public Art should establish an ongoing public art residency program placing artists in City facilities and offices to engage directly with residents and staff. Through these residencies, artists would develop projects that infuse artistic practices and artists’ creative problem solving into residents’ lives and the everyday operations of the City.

**Civic Infrastructure Projects**

ACT Public Art should work with other City departments, as well as relevant outside agencies, to incorporate public art into the City’s public buildings and infrastructure. These projects should infuse art and creativity into everyday spaces used by all and reflect the creative culture of Providence in the City’s civic facilities, infrastructure, and systems. Projects can be large-scale and integrated into new construction or they can be smaller, tactical projects that adapt or add to existing facilities and infrastructure.

**Temporary Projects**

The plan outlines three main tools that ACT Public Art should use to continue to build on ACT’s history of commissioning and displaying temporary public artwork:

- *PVD Projections* should be an ongoing platform for rotating new media work projected onto buildings in downtown or other prominent places.
- *PVDFest Public Art Projects* should continue to be commissioned for the duration of PVDFest each year but should be brought under the umbrella of ACT Public Art and focus on achieving the goals and vision of ACT Public Art, as well as those of the festival.
- *The Public Art Ideas Competition* should be a new model for funding artist-initiated projects by issuing a “Call for Ideas” to artists asking artists to respond to a broad curatorial prompt with a project idea and location of their choosing.

**Communications and Community Programs**

Effective communications and community programs will be key to the success of ACT Public Art. The plan recommends specific goals for communications and community programs with the ultimate goal of ACT Public Art becoming well known in the community as commissioning high-quality, community responsive public art. The plan also recommends that communications strategies be developed for each project, which could make use of tools and events such as Meet the Artist sessions and artist-designed engagement, as well as programs to promote engagement with the public art collection as it develops and programs to engage Providence’s strong community of local artists through public art opportunities, trainings, and potential fellowships.

**Administrative Plan**

In addition to commissioning new works of art, ACT Public Art should oversee maintenance and conservation of the works in its collection and serve as a resource for other entities developing public art in Providence, most notably by guiding individuals and organizations commissioning public art through any required reviews by the City. The plan recommends procedures and tools the program should use to accomplish its work. These includes tools for planning for public art and evaluating potential opportunities, as well as recommended artist selection processes, funding sources and staffing levels. It also lays out the responsibilities of the Mayor, City Council, the Art in City Life Commission, Art Selection Panels, the Special Committee for Review of Memorials, and staff.
Funding Sources
ACT Public Art should be supported through various public and private resources. An increase in public funding will demonstrate the City’s leadership and commitment to quality public art throughout Providence. Focused efforts on private fundraising will be crucial to realizing more ambitious and large-scale public art projects. Most important, a diversity of funding sources will help ensure a stable program.

Staffing
There are a variety of skill sets needed for the successful management of ACT Public Art. These include, but are not limited to: planning and budgeting, curating, project management, collections management, conservation, program development and administration, fundraising and grant writing, marketing and communications, and community partnership development. Therefore, there should be a full-time staff person at Art, Culture + Tourism who is the main point person for public art, with ACT Public Art Manager as their title.

Planning for Public Art
ACT staff, working with other City Departments and the Art in City Life Commission, should thoughtfully plan for public art, both through an annual work plan process and by developing specific plans for each new public art commission being led by ACT. ACT staff should also work closely with the Planning Department, as well as other City Departments, to include strategies for public art in other City plans and planning processes.

Commissioning Public Art
New public art projects should, with rare exceptions, be site-specific commissions where an artist is selected to develop a project specifically for Providence that is informed by the context of the site. The Standard Public Art Commissioning Process outlined in this plan should serve as a starting point for how to select new commissions, with the exact details outlined in each Project Plan. Commissioning processes for Public Art Residencies and the Public Art Ideas Competition are also outlined.

Donations and Loans of Artwork
ACT staff and the ACL should have an important role to play in the review of donations of permanent artwork and memorials to the City, as well as temporary loans and exhibitions of public art that are sited on City property. ACT staff should help facilitate the review and approval process, while the ACL should play an important role in Site and Design Review to ensure that public art sited on City property is of high quality and appropriate to its site.

Memorializing a person, group, organization, idea, principle or event on City property is an important decision. A Special Committee for Review of Memorials should be appointed by the Mayor and should be convened to review proposals for memorials on all City property based on social and merit issues and make recommendations to staff.

Public Art on Private Property
Public art as part of new private development is a benefit to both the development project and to the City. Developers should be encouraged, and in some cases, incentivized, to incorporate public art in their projects. ACT staff and the ACL should have a role in the review and approval of any public art that is commissioned in exchange for a development benefit. When permanent public art is commissioned on private property that is located Downtown in the area under the review of the Downtown Design Review Committee (DDRC) or within the Capital Center Special Development District, ACT staff and the ACL should have a role in the review and approval of the artwork, as already required by existing regulations.

Collection Management
ACT Public Art should adopt practices for the documentation, conservation and maintenance of artworks that are part of the Providence Public Art Collection and for de-accessioning or relocating artworks in that collection. ACT should ensure that the Providence Public Art Collection is properly maintained and preserved, that a periodic assessment of conservation needs is made, and that proper records regarding the works in the collection are kept. The ACL should review and approve the de-accession or relocation of works in the City’s Collection, using a strict set of criteria and subject to final approval by City Council.
CONCLUSION

This plan charts an exciting new future for public art in the City of Providence that builds on the city’s existing strengths and allows ACT to thoughtfully plan for and advance the City’s investments in public art. Using this plan as a guide, ACT can better support the growth of public art practice in Providence and build a collection of artworks that improve the quality of life for all residents, contribute to shaping the city’s visual identity, and create important opportunities for engagement, connectivity and community building.
APPENDIX A: ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Art in City Life Plan was developed with thoughtful input and feedback from many Providence citizens and the dedicated work of City staff and volunteers. We are grateful to the following people who participated in the process and shared their perspectives and passion for public art in Providence with us.

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Via Partnership
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Larry Mancini, Department of Finance, ex officio
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Kate Blacklock
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Washington Park Neighborhood Association
Fox Point Neighborhood Association
Elmwood Avenue Neighborhood Association
Providence Tourism Council
Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau
Providence College Department of Global Studies
Mass Art
Fox Point Cape Verdean Heritage Place
Port Markers Project
Renee Neely, Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice
Dan Schleifer, New Urban Arts

Artist Roundtable Participants
Southside Cultural Center, July 24, 2017
Amy Bartlett Wright
Christina Brown
Will Cornwall
Jennifer Dalton Vincent
Christina DiChiera
Peter Diepenbrock
Barnaby Evans
Lois Harada
Jasmine Johnson
David Karoff
Philippe Lejeune
Marta Martinez
Jessie McLean
Helene Miller
Will Reeves
Hannah Resseger
Jenny Sparks
Judith Tolnick Champa
Ysanel Torres

Youth Roundtable Participants
AS220, July 25, 2017
Ysanel Torres
Lizzie Saur
Timothy Cascade
Leila
Paris
Kiti Yakara
Katie Clark
Julissa
Saylyng
Anthony
Sin Seven
Nelson Paredes
Luis Guerrero
Christian Lopez
Aja Delgado
Ming Phomsouvannady
Luis Guerrero
Yerliza Espinal
Nika Gorini
Dietrich Neumann
Saylyng
Ant
Rob
Sandy Zipp
Unknown Studios
Anjel Newman
Susan Smulyan
Dan Schleifer

Imagine Art Here! Participants
WaterFire Arts Center, September 19, 2017
Tracy Barbosa
Arria Bilodeau
Michaela Bolotin
Margie Butler
Erik Carlson
Deb Clemons
Will Cornwall
Cristina DiChiera
Katherine Eberle
Harry Evans
Holly Ewald
Noah Ezer
Tim Ferland
Alexander Fiorentini
Gayle Gifford
Morgan Grege
Joe Haskett
Cole Hersey
Niels Hobbs
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Geoff Kish
Christine Lichatz
Davis Lloyd
Jen Long
Matt Mahoney
Marybeth Meehan
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Koki Mendis
Helene Miller
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Steven Pennell
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