

PROVIDENCE

ART  
IN  
CITY  
LIFE

PLAN

Charting a Future for Public Art  
in the City of Providence

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## 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**



# EXEC UTIVE SUMM ARY

**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 project. 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.



# 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.

We want to specially acknowledge Stephanie Fortunato and Gina Rodríguez-Drix of The Department of Art, Culture + Tourism, as well as the Art in City Life Commission members who served on a special subcommittee to develop this plan – Aiyah Josiah-Faeduwor, Xander Marro, Dominic Molon, and Eric Telfort – for the many hours of hard work they put into the creation of this document.

We would also like to thank the WaterFire Arts Center for hosting the Imagine Art Here! Workshop, the Southside Cultural Center for hosting the Artists Roundtable, and AS220 for hosting the Youth Roundtable.

### Via Partnership

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Emily Blumenfeld  
Aliza Schiff  
Bruce Burton, Designer

### Art in City Life Commission

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Larry Mancini, *Department of Finance, ex officio*  
Howard Ben Tré  
Kate Blacklock  
Jessica Brown  
Joseph Haskett  
Aiyah Josiah-Faeduwor  
Xander Marro  
Dominic Molon  
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Eric Telfort

### Art in City Life Plan Advisory Committee

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Adrienne Gagnon, *DownCity Design*  
Morgan Greffe, *Rhode Island Historical Society*  
Amber Ilcisko, *I-195 Redevelopment District*  
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Geoff Kish, *Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy*  
Marta Martinez, *RI Latino Arts*  
Jef Nickerson, *Cornish Associates*  
Donna Personeus, *Thayer Street District Management Authority*  
Shey Rivera, *AS220*  
Howie Sneider, *The Steel Yard*

Yarrow Thorne, *The Avenue Concept*  
Paris, *AS220*  
Ming Phomsouvannady, *AS220*

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William Bombard, *Department of Public Works*  
Brian Byrnes, *Department of Parks*  
Zainab Giwa, *Mayor's Center for City Services*  
Francis Gomez, *Department of Public Property*  
Martina Haggerty, *Department of Planning and Development*  
Christopher Ise, *Department of Planning and Development*  
Andrew Jacques, *Mayor's Center for City Services*  
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Jason Martin, *Department of Planning and Development*  
Natale Urso, *Department of Public Works*

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Michael Christofaro, *Marketing, Fiscal and Production Manager*  
Ysanel Torres, *2017 Public Art Fellow*

### City Staff

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Al Buco, *Department of Public Property*  
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Caleb Horton, *City Archives*  
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Wendy Nilsson, *Department of Parks*  
Allen Penniman, *Department of Planning and Development*  
Michael Stephens, *Department of Recreation*

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Craig Dreeszen, *Dreeszen & Associates*  
Deb Dormody, *Alliance of Artist Communities*  
Frank LaTorre, *Providence Downtown Improvement District*  
Lynne McCormack, *LISC*  
John Smith, *RISD Museum*  
Helene Miller, *Partnership for Providence Parks*  
Brent Runyon, *Providence Preservation Society*  
Greg Nordin, *RIPTA*  
Cliff Wood, *The Providence Foundation and the Downtown Providence Parks Conservancy*  
Randall Rosenbaum, *RISCA*  
Mollie Flanagan, *RISCA*  
Adeola Oredola, *All in Education*  
Marybeth Meehan, *Artist*  
Charles Denby, M.D.  
The Avenue Concept, Board of Directors  
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 \$our  
Timothy Kascade  
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 Grefe  
Joe Haskett  
Cole Hersey  
Niels Hobbs  
Aisha Jan  
Elizabeth Keithline  
Geoff Kish  
Christine Lichatz  
Davis Lloyd  
Jen Long  
Matt Mahoney  
Marybeth Meehan  
Peter Mello  
Koki Mendis  
Helene Miller  
Domingo Monteiro  
Laura Moss  
CJ Opperthausen  
Greg Pennisten  
Steven Pennell  
Kathleen Pletcher  
Mimo Riley  
David Riley  
Cathy Saunders  
Rachel Schwartz  
Jen Smith  
Sundeep Sood  
Jenny Sparks  
Jen Stevens  
Yarrow Thorne  
Rich Watrous  
Shaw Weinberger  
Zachary Weinberger



**PROVIDENCE**

THE CREATIVE CAPITAL

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE  
DEPARTMENT OF

**ART  
CULTURE  
+TOURISM**

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