

# Public Art and Monuments Advisory Committee

## May 18 Meeting Agenda

- Introductions
- Committee Work Session
  - Review Committee Notes To Date
  - June 30 Report and Response Period
- Public Comment
- Conclusion

# Advisory Committee Overview

The Public Art and Monuments Advisory Committee is charged with developing a set of principles for evaluating Louisville's existing public art and monuments. Committee members represent a range of disciplines and perspectives, including art, history, community building, business and political science.

The scope of work for the Committee for February through June 2018 will include:

- review processes, actions and outcomes employed by other cities;
- develop strategies to receive public input;
- work with Metro staff to gather and review historical research;
- consider public opinion, historical research and the multi-disciplinary perspectives of Committee members in developing principles; and
- produce a report outlining the Committee's methods of inquiry and findings on the matter of establishing principles to guide decisions on whether to alter, preserve or remove public art and monuments.

The set of principles that the Committee is tasked with developing will acknowledge the complexities of Louisville's past, as well as the values that matter to us today. They will be comprehensive, rather than specific to current controversies, and informed by the work of the city's Commission on Public Art, Compassionate City initiatives, and Historic Preservation Advisory Task Force.

The Committee will consider the historical representation of our city's existing public art and monuments and develop principles that aspire to make public spaces welcoming and reflective of our diverse community. The principles will guide the administration's deliberation on whether to alter, to preserve or to remove public art and monuments that may be interpreted as honoring bigotry, racism and/or slavery.

# Advisory Committee Process to Date

## **Public Meetings and Engagement To Date**

February 7 Committee Meeting – Main Library

March 6 Committee Meeting – Kentucky Center for African American Heritage

April 12 Committee Meeting – University of Louisville Campus

April 14 Committee Meeting – Cyril Allgeier Community Center

April 28-29 Staff Engagement – Cherokee Triangle Art Fair

## **Upcoming Meetings and Engagement**

May 18 Committee Meeting – South Central Library

June 5 Committee Meeting – Main Library

## **Public Comments Received (approximate number received, ongoing)**

Online Form (1000)

Emails (150)

Postcards and post-its from engagement events (150)

Mailed letters and documents submitted during meetings (50)

#monumentalletters on social media

Public meeting sign-in sheets (about 70 emails on distribution list)

## **Web Page**

Public input posted online regularly

Committee documents and resources posted online

Links to Facebook live video of each meeting (views listed below)

Feb 7 - 449

March 6 - 195

April 12 - 343

April 14 - 210

# General Committee Notes

As a city, our goal is to retain the integrity and history of our artworks and monuments in public spaces, but not to glorify symbols that denigrate segments of our population. Through artworks and monuments in public spaces, Louisville strives to educate and connect with residents and visitors, in an honorable and honest manner.

The Advisory Committee acknowledges that artworks and monuments are not easily removed from public spaces. Only in the most extreme cases should these objects be removed. In some cases, new interpretation may be desired as an alternative to removal.

Louisville needs to align its artworks and monuments in public spaces with the vision of our city as a progressive, compassionate, and equitable community. Public spaces must be inclusive with commemorative objects recognizing all histories and all people, not just people in a position of power.

# Focus Area: Is a principal legacy of the subject fundamentally at odds with current community values?

[see Yale University, CEPR Report 2016]

## Discussion:

The historical context and motivations surrounding an artwork or monument in public space are critical and should be rigorously analyzed. Today's standards should not be the only guide. However, while artworks and monuments in public spaces reflect their time of creation, it must also be considered that they become an integral part of the public aesthetic and communicate an implied acceptance or validation from the community and its leadership.

The difference between *commemoration* and *documentation* is important. Memorialization and glorification of historical narratives that exclude or denigrate segments of the community can have a negative psychological effect, and contradicts the collective goals of a compassionate city. It is noteworthy that many artworks and monuments were added to public spaces without a process of engaging citizens and opportunities to voice support or opposition.

Whatever else a monument is or becomes, it is always first and foremost a celebration of a person, agency, or event. The formal structures of monuments aim to make the subject appear timeless. In order to be timeless, the subject matter must withstand the passage of time and endure as a monument we would install in our current times. This does not mean Louisville should only have monuments to perfect people, but that the city has monuments that reflect our current values. This might mean removing monuments to figures, agencies, or events that do not share our values OR it might mean adding monuments so that the city demonstrates the value of more contributors in more neighborhoods in equal measure.

*What was the original intent of the object?*

*Would the object be installed in a public space today?*

# Focus Area: Is the subject a potential rallying point for racism, hatred, or bigotry?

## Discussion:

It is true that artwork and monuments in public spaces become many things to many different people. Artworks and monuments in public spaces reflect the privileged and prevailing values of their time and times do change. While an artwork or monument's original intent may be considered historically accurate, and it may continue to serve a purpose or as a visual reference to an historical person, agency, or event, the perceived meanings of symbols evolve over time and may be reinterpreted and recharged by new groups or movements. Appropriated symbols, or symbols used out of context, may imply or become a rallying point for a purpose or movement that differs from the objects' original meaning or intent.

Confederate symbols, for example, have been reinterpreted through historical and contemporary movements broader than the Civil War context in which they originated.

In Louisville, there persists a complex history of human conflict inherited from eras of colonialism, slavery, Civil War, segregation, immigration, and economic disparity. Symbols accepted in previous generations as historic and honorary references may today represent movements with divisive or intimidating intent and actions.

*What is the enduring influence of the subject or symbolic image today?*

# Focus Area: Emphasis on new artworks and monuments

## Discussion:

New artworks and monuments in public spaces should be made the highest priority. Work should begin immediately on creating a nomination list and methods for community engagement in developing new projects.

New artworks and monuments juxtaposed near or adjacent to existing objects can be used to establish balance in the visual expression of community values.

When evaluating an existing artwork or monument, the city should consider:

*Is there a better way to commemorate the subject matter's legacy?*

*Can the primary legacy of the subject be depicted in a more accessible, inclusive, or relevant manner that retains the historical, educational, or memorial substance?*

# Focus Area: Considerations for removing an artwork or monument

Discussion:

Does the object contribute to the cultural life of the city of Louisville?

Is the object important to the field of art?

Is the object relevant to its site?

Does the object engage with the public in a dynamic way?

Is public safety a significant factor?

Is the historic value of the object better represented in a different context, with didactic material?

Can a more suitable location be identified?



# Notes