

ANCASTER MEMORIAL ARTS CENTRE PUBLIC ART PROJECT



FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Date: Tuesday January 16th, 2024

Location: Tourism and Culture Visitor Centre, 28 James Street North, Hamilton, ON

Time: 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Facilitator:

Peter Fortune

City Staff Advisors:

Peter Fortune, Manager, Placemaking, Public Art and Projects

Claire Calnan, Cultural Projects Specialist, Placemaking, Public Art and Projects

Ingrid Wolker, Administrative Secretary, Placemaking, Public Art and Projects

Attendees:

Ardyn Gibbs

Artist / Resident, STEPS Public Art

Colin Lapsley

Executive Director, Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre

Allison Osterman

Artist / Educator, Theatre Ancaster

Ron Poling

Local Condominium Board Chair / Resident

Heather Peter

Executive Director, Ancaster Village BIA

Bob Prince

Principal, Invizij Architects

Regrets:

Natasja Bischoff, Artist / Educator, Dundas Valley School of Art

PURPOSE

This group was assembled to review plans for a public art competition for the grounds of the Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre (AMAC) and to advise on goals and themes for the public art project.

BACKGROUND

Peter Fortune gave a presentation on the project background, highlighting changes to the public art process associated with permanent art competitions. A summary of Public Art's two-stage submission process was provided:

In Stage 1, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) is required of artists comprising an expression of interest, work samples and references. In Stage 2, artists are required to submit a detailed project proposal, for which they will receive an honorarium. A total of four (4) artists or artist-led teams will be shortlisted in Stage 1 and invited to submit proposals to Stage 2 of the submission process.

An overview of the site's current use and context, natural heritage, local history and artifacts uncovered during excavation for the AMAC's renovation was shared. A Historical Context document produced by the City of Hamilton's Heritage Resource Management team was also distributed to attendees.

Finally, a site plan was presented illustrating potential locations for a single or series of permanent artworks. This plan will be included in the Call for Artists for submitting artists' consideration. The project timeline was also reviewed with artwork install targeted for the end of 2024, though materials sourcing may push completion to 2025.

The budget for the project is \$250,000.

DISCUSSION

Members of the group were asked to address a series of questions as part of the general discussion. Before addressing the questions, the following information and feedback was provided to the group by the Facilitator:

- There is a concern about being too prescriptive with themes and goals; artists should have more opportunity to shape their proposals, provide input on artwork locations and consider how the open space site features at AMAC may be integrated into the public art
- When referring to the AMAC's Queen and Wilson St entrances, there is a concern that the respective terms 'primary' and 'secondary' are misleading:
 - Queen St access is the permanent AMAC vehicular and pedestrian access
 - Wilson St access can be blocked by bollards to restrict AMAC access to pedestrians only
- There is a concern that a potential location for a series of artworks along the building's west façade, east of the new entrance canopy, is the only location with shade on site, is well-used by the public and should be maintained as such.

The following four (4) questions were put to the Focus Group which initiated a lively discussion, documented in bullet points below. Bullet points in **green** represent feedback that was given by two or more members of the group, highlighting their importance to local stakeholders.

1. How might artists create a more meaningful connection between the AMAC and historic Wilson Street?

The following responses were provided:

- Indigenous history, a desire to connect with the Indigenous and Urban Indigenous Community,
- **The need for functional space that has seating and shade was a repeated theme throughout,**
- The history of the land acknowledged while also highlighting the uses of the space now,
- **Consider wayfinding and functionality designed to draw people in, look at potential for engagement at both entries, connecting them,**
- **Consider audience demographics in the design – who uses the space? Who will use it in the future? Can colour be used in design to attract families and youth? Is there an opportunity to connect with any marginalized communities?**
- Could the art piece reflect ‘the arts’ (to echo the use of the building)
- Wilson Street is definitely the main thoroughfare and will have visual impact,
- Opportunity to connect to youth at the water park and create more activities to create an integrated experience,
- The community wants to be walkable but there is a lot of space between locations. Might be best to focus on outdoor engagement for populations who already use the space – Farmer’s market, kids’ camps, theatre-goers,
- There is a willingness from the Arts Centre to give up parking spots in favour of other uses so it is not just a ‘concrete slab’
- **Thinking about visibility – from the Arts Centre and from Wilson St, the ability to draw people in different directions e.g. seating would give people who get ice cream a place to sit and eat it,**
- The desire to create a multifaceted space that can be used in a myriad of different ways, increasing access for events and gatherings,
- An interest in tasking the artists with above question, tasking them with making connections.

2. What unique and meaningful stories, qualities and characteristics of Ancaster should artists reflect in their public art proposals?

The following responses were provided:

- Ancaster has a changing identity, it's increasingly culturally diverse and there is more density planned,
 - There is a political conversation around changes and what can be preserved,
 - The smaller community feel, knowing your neighbours, increasing walkability, encouraging interaction all help contribute to the Ancaster 'Village' identity,
 - Reflecting or celebrating heritage to be considered, with Ancaster the 3rd oldest colonial settlement in Upper Canada,
 - Acknowledgement that it is 'Art' and not a 'Monument,'
 - Leave it to the artists to decide what to do, the desire not to be prescriptive out of fear, offering criteria but not limits,
 - **Acknowledging what is in the area: school, community, waterfalls, trees, Dundas Conservation Area, proximity to nature and to the unique Carolinian Forest. Make a list of these for the community and the Arts Centre and let artists choose direction,**
 - Acknowledgement that artists from outside the community can sometimes identify issues with more clarity from a distance,
- 3. How might artists support Ancaster's vision to create a complete, liveable, walkable community, honoring its heritage?**

The following responses were provided:

- Rephrase this question as a statement and offer to artists,
 - The connection to walkability includes using art to encourage foot traffic, to cut down on cars using the (Wilson St) entry as a cut-through, discourage the identity of the space as a parking lot and encourage other uses instead,
 - **Use the art to help define other performance areas, encouraging engagement and facilitating more creativity on site,**
 - **Possibility to engage more audience (and a younger demographic) through digital work attached to the permanent piece (important to consider durability of the QR code installation)**
- 4. How might public art serve and support both artists and residents of Ancaster's surrounding community?**

The following responses were provided:

- Exposure for artists and promotion of the arts,
- Stimulating discussion,
- Drawing people together,
- **If art can be used to facilitate or designate other performance spaces, this would help the promotion of artists working in different disciplines,**
- **Temporary art connected to install could help with continuous engagement, assist younger artists in gaining experience and exposure,**

help promote Ancaster on a bigger stage as digital pieces could be shared online.

SUMMARY

Based on this input, public art staff have developed the following **Project Goal**:

The public art at Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre (AMAC) shall be a beacon drawing people into the site from historic Wilson Street to the AMAC, integrating one or more functional element(s) to enhance visitors' experience of the site.

These elements may be shade structure(s), seating, wayfinding or other public amenity. The public art may also delineate a performance and/or projection space, supporting the intersection of emerging art practices, digital or otherwise.

The following **Project Themes** have been identified:

- ***Connecting to the site's context by addressing its natural heritage, Indigenous history and/or the building's heritage over time.***
- ***Engaging and inspiring community gathering and connection, amongst children, seniors, families and newcomers.***
- ***Artists may choose to address additional highlighted theme(s) from the Focus Group discussion detailed above.***

FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Since the Focus Group meeting, Colin Lapsley, Executive Director of AMAC, has advised that Ancaster Memorial Arts Centre (AMAC) and the Ancaster BIA have begun talks about an ongoing community concert series on AMAC property.

NEXT STEPS

This Focus Group report will be posted on the City of Hamilton's Public Art website at www.hamilton.ca/publicart for public record.

Urban Design issues identified will be shared by public art staff with the appropriate staff in street lighting, roads, etc. for consideration in all future plans.

A Call for Artists, including the above project goal and themes, site constraints and technical requirements will be issued in early February 2024.

This call will also include the following background information:

- Site Context and History
- Site Plan

A Selection Panel of residents, local artists and arts professionals will short list up to **four (4)** artists' proposals to be posted on the City of Hamilton website for public comment in February 2024.

The Selection Panel will select a winning proposal based on artistic excellence, response to the project goal and themes, technical concerns and public response in Spring 2024.

