



**UrbanArt Commission
Public Art Oversight Committee
Wednesday, February 9, 2022 – 1 pm**

Attending: David Cruthird, Nefertiti Orrin, Jana Travis, Coriana Close, Eso Tolson, and Lisa Law;
UAC staff: Lauren Kennedy, Whitney Williams,

- I. Welcome
Kennedy begins the meeting with a welcome to the March monthly PAOC meeting.

APPROVALS

- II. Minutes
 - a. Kennedy asks if everyone had a chance to review the January 2022 meeting minutes and if there are any questions or edits. With no questions, Close moves to approve the minutes, Orrin seconds. The minutes are unanimously approved.
 - b. Kennedy also reviews a contingency request approved via email by PAOC for an additional \$1,000 for honoraria for Ed Rice and Douglass NAI projects (an additional \$500 per project for a fourth finalist. Williams and Kennedy add that there was a lot of excitement from the selection committees and the additional honoraria have helped invite new artists to submit proposals and ensure a diverse group of portfolios in the finalist pool.
- III. Cordova Library - Final design
Kennedy reminds the committee that Youngblood Studio has had a very difficult time getting stamped engineering drawings produced for this sculpture project at the Cordova Library. Young presents the long-awaited engineering drawings and notes that she has shared them via email with Law for additional review. She adds that one previous concern from PAOC was potential sharp edges on the sculpture, and Tylur French from Youngblood has shared that all edges will be smoothed. Law asks if there is the potential for small hands or heads to get caught in between the letter openings, noting that typically you wouldn't want a 4 inch sphere to be able to pass through an opening. Young replies that she will confirm with French on the opening size between letters. The possibility of mesh at the base of the sculpture to prevent hands being caught or potential climbing is discussed and Young says that she will discuss that with French. Cruthird asks about liability if something were to happen in terms of climbing etc..., Kennedy replies that once the sculpture is finished and finally accepted by PAOC

it becomes part of the City of Memphis' inventory and part of their risk management coverage. Daigle asks if the letter size is consistent throughout the sculpture or in fact larger at the base; Law notes that from the drawings, the letter size does decrease towards the top of the sculpture. Law also shares that from her initial review of the engineering drawings that everything looks good and structurally sound.

Kennedy suggests that UAC confirm a couple of details with French related to the spacing between letters and size of the letters, and to ask for final design approval over email. The committee agrees with this suggestion.

IV. NAI - Westwood - Finalist selection

Kennedy presents a unique situation that developed with the selection committee's review of applicants for an open Call to Artists for a mural through the Neighborhood Art Initiative program. Uplift Westwood CDC was selected from an open application to allocate public art funds to develop projects collaboratively between neighborhoods and UAC. On their application, the CDC did express interest in working with an artist named Tony Hawkins who UAC has recently worked with on a different project in Whitehaven. A large-scale mural for a retaining wall at Raines and Doubletree was identified through the neighborhood discovery process, where a much older mural had deteriorated, presenting a fairly significant undertaking for a new mural. UAC recommended an open Call to Artists and encouraged Tony Hawkins to apply, both because of the open call process used historically with City funding and because Hawkins had not worked on this scale previously. The selection committee helped to develop the Call to Artists and share the opportunity, but in reviewing applications recently, committee members from the Westwood neighborhood indicated that they were primarily interested in working with Hawkins and were not inclined to consider the other applicants for the commission. Kennedy notes that it is possible through the City's program guidelines to directly commission an artist but it is not an approach that is typically used. Because the Call to Artists was posted publicly and 15 artists submitted their materials, the UAC team did not feel confident moving forward without further review from PAOC and ensuring a fair and equitable process. Kennedy acknowledges the existing relationship with Hawkins and the community, and that there were some miscommunications and different expectations set between the committee and UAC, and that UAC's goal is to find the most appropriate way to move forward.

Kennedy invites Westwood selection committee members Dr. JB Blocker and Pastor Melvin Watkins to share their perspectives as both committee members and Whitehaven residents. Dr. Blocker begins by sharing his long history and connection to the neighborhood and his professional experience in the arts through his role at Shelby County Schools. Dr. Blocker shares that Hawkins has extensive experience and that it was very important to the community to commission an artist connected to the Westwood neighborhood. He notes that the committee was not made aware of the possibility of a direct commission and that his personal preference was to directly commission Hawkins rather than review proposals from additional finalists. After hearing from UAC that the committee needed to honor the open Call to Artists that was shared, the committee did review the other artists' submissions and identified other finalists. There has been confusion on the process and communications from UAC, and he feels it is important to note that the other artists' submissions were reviewed and that there is a perception that Kennedy disagrees with the committee's expressed desires and Hawkins' capacity as an artist. Pastor Watkins affirms that the committee did ultimately select to move forward with finalist proposals being submitted and that there should have been a more extensive conversation about the possibility of commissioning Hawkins directly with the committee.

Travis identifies herself to the Westwood committee members and asks if UAC has ever directly commissioned an artist for a mural previously because her understanding is that an open call is always used. Kennedy replies that direct commissions are listed as an option in the City of Memphis program guidelines as may "... occur when circumstances surrounding the project warrant either an open or invitational call unfeasible." In her seven year tenure at UAC, she has not seen a direct commission through the City's program for a project of this size (noting that it is a \$60,000 mural project). She also clarifies her comment about Hawkins' experience having been about the scale or size of murals he has done in the past, not about his capacity or ability as an artist. She continues by noting that at this current stage in the process, finalists are usually selected to submit site-specific design proposals from which the selection committee votes to commission one proposal. It is not typical that an artist would be commissioned after an open request for qualifications or before proposals are reviewed. Kennedy also clarifies that PAOC approves all decisions made by the selection committee and that the concern raised by UAC is how fairly the other two finalist proposals will be reviewed. She respects the strong feelings for Hawkins' work and participation in the project and expresses her regret for the difficult conversations that have occurred in this process. Kennedy reminds PAOC that she is asking how best to move forward potentially including commissioning Hawkins at this stage, continuing with the RFP process, or inviting wider community input.

Law asks if the selection committee members would consider another artist's proposal for the mural commission. Pastor Watkins reiterates that the selection committee was not aware that a direct commission was possible and that from his perspective the other artists' portfolios were reviewed and considered. Dr. Blocker again expresses his concern that UAC is questioning Hawkins' ability to execute the mural which he does not feel is accurate and that the original NAI application invited neighborhoods to apply with specific artists in mind. Daigle thanks the committee members for sharing with PAOC today and that it is important to talk through the situation to find a good solution. She also asks for more information on the selection committee's review process. Dr. Blocker responds that the committee members reviewed artists' submissions prior to the meeting via Submittable and submitted scores. The possibility of commissioning Hawkins directly was again raised and UAC indicated that it was important to honor the call process and identify two other finalists to submit proposals, to which the committee agreed. The committee then discussed the other applicant portfolios and were asked to submit ranked preferences for the other two finalists, which were identified as Carl Scott and Kiersten Williams.

Kennedy calls attention to the time and asks if PAOC members are able to continue past 2 pm in order to maintain quorum and vote on a solution. Daigle asks for clarification on where we are in the process and what is needed, and the total number of committee members. Kennedy replies that a decision on moving forward with a direct commission or reviewing finalist proposals is needed, and that in other complex commissioning decisions sometimes PAOC has opted to start the selection process over. She adds that the artists who applied were told that a decision would be made following this meeting, so nothing has been communicated to them about the review process or potential finalists. Williams adds that the selection committee has 6 members including 4 Westwood neighborhood representatives, local artist Larry Walker and Nick Oyler from City Traffic Engineering. Orrin asks if the committee unanimously ranked Hawkins as their first choice artist. Kennedy responds that 4 out of 6 committee members ranked Hawkins first. Orrin asks Law to clarify her previous question, Law questions whether it is fair or worth the other finalists' time and energy in submitting a proposal that might not be considered. Pastor Watkins replies that he feels the committee is open to reviewing proposals. Williams notes that part of UAC's concerns in bringing this matter

to PAOC was because it was vocalized in the committee meeting that the result would still be to commission Hawkins. Close asks to review the Call to Artists and shares that she feels the finalist honoraria should be increased either for these artists or in the future. She also acknowledges the difficult position of sharing a public call with an artist already in mind and the artist's connection to the neighborhood as important. Hanover adds that the NAI process is still new for UAC and apologizes for any confusion on the original NAI application to which Uplist Westwood applied.

Kennedy asks if PAOC members can share their thoughts between commissioning Hawkins directly or reviewing finalist proposals for the commission. Daigle responds that she is not comfortable with the precedent that would be set by directly commissioning an artist from an open request for qualifications, and that the finalist proposals should be reviewed. Travis agrees with Daigle and that she is also concerned about the other finalist's proposals being fairly considered. Close encourages the selection committee to have an open mind about all of the finalist proposals and if there is any other kind of smaller opportunity for the artists not commissioned for this project. Kennedy suggests that sharing the proposals publicly and voting for their favorite would help support all three finalists' work being seen and reviewed (the cumulative vote representing one additional vote on the committee) as was previously done for projects in Whitehaven and Raleigh. Orrin agrees that it is important to move forward with the process from here and hopes that the proposals will be reviewed with an open mind. Law also suggests the possibility of a blind submission without the artist's names attached. Kennedy acknowledges a question from Dr. Blocker about how a blind process impacts the connection to the neighborhood which was articulated as important in the Call to Artists. Dr. Blocker questions any changes to the process currently being discussed.

Law moves to approve Tony Hawkins, Carl Scott and Kiersten Williams as finalists for the Westwood mural project, Daigle seconds. The motion is approved. Law also suggests that any other details of the process be discussed further as time allows and is needed. Kennedy clarifies that the public vote that was suggested is part of an overall process change UAC is making to share proposals more broadly and has proven to be a great way to engage communities beyond the selection committees. Kennedy also addresses a question from member of the public Shanette Parks on the role of a community organizer in the NAI program and any funding attached. Kennedy responds that a community organizer role had been considered but ultimately not pursued by the UAC team in the execution of NAI, and all NAI funding was concentrated in the project budgets proposed to PAOC.

UPDATES

V. FY23 Public Art Plan

Kennedy quickly notes that she will be providing additional details about the FY23 public art plan recommendations for approval by PAOC before submitting to the City as part of their annual budget process. Currently funding includes new allocations for the Neighborhood Art Initiative, maintenance overhaul currently underway and being led by Wendy Young, and contingency funding as there are two projects with significant contingency requests coming. UAC is also including funding in FY23 to fund a new project for Jesse Turner Park following the cancellation of a sculpture contract last year.

Full meeting recording is available [here](#).