

Robert Bruce Memorial Parking Garage Public Art Project



Community Focus Group Report

Date: Thursday, July 5, 2024
Location: Stationview Room, City Hall (in-person)
Time: 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

Attendees

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| Marijo Cuerrier | Downtown Kingston BIA |
| Jason Goettler | Local Entrepreneur, owner of Ink Well Tattoo & Piercing Studio |
| Nicole Daniels | Kingston Arts Council |
| Jillian Glatt | Local Artist |
| Barb Danielewski | Local Artist |
| Laird Leggo | City of Kingston, Licensing & Enforcement |
| Taylor Norris | City of Kingston, Public Art Coordinator, Arts & Culture Services |
| Danika Lochhead | City of Kingston, Director, Arts & Culture Services |

Purpose

This group was brought together to review plans for a public art competition for a permanent public artwork on the exterior of the Robert Bruce Memorial parking garage on Bagot Street, and to advise on specific goals and themes for the artwork.

Background

Taylor Norris, Public Art Coordinator at the City of Kingston gave a presentation outlining the project background, public art selection process, and context. The public art project has an overall budget of \$50,000 – \$60,000, which is being provided by Parking Operations. The public art commissioning process will be led by Arts & Culture Services. The site for the

artwork is on Bagot Street in downtown Kingston, between Brock Street and Princess Street and will leverage the 10 flat concrete units on the front exterior. The artwork will be produced on di-bond panels and will be mounted to the front facade over the concrete units via a steel frame. The design, fabrication and installation of the artwork mounting structure and the production and installation of the final artwork panels will be commissioned and coordinated directly by City of Kingston staff. The artwork will be seen from the ground level and at a distance, by pedestrians, transit users and those passing through the space.

This site was chosen for a new capital public artwork as the parking garage had recently undergone maintenance and restoration, which is outlined in the Public Art Policy, and is centrally located and adjacent to the Kingston Transit downtown transfer hub. It is considered a high profile, active downtown location and will be the City's first permanent public artwork installation on public property in the downtown.

The parking garage opened in 1966 and was named the 'Robert Bruce Memorial Parking Garage' to commemorate the father of Reginald M. Bruce, who was an Alderman and the Chairman of the Transit Committee during the 1950's and 1960's. Robert Bruce was a local businessman who owned and operated a department and dry goods store on Princess Street.

Discussion

Members of the focus group were asked the following questions as part of a general discussion:

- What local stories, qualities and characteristics of the area where the Robert Bruce Garage is, or the downtown core more broadly, do you think artists should be asked to reflect in proposals for public art for this site?
- What themes or messages would you like the artwork to convey?
- How can the design of the artwork ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all community members?
- Are there examples of public art projects (either locally or elsewhere) that you find inspiring or relevant to this project?

The following responses were provided:

- There are so many people waiting and standing looking at the site from across the street. It's a highly visible location and artwork needs to consider this main audience. The artwork can't have minute details, it needs to have a visual impact from far away.
- Site is where the downtown starts to open up from a strip and into the core.

- So much time is spent at this area; the public art project's goal should contribute to making it feel more like a lived in home, cozy spot and space.
- It's a transition space, and the project could pose the questions why are you downtown, what brings you here, what brings you here for?
- Diversity, energy, vitality – don't want to see the public artwork be heritage or history focused; it should build on the local character of the area.
- Active transportation – the garage is for cars but the site for public art will be more connected to community members and visitors using public transit, walking, or cycling.
- Unique parking garage in Kingston – its two levels only, with a staircase in between and an alleyway that goes out to the buses on Brock Street. Find a way to link the various access points (Brock Street, Montreal, and Bagot Street) through public art. The whole parking lot offers a little journey as you move through it. It's a double decker kind of experience.
- Skyline is visible above the parking lot, because its not more than two stories and the buildings on either side are mid-rise. This feature makes it a very unique and special site.
- Consider the people who hang out in the back of the parking lot.
- Consider the view from the street but also the view from the parking lot on the second level.
- Reflect the movement of the space. It's a flow through space but also where people congregate; transitory but stationary.
- Artwork needs to be less busy; less is more, needs to be able to be see clearly and not confusing or add to the chaos,
- Can't be over stimulating. The artwork needs to just help people take a moment to pause, where your eyes can rest.
- If the artworks can interact with the panels instead of being installed on them, it could rise up from the platform space and it could be more sculptural, decorative – for example, iron work and the creation of a frame.
- Best approach, and budget wise, is likely to install a series of two panels across the 10 individual platforms and the artwork can be installed on them.
- Needs to be one artist or a collective in order to ensure the public artwork is cohesive and clear – given the location and how folks will interact with it, its not well suited to different public artworks that use the 10 panels.
- Given the site's proximity to the downtown transfer point for Kingston Transit, there are so many diverse communities who move through this space - newcomers, youth, and residents who live in neighbourhoods outside of the downtown core. These audiences need to be considered in the public artwork and it should be about the site as a nexus point and place of community connection.
- Downtown Kingston has lots of heritage and older, beautiful buildings. This area where the public artwork will be installed has a different character, more alternative, and is a bit more edgy/grungy, and presents a vibe shift from the rest of downtown in

an interesting way. This edginess should be played up vs. taking a beautification approach.

- Youth oriented, and give off a pop-art vibe; not a good site for a impressionist landscape nor artworks that have minute details.
- Play off the interesting brutalist, utilitarian architecture buildings that surround the parking garage.
- The artwork should be a bright pop of solid colour, something that pulses and is vibrant.
- There are specific things that makes downtown Kingston unique: music, dogs, ice cream, the lake – the are signals of the downtown core.
- The idea that everyone who moves through this space and passes the parking garage is a part of the core hub, and part of the community.
- Community is essential for downtown Kingston to be sustainable.
- Provide an in person, interactive opportunity to showcase the public art proposals for feedback/comments.
- Artwork should have bold visuals, not too many details, no words/texts. Text can look dated very quickly, messaging, subtext can create issues and require longevity.
- A call to explore and connect in downtown Kingston.
- Consider that many of the same people are going to see the public artwork day after day after day, because it's located beside the downtown transit transfer point.
- Lighting and daytime vs. nighttime. The public artwork will not have any additional light provided – the effect of the artwork has to consider just natural lighting during the day and then lights that are already there for nighttime lighting.
- The site doesn't get a lot of sunlight during the day, but there are some reflections that bounce off the windows across from the site and there is an interesting interaction that happens with the sunlight and the site.
- Highlight the moments where the sun interacts with the site/parking garage.
- Opportunity for a public engagement piece once the artists are selected – to be considered?
- Low relief sculptural work may not have a significant impact in this site.
- Placemaking opportunities in and around the area, in connection to the final public artwork including bench upgrades and integration of colour to create vibrancy around the public artwork experience.
- Use the palette of the public artwork to beautify other adjacent areas – railings/staircase, frames, anything at the entrance on Montreal.

Staff representatives for Kingston Transit were unable to attend the focus group, and have provided the following key items for consideration:

- The Parking Garage fronts on the Kingston Transit Downtown Transfer Point (Terminal) and experiences high pedestrian activity and high bus volume
- The project outcome should not impact transit operations
- Improvements to customer environment and lighting should be considered

- Consider opportunities to integrate transit customer information

Summary

The group identified what they felt to be the most important concepts as the evening ended. These are highlighted as follows:

- Gathering place – movement, vitality, diversity, and space for pause.
- Respond to the specific community that interacts with the downtown transit transfer point and consider how it's being used.
- Interact with the architecture and be very site-specific.
- Celebrate what the community is doing when they will experience and see the public artwork.
- Ensure the artwork has a visual impact from far away.
- The site is both a destination and a connection point.

Based on these concepts, the City of Kingston has developed the following Project intent:

The public artwork will be visually impactful, situated within a busy corridor, and will help to animate and improve the Robert Bruce Memorial parking garage, create a new point of interest in the downtown core, and foster a pride of place for all who pass through and engage with this space.

Artists' proposals should:

- Consider and incorporate an understanding of the use of the surrounding space as a Transit Hub and central corridor for the downtown business area and community
- Reflect the diverse body of users of the space, which represents a cross-section of visitors and Kingstonians of all ages, backgrounds and lived experiences
- Engage viewers in both a passive and active sense by inspiring moments of reflection for those moving through and experiencing the space for the first time or on their daily commute

Next Steps

A call for Expressions of Interest for this project has now been launched, and the project intent was established based on input from this community focus group. A Selection Panel composed of arts professionals and community members will be established for this competition and the artwork is expected to be installation is expected by September 2025.