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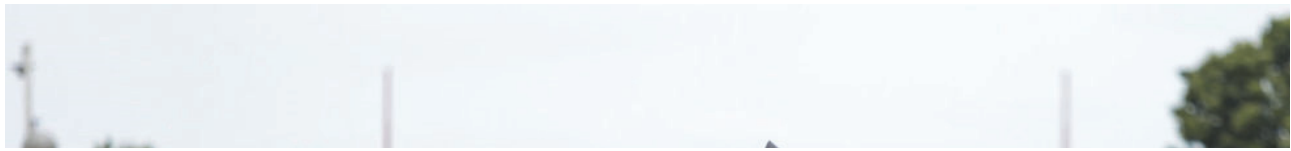
TOP STORY

LIVABILITY | BIG CAPITAL PROJECTS WOULD HAVE ART COMPONENT

Madison considers 1 percent program to fund public art

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In a bid to retain the livability that officials say is an economic engine for the city, Madison may soon set aside funds in big projects for public art.

Mayor Paul Soglin and five City Council members are proposing an ordinance that would set aside 1 percent of the total budget for city capital projects exceeding \$5 million for public art. The 1 percent would require borrowing in addition to the project cost and would not be drawn from a project's budget.

The proposal would provide funds for art at project sites, but the city also could use the set-aside money at a different location or to maintain and conserve existing artwork.

If passed, the ordinance would take effect two years after adoption or for the 2019 Capital Improvement Plan.

If it had been in effect for this year, three projects would have been eligible: the renovation of the Madison Municipal Building, the Pinney Library, and the Midtown Police Station. The 1 percent for these projects would have totaled \$364,000.

The funding stream would help the city become more attractive for residents, visitors and businesses, and energize public places, such as with “Cloud Gate,” the famed metallic, bean-shaped public sculpture by artist Anish Kapoor in Chicago’s Millennium Park, officials said.

In reporting by Forbes magazine, 13 of 15 of the U.S. cities rated most livable and all 15 of the fastest-growing cities have so-called “percent for art” ordinances, city arts program administrator Karin Wolf said. Most provide 1 percent, but some, such as Austin and Fort Worth, Texas, deliver 2 percent.

“This contributes to economic vitality. It attracts business,” Wolf said. “I think it’s strategic to do it. We can’t afford not to keep investing in a well-designed, attractive city.”

Ald. Mike Verveer, 4th District, who represents the core Downtown and is co-sponsoring the ordinance, said, “I don’t think one can overestimate the power of public art. On so many levels, it’s important to a city.”

The state had a “percent for art” program, which funded the beloved 50-yard-long Dale Chihuly glass installation called “Mendota Wall” at the Kohl Center and controversial 20-foot-tall “Nails’ Tales” sculpture at Camp Randall Stadium, before it was eliminated by Gov. Scott Walker.

Funding a challenge

Currently, the city cobbles together funds for public art, which takes “immense time and resources,” Wolf said.

The city, for example, knew it wanted significant public art in the renovated Central Library, but had to rely heavily on outside sources to secure funding for artworks, the most prominent being the 21-foot-tall sculpture called “Question Mark” in a window facing West Mifflin Street.

“To be able to plan in advance, and have an amount included from the beginning of the project, that’s what we need to do,” Wolf said.

Gregg McManners, director of Monona Terrace, said adding public art has been a priority for the convention center. Monona Terrace has created an art program after positive reaction to a temporary installation of a sculpture called “Seed Pod” on Olin Terrace for the World Conference on Ecological Restoration in 2013.

The next year, Monona Terrace tried another installation on Olin Terrace and two on the facility’s rooftop, which led to a decision to make temporary installations, one on Olin Terrace and six on the rooftop, a permanent program starting in 2015, McManners said.

New works were installed last week, and at the start of June, Monona Terrace will offer a phone number that will allow callers to hear the artists give recorded descriptions of their works.

Under the proposed ordinance, eligible projects include construction of new city facilities; renovation or remodeling of 50 percent or more of city-owned or leased facilities; and improvements to city-owned or -leased outdoor sites that have public access, except rights of way, utility easements and highway easements.

Ineligible would be Water Utility wells, towers, reservoirs and buildings that largely house well and pump equipment; sewer utility pumping stations; repair of parking structures; and landfill remediation.

There also would be specific guidelines for determining the \$5 million threshold, which would include construction and contingency costs but not some other expenses such as property acquisition, demolitions, environmental remediation, equipment and fixture costs, legal, design and accounting fees.

The calculation would be made on city spending, not state or federal funds, funds received from other municipalities or private sources, city utilities or donations.

The ordinance would allow the council to approve spending of funds at a location other than the eligible project site, and also permit the deposit of some or all of the funds into a new Art Aggregated Fund for new projects or an Art Maintenance and Conservation Fund for existing city artworks.

Sometimes controversial

The proposal requires artists who are funded to waive any Visual Artists Rights Act rights so the city would have full ownership and discretion over the location, display and maintenance of acquired artwork.

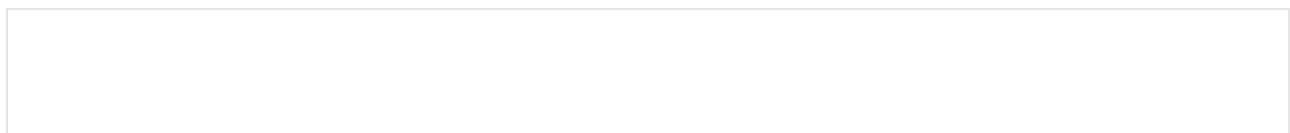
That provision is unappealing to artists, and many who would typically seek commissions may not do so due to copyright concerns and because pieces could be moved if they simply fell from fashion or policymakers didn't like them, Wolf said, adding, "We will lose some opportunities."

The city, in fact, has seen such controversies.

There are intermittent calls to remove "Nails' Tales," and in 2015 the city removed the sculptured seating and tables at Philosopher's Grove at the top of State Street because they had become a magnet for bad behavior.

The ordinance is a "product of compromise," and the waiver is part of that give and take, Verveer said. Wolf still hopes it can be tweaked to create a better balance in attracting the best art and giving the city flexibility and legal protections.

The proposal was introduced to the council on May 16 and is moving through a review process where changes can be made. It was approved by the city's Finance Committee on Wednesday and will be considered by three other committees before the council makes a final decision in June or July.





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Dean Mosiman covers Madison city government for the Wisconsin State Journal.