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### Proposal for Public Art Consultancy for the Town of Arlington

#### *I. Introduction*

The Town of Arlington, MA seeks a consultant to lead it through a process to commission public art that will enrich cultural life in the community and contribute to the economic vitality and public profile of East Arlington. This document introduces my qualifications to assist the town in refining and realizing these goals and then offers a relatively low-cost and high impact model for moving forward: a temporary, participatory, site-responsive art project developed for the public spaces of the commercial district along Massachusetts Avenue in East Arlington.

A large scale temporary and participatory project would build on the success of initiatives such as the Switchbox Project, emphasizing community engagement and laying the groundwork for future initiatives. The many programmatic advantages of this approach, which has become the choice of many cities around the nation, are described below in Section III. This strategy also addresses the challenge that no funding is in place to implement a permanent commission and – currently – there is no identified staff, organization, or volunteer leadership who have this responsibility.

However, if the Town of Arlington decides that a permanent commission is the preferred option, I would be happy to lead a community based process to develop a site profile and RFQ, to oversee the artist selection process, and to deliver an inspiring proposal from the selected artist which could be used as a basis for fundraising along with a fundraising plan. In this case, I would use the methodology outlined in this proposal with a few modifications; the emphasis might be slightly different, with the focus shifting towards creating a durable object or street feature and, perhaps, away from community participation in fabrication and content.

#### *II. Qualifications*

After serving as a leader in the community arts field for more than 20 years, I now consult on projects that bring together artists and people from all walks of life to create meaningful public art projects that enhance and celebrate a sense of community and place. I am excited at the opportunity to facilitate a project with this potential in Arlington, a town where I once lived and which I enjoy visiting.

As the first director of the Somerville Arts Council I led a process that developed an all-volunteer commission into one of the most highly regarded city arts agencies in the Commonwealth. In addition to administering \$70k in grants annually, I oversaw two permanent public art projects (one commissioned as part of development in Union Square and the other a Korean War Memorial) and launched many signature initiatives that transformed the city of Somerville. These ranged from the annual *ArtBeat Festival* and holiday light *Illuminations Tour* to the *Mystic River Mural Project* (an education and employment program for at-risk teens), the *Switchbox Project* (the first in the area), and an oral history/photography project focused on ethnic gardens. The Council's central role in the life of the city was acknowledged by one of the first Commonwealth Awards in the category of "Community."

As Executive Director of the Forest Hills Educational Trust in Boston, I pioneered the use of a beautiful historic site and arboretum as a venue for site-responsive temporary art. In that capacity, I led projects that commissioned artists to respond to the themes of family, memory, history, nature, and mortality – all so poignantly present in the Victorian landscape of the Forest Hills Cemetery. I also raised funds for a permanent commission, a bronze ancestral African-American female guardian figure by Fern

Cunningham. The Trust's visual arts initiatives were complemented by an array of engaging artistic and educational activities. These included: regular concerts and poetry readings, an annual memorial event called the *Lantern Festival*, a traditional Day of the Dead celebration, and an array of walking tours and educational programs for children. Together, these cultural programs drew tens of thousands of new visitors to discover a previously obscure historic treasure; the Trust won extensive media attention, including placement on top ten lists for "places we love" and "art exhibitions."

I have served on numerous grant evaluation panels and juries, and am a reviewer for a family foundation that focuses on catalogues for contemporary art exhibitions around the country. Recent consultations include an assessment of model outdoor sculpture programs in botanic gardens around the U.S. and producing a series of popular interactive programs to complement the Boston Society of Architect's 2014-15 *StereoType* exhibit. I am a current member of the Organizing Committee for *HonkFest*, a major public celebration in Somerville. My focus on the committee is to heighten the visual appeal and impact of the Festival's parade of local activist groups and street marching bands from around the world. In addition I seek out (and recently began to blog about) public art and exhibitions of contemporary art whenever I travel (*StopGoLinger.blogspot.com*).

### *Conceptual Proposal: Public Art in East Arlington*

This proposal outlines a process for the Town of Arlington -- in partnership with East Arlington businesses, the Arlington Public Art Committee, arts activists, and interested residents -- to shape a successful temporary public art initiative that will expand the town's identity as a community that values and promotes the arts without requiring a daunting investment of financial resources. There are many advantages to using the model of temporary and site-responsive art, which has become a trend in cities and towns across the country:

- **Affordability** – meaningful and high quality temporary projects can be accomplished on modest budgets, because work can be fabricated with less durable and more economical materials as well as simpler installation methods. The community's focus can thus be on making art rather than on fundraising.
- **Expression and innovation** – temporary work can make a different kind of statement -- experimental, inventive, and playful – in part because the work does not become a permanent feature of the streetscape.
- **Scale** – even with a relatively small budget, a temporary project can be designed to achieve a large scale with strong visual impact.
- **Community engagement** – often, temporary projects enlist community members in fabrication, incorporating the skills or stories of local residents. People can get involved, and this diversifies the ownership as well as the content of the work while building a sense of shared community.
- **Strengthening the constituency for art** – successful projects educate participants about the value of public art – value which they see first-hand and had a part in creating – and build support for future efforts.
- **Dynamic versus static** – when part of an ongoing effort, changing temporary projects animate public spaces with new, unexpected, and engaging experiences and interactions.

My goals in developing a temporary art program for Arlington will include:

- Facilitating a public dialogue exploring the possibilities for innovative and experimental public art in Arlington.
- Engaging the local business community and town residents in project planning and implementation.
- Developing a work that reflects the character and/or history of East Arlington.

- Selecting an artist who can shape positive experiences for public participation and lead the creation of a work that increases the sense of identity and place in this area of the Massachusetts Avenue corridor.
- Managing a high quality project that will inspire participation and provide a model for future efforts.
- Building community support for future public art initiatives.
- Identifying sources that will help to sustain Arlington's commitment to public art.

In addition to Arlington's recent *Switchbox Project*, examples of temporary art that respond to context and enliven the urban environment include:

- Ross Miller's banners made of small lights woven into a pattern of stars suspended over the streets of Harvard Square, which festively illuminate the area at night.
- Magda Sayeg's colorful knitted sleeves for 69 parking meters along one street in multicultural Brooklyn; sleeves were donated by people across the country.
- Liz LaManche's "tattooed" mural of maritime motifs from around the globe inked onto the surface of a concrete pier in the Boston Harbor Ship Yard in East Boston.
- Dan Sternof Beyer and Bevan Weisman's interactive kiosk containing recorded observations and stories they collected from neighborhood residents living near the Boston Center for the Arts plaza, where the piece was located.

As part of an initial year-long implementation process, I propose to organize a series of public presentations about projects like these, in order to expand Arlington residents' vision of what can be accomplished through public art initiatives, to spread the word about Arlington's plans, and to build participation and support from the community. These could take place throughout the project, and during Phase 4 outlined below.

#### *Proposed Project Phases*

A potential phased project implementation process is outlined below to help Town of Arlington decision-makers design a possible project approach. This approach is flexible and will have mutually agreed upon checkpoints with the key stakeholders/decisionmakers that may require revisions to the timeline as the project unfolds.

#### PHASE I: Introduction (September to November, 15% of fee)

- Meet with stakeholders, decision makers and possible collaborators to understand their individual needs, goals, and desired participation level.
- Hold an open community meeting in East Arlington.
- Identify and convene a Project Advisory Group.
- Public presentations of inspirational/model projects.
- Start outreach to artists.

#### PHASE 2: Assessment (November to April, 15% of fee)

- Public presentation of inspirational/model projects.
- Host three to five meetings with Project Advisory Group to develop site profile, project goals and conceptual underpinnings.
- Write-up minutes or report from these meetings that will be made available to selected artist to guide their project development.
- Finalize project design and budget.

### PHASE 3: Fundraising (April to May, 10% of fee)

- Write a fundraising plan with input and participation from the Project Advisory Group, stakeholders, the local business community and the city manager.
- Support the Project Advisory Group, stakeholders, the local business community and city manager in securing funds.

### PHASE 4: Mini-projects (April to September) (10% of fee)

Plan and implement 2-5 small scale public art happenings in East Arlington to raise visibility for the project and celebrate completion of the street scape. For example: bring John Tagiuri's giant chess set to East Arlington for a chess festival (in collaboration with the Arlington Library) or invite artists to decorate the poles of parking meters.

### PHASE 5: Artist Selection (May to September, 15% of fee)

Please note: this Phase could be shortened and simplified if the artists are chosen without a public process. For example, I could act as curator and invite a smaller number of experienced artists to apply, and the final candidate could be selected by the Project Advisory Group or by an Art Jury. For the purposes of this proposal, I have outlined a public process.

- Write and issue a public Request for Qualifications to the artistic community. Solicit applications from identified artists. Process applications.
- Convene an Art Jury.
- Manage an artist selection process inviting 3-5 artists to submit preliminary proposals and selecting one or two for implementation.

### Phase 6: Contract with Artist (September, 5% of fee)

- Work with artist and town manager to finalize artist's scope of service and plan for community outreach/participation.

### Phase 7: Implementation (Timeline TBD by selected artist's proposal, 25% of fee)

- Organize a kick-off event.
- Work with artist, Project Advisory Committee, Town of Arlington and other stakeholders to oversee project
  - Manage community engagement
  - Secure additional resources and permissions as necessary
  - Oversee installation.
- Organize celebration and any collateral events.

### Phase 8: Conclusion (5% of fee)

- Project evaluation.
- Determine whether to continue with new temporary projects, perhaps on an annual cycle, or work towards a permanent commission.
- Develop plan for future initiatives.

This kind of initiative can grow into an annual event, perhaps staged at different locations, or can lay the groundwork for a permanent commission.

### *Options and Budget*

This proposal suggests that the town focus on temporary rather than permanent art installations. Accordingly, this proposal does not include a timeline and budget for a permanent commission; Phase 3, Fundraising, would be expanded to support a permanent work if this is chosen as the desired outcome of the project.

The scope of a temporary art project will vary according to the size of the budget for artist's time and materials. Modest funds are also necessary for associated programming, events, and publicity. To avoid immediate fundraising challenges it will make sense for Arlington to launch this process with a realistic budget and corresponding expectations.

Ideally, *Chairful Where You Sit* would continue into FY2016 and provide a proven mechanism for raising funds this public art initiative. A part of this consultancy could include working with Adria Arch and other volunteers to facilitate a new model where the leadership and workload for this vital and successful initiative are shared. In any case, an initial budget projection of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for artist's stipend and materials seems reasonable; this number will need to be tested during the Assessment and Fundraising Phases.

### *Permanent Commission*

Permanent commissions have to be engineered to withstand weather and physical stresses just like any element of street furniture, but have additional cost of being unique and innovative -- comparable to a "prototype" versus being manufactured in quantity. Durable materials, footings, and pavings or other surface treatment usually require an artist to contract out fabrication and installation. In this context, \$100,000 is a modest budget.

If the Town prefers to aim for a permanent commission, I would recommend a similar process for developing goals and a site profile. I would implement a 2-tiered process to select the artist:

- Issue an RFQ;
- Convene an art jury to review these applications;
- Select 3 to 5 artists to develop proposals;
- Make a final selection for the commission based on these proposals; and,
- Obtain a detailed proposal with accurate specs for fabrication and installation from the finalist to use for fundraising.

The fundraising plan and implementation will become a more central aspect of the project. The larger budget needed to ensure successful completion would require a solid fundraising plan with identified sources and fundraising leadership (volunteer and/or staff). Typically, but certainly not always, at least some funding should be in place *before* an artist is selected, and/or a likely source of funding such as a community foundation have signaled interest. However, communities have successfully raised funds after selection, using an artist's visionary proposal as an inspiring basis for fundraising. In this case, in order to attract qualified candidates to a project that is not guaranteed, the Town would have to plan to pay significant proposal development fees to 3 (or more) competing candidates selected from the RFQ.

### *Consultant Fee*

Given the \$12,000 budget available, I propose a fee of \$10,000 for the services outlined in this proposal, and I propose to allocate the remaining \$2,000 towards the artist's fee for project implementation so that there is seed money in place. Funds would also have to be secured for speaker's fees, printing, and any associated special events (such as refreshments or music at an opening celebration).

If the Town of Arlington decides in favor of a permanent commission, I would propose a consulting fee of \$12,000 to cover an expanded fundraising component.