



ICMA Award Application #Manassas Art

For years people in the City of Manassas have been talking about bringing more public art to the City. The City Council established the Historic Downtown area of the City as an Arts and Tourism District in 2009. Multiple Art groups were already thriving, but a concerted effort had not previously been made to encourage public art. When the City created a new Economic Development Department in 2014, it was the perfect time for the City Manager to initiate an arts movement. There is a definite tie between a locality's artistic nature and economic development, so it was a natural fit. Art draws tourism and tourism leads to economic development. The challenge was getting the right people involved in the discussion so that work could begin. With some very helpful and creative artists donating their time to begin the project, the initiative fell in place.

At the direction of the City Manager, an ad hoc committee was formed which included the City of Manassas Economic Development Director, Communications Manager, several local artists, a Manassas City Schools representative, local business owners and a member of City Council. The initial meeting was held in Spring 2015.

While the City was the convener and organizer of the group, there was an intentional decision to keep this an ad hoc committee instead of a formal committee with structure, bylaws, and the like. General guidelines were developed to include submittal of ideas by artists and approval by the City Manager or designated staff when the proposed art involved public infrastructure.

The cost of these projects to the City of Manassas has been minimal. Artists wishing to highlight their work have donated their time and efforts in producing the art. The artists also supply their own materials. Those who hang their art in The Hall gallery do so at no cost to the City, but with the opportunity to perhaps sell a piece or two. The City has donated staff time and the cost of a few concrete pads for placement of new sculptures. In a very short time, multiple new public art initiatives have been created through the work of this new ad hoc committee.



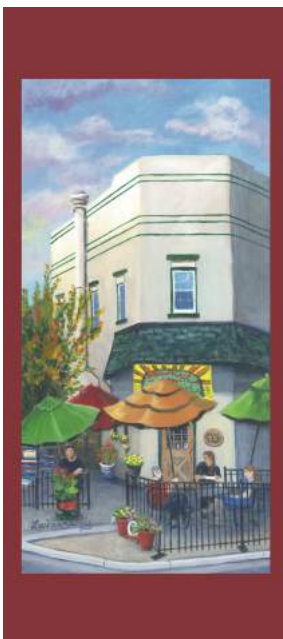


Little Bits

Little Bits are small pieces of art around the Historic Downtown of the City created by local artists to add interest and an artistic flair to our charming City. As part of the new artistic movement, an alleyway was painted as a brook, complete with fish, flowers and grass. Visitors stop by the alley to take selfies and appreciate their surroundings. Walking along Center Street, there is a bench painted like the American Flag. A little further along the street, there is a bench painted like a piano. On the other side of the street, there is a conduit painted to look like a happy snake.

Fire hydrants in several parts of the City are now painted as a Dalmatian, a Gum Ball Machine, and a few American Flags. On City Hall there is a door painted to resemble a gothic fountain. At the Harris Pavilion, the City's outdoor entertainment venue, an entire bug garden has been created out of electric outlets with friendly little faces that children love. On the side of City Hall, the initial "Little Bits" were created on six bricks that are tiny artistic renderings that attract the eye. The artists self fund all the Little Bits projects. The project is open to any artist that wishes to paint in the City as long as they follow the guidelines on the website and have prior approval from the building owner and the City Manager.

In front of each piece of art is a plaque with the hashtag #ManassasArt. There is also a portion of the City's website dedicated to all of the art in the City located at www.manassascity.org/art. This and the other pieces of the public art project have created a tourism buzz and with the temporary nature of the displays and more popping up every day, it keeps people coming back to see what's new.



Banner Art

The City and Historic Manassas, Inc., (HMI) the City's Main Street organization, are beginning the third year for the Banner Art Competition. This competition solicits original pieces of art from artists from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia. About 130 pieces are submitted each year. Out of these, 60 pieces are selected to hang on banners on the light poles around the Historic Downtown. They are selected by a group of residents, business owners, elected officials and others. The "judges" are selected in an effort to create a sense of ownership for the banners for the entire City. One of the banners wins a \$1,000 prize. Local art teachers and adjudicators select the \$1,000 winner of the competition. A

\$500 “people’s choice” award is given at the end of the banner season to the crowd’s favorite piece. A walking tour brochure is created each year to encourage visitors to visit the Historic Downtown, look for all of the banners and choose their favorite. Along the way, they may stop in one of our restaurants or stores, adding to the City’s economy.

Sculpture

Another new initiative is sculpture. The ad hoc arts group is working collaboratively with Northern Virginia Community College on this new initiative. One of the art professors has taken on sculpture projects as part of his curriculum. His students earn college credit while designing and creating public art. The students and teacher have created a website where people can follow the sculptures’ progress. After being approved by the art group, these pieces are placed around the Historic Downtown for a year, until the next class completes their sculptures. This gives the students a chance to showcase their art to the public and gives the City of Manassas eight to ten pieces of sculpture to enhance the downtown.



“The Hall” Art Gallery

The main first floor hallway in City Hall is now home to “The Hall” art gallery. Each month local artists hang their paintings, photography and other 2D art on the first floor of City Hall. Once announced that The Hall would be opening, enquiries from artists flooded in. Now, The Hall is booked about six months in advance. Local news coverage has been fantastic for The Hall and creates the foot traffic artists need to sell their work. The City allows artists to post a card next to their art with information about selling the piece and the artist handles any transactions.

Other Initiatives



An arts competition offered during the year is the Battle of the Artists, where artists use chalk to do street drawings. There is an area marked off for aspiring artists and children to complete their own drawings. This event is held in conjunction with the City’s Railway Festival each year and is a great added attraction for the event.

This year, the City of Manassas is adding an additional event – Much Ado About Art – to our annual spring and fall Gallery Walks. Gallery Walks are held in conjunction with First Fridays in Historic Downtown where the Manassas

Museum, various downtown galleries, and businesses are open late and showcasing new art. The Gallery Walk events have a great following, but to enhance the spring event, this year the walk will include two nights of juried art exhibits and family

entertainment during the day time hours. Streets are closed and residents and visitors are invited to browse the local galleries or watch the artists at work as they create their paintings on easels both inside and outside local shops and restaurants. The City Manager suggested this event as a way of spreading the word that the City of Manassas is open to artists of all genres.

Lessons Learned

One of the City's "lessons learned" is to keep the arts group ad hoc with no formal structure or bylaws. We believe this approach has led to more free-flow and sharing of ideas and allowed the group to be more creative in its approach to creating public art. All ideas are encouraged and many have been accepted. Flexibility has also been a key lesson. One of the sculptures had to be moved inside because the wire material from which it was made was catching debris during windy periods. The move inside to the Center for the Arts building in downtown actually turned out to be a better way to display this particular sculpture and created additional foot traffic for the Center.

Several members of the ad hoc group also serve on the City's architectural review board. This helps with project review and consideration. In addition, having a member of City Council on the team shows Council support and encouragement for all of these projects. In recent months, several localities have visited the City of Manassas to inquire about starting their own arts initiative and we continue to receive favorable media coverage. The "buzz" is working and catching on.

#Manassas Art would not have been possible or as successful in such a short period of time without the efforts of Local Government Managers. The City Manager made public art a focus with the establishment of a new economic development department. By building relationships within the community as well as demonstrating a commitment with staff resources and assistance, a beneficial new program has been created with widespread support and minimal public expense. Manassas has indeed caught the "art bug" and more and more creativity is being leveraged to help fulfill City Council's vision of creating a Sense of Place, a Sense of Community, and a Sense of Opportunity.