

# City of Poughkeepsie Public Arts Commission

## Public Art Policy

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Jeff Aman - Chair  
Azia Brown - Vice Chair  
Art Jones - Secretary  
Liz Dahmen

Jean Hinkley  
Victoria Horner  
Tim McQueen  
Tom Pacio

## **Introduction**

The City of Poughkeepsie Public Arts Commission (PPAC) is an advisory group formed by Mayor Rob Rolison in 2017 to “advocate for the role and value of arts and culture in civic life” and to “develop and update, as needed, an arts master plan, policies, resources lists, and other program elements for the City.” In support of the Mayor’s directive, the PPAC has prepared this document in an advisory capacity to explain the purpose and goals of public arts in the City, along with practical guidelines to assist the public. The Public Arts Policy set forth is intended to be a living document that will undergo revisions as our public arts evolve and grow.

The Public Arts Policy was prepared in the wake of COVID-19, which has caused considerable hardship for the City of Poughkeepsie, as it has throughout the world. This document envisions the future through a post-pandemic lens—optimistically looking forward to a time when public arts will thrive, helping to restore Poughkeepsie to a state of economic and cultural well being.

### **Definition of Public Arts**

The PPAC embraces a broad and inclusive definition of public arts, encompassing an array of artistic forms. When traveling through our City, public arts involve a wide range of creative works you see and hear, and in some cases what you might feel within the environment. The definition of public arts may normally include art forms located on City property—such as publicly accessible sculptures, murals, temporary art installations, musical and dance performances at festivals, or theatrical events. While art on private property would not usually fall under the heading of public arts, it could be designated so when it is clearly observable to the public and, especially, if it contributes to the overall artistic ambiance of the City.

### **Value of Public Arts**

The City’s public arts transform and activate public spaces for the benefit of all who experience them. The vitality of a city can be measured by its public arts, which may potentially add enormous value to the cultural and economic well-being of the City. Public arts may be educational, inspirational, thought-provoking, or merely decorative to enhance a welcoming public space. Poughkeepsie’s public arts can create a sense of belonging and inclusiveness—reflecting historic events, cultural diversity, the City’s evolution over time, or the future we envision.

## **Vision for Public Arts**

The purpose of the City of Poughkeepsie's public arts policy is to foster an environment that enhances the overall quality of life for culturally diverse people of all ages and to promote economic development—*building upon Poughkeepsie's prominence as a City with community pride and a sense of place, a desirable place to live and work, a tourist destination, and a haven for arts and culture*. Within the foreseeable future, we envision that public arts will play an increasingly vital role in the growth, vitality, and economic prosperity of our City. Moreover, we look forward to the emergence of new public arts projects that celebrate our City's history and promising time ahead, while incorporating art into spaces associated with private development and City planning.

In keeping with the goals and mission of the Public Arts Commission, we provide seven general recommendations reflecting the value of the arts to our City and in support of the future cultural and economic vitality of our City. These recommendations may be used to shape plans for in-progress projects and to suggest areas where minor improvements to our City may have a large positive impact. We realize that the following recommendations are time-dependent and will need to be periodically updated as the City's environment changes, which may also drive the need for additions and revisions to our Public Art Policy and Processes.

### **1. Arts and Culture Plan**

As the **Comprehensive Plan** for our City is updated we recommend the addition of an **Arts and Culture** component giving thoughtful consideration to the role, value, and placement of public art exhibitions, arts activities, festivals, and performance events within our City. This could bring the value of the arts to the forefront while providing a framework for how public art installations and activities could be more inclusive of the City's residents, reaching out to all. We would also expect a planned approach through which the City incorporates opportunities for public arts within its capital improvement projects.

A positive side effect of incorporating public arts within the updated Comprehensive Plan will be to inform people near and far that our City believes it has a strong future, understanding the needs of its residents, and that potential grant funding would be well spent. Having an environment conducive to cultural events would help us to engage and inform residents from all neighborhoods about public safety, social justice, and other issues.

### **2. Activation of Public Spaces**

In conjunction with recent focus by the City Administration on the need for major improvement to our public parks, additional arts-related activities could energize under-utilized parks and other public areas. Near term minor improvements are possible to create distinctive opportunities for social interaction such as pop-up performance spaces in select areas, to reach and inspire residents in every corner of our city. Longer term, more extensive opportunities are plentiful, such as in College Hill Park, the underground Cistern, Kaal Rock Park, along the Fall Kill, and in areas near the upcoming Youth Opportunity Center.

Consideration should be given to designation of small-pocket parks and areas within existing parks suitable for temporary installation of sculptures or other 3D artwork for extended time periods. Somehow, somewhere, visitors to our waterfront and to the Walkway Over the Hudson need to be drawn to the numerous historic and cultural elements of our City.

We also recommend an evaluation of the means by which the City may encourage spontaneous or unexpected projects or events to occasionally spring forth, as spontaneity might at times foster vitality. Consideration should also be given to availability of funding to encourage staging of smaller local events, serving residents unlikely to gravitate toward the waterfront or the Central Business District.

### **3. Public Arts Ambiance and the Environment**

Public arts activities and events need to be situated in aesthetically pleasing and safe settings that create welcoming conditions for locals and tourists alike. This matter is of particular importance to the Main Street corridor and areas surrounding the Central Business District — areas where our art galleries, arts organizations, and cultural venues are concentrated. Some improvements are in progress and, as our economic climate improves, we encourage continued environmental improvements, such as parking lots with well-lit safe passageways to arts venues, accompanied by additional security measures that assure public safety. Continued and additional focus is also recommended on the cleanliness and appearance of our streets and sidewalks, with attention to sidewalks in disrepair and the safety of our crosswalks.

### **4. Promotion of Public Arts to Revitalize the Economy**

Public arts have potential to boost local economies in ways that benefit communities on a day-to-day basis and drive long term tourism revenue. Both the need and the potential have clearly been demonstrated by our First Friday events, distribution of The Buzz, and the PKGO initiative. We, as a City, need to aggressively promote what we have: within our City, around the Hudson Valley region, and in the New York City area. We have both significant untapped tourism potential and we have complex challenges attracting residents from all parts of our City to participate in our economy. We have many things in place that move Poughkeepsie in a positive direction, actions that need to be touted and driven to all corners of our City. The time appears to have arrived for a concerted promotional effort by the City, partnering with Dutchess Tourism, the Walkway Over the Hudson, MTA, our local businesses and organizations, and others.

We also feel that the burden of far-reaching promotion of the arts should not be left to each individual art gallery, arts venue, or arts organization to carry. Some form of consolidated marketing and promotion of Poughkeepsie has to offer is needed to reach deeper into our City, around the Hudson Valley region, and into the New York City area. To provide a good sense of what may interest tourists and how to reach those tourists may require professional assistance, and the scope of promotion should go beyond arts performances, exhibitions, and festivals to include other topics like architectural and historical sites.

### **5. Collaboration, Public Expression, and Our Youth**

As the economic future of our City improves we feel the need for public art will increase, driven by increased population density in an around the Central Business District, new residents moving to our City, and a new generation of “experiential” residents. Coupled with a desire to focus on tourism and our need for more outreach to our existing population, attention to the arts (and other areas) will be required to satisfy an increased public appetite for social interaction, things to see, and things to do.

All around our City we have examples of public/private collaborations improving the appearance of our parks, cleaning up the environment, and engaging the public for input on ideas about our future. More importantly are events that provide arts activities, mentoring,

and social interaction with our youth, which include collaborations that support development of future leaders of our community. We urge the City to continue and expand partnerships supporting public arts projects with local businesses, schools and colleges, libraries, and art organizations, building connections between the City’s residents and our local artist community. Beyond fostering relationships with our partners we urge the City to continue support for artistic projects that demonstrate visible vitality and public enthusiasm for the arts such as decoration of sanitation vehicles, public garbage cans, bus shelters, and spaces within parks. We also recommend even more opportunities for our youth by creating a large “Mural Expression Wall” in the City, designation a major street as a “Street Art Zone”, and incorporation of public art in close proximity to locations supporting youth activities.

## **6. Additional Public Art**

While not on the immediate horizon, the production of additional large-scale public arts projects such as public monuments or sculptures and expanding our local festivals would have lasting benefits in the promotion of tourism and improved bonding of our residents to our City. Investment in public art may attract more businesses to the City, as well as more customers. In other words, the growth of local businesses and the entrance of new ones into Poughkeepsie may be spurred by the growth of our public arts.

Going forward we recommend exploring ways in which the City could provide funding specific to the creation or purchase of additional public art, as well as funding and support for our growing list of annual festivals. Various mechanisms are used by cities large and small around the country, such as:

- Creation of a Business Improvement District,
- Establishing an occupancy tax on hotels, motels and B&B rentals
- A “% for the Arts” requirement on new construction
- Requirements for developers of large projects to include a public art component

These types of funding could also be applied to support City improvement projects such as the Kaal Rock Park Connector, the Poughkeepsie Water Cistern, or an annual rotating sculpture exhibit. Accomplishing any type of funding mechanism would not be an easy task but could have significant long term benefits.

## **7. Stewardship of Existing Public Art**

We encourage the City to take a more proactive role in the stewardship of our existing inventory of public art. We recommend creation of an inventory of sculptures, monuments, statues, murals, and historic markers resident on City-owned property, capturing historical details and photographs for each item. This inventory would be available online for public consumption, public education, and tourism promotion.

We also recommend that a City employee position be established, responsible for:

- keeping the public art inventory current,
- periodic evaluation of all public art to identify maintenance or preservation needs,
- providing input into the City budgeting process for funding of necessary work.

An additional public art policy component would also be an appropriate companion to this effort, defining specific policy and procedures for moving or removing public art, should the need arise.

## **Public Art Policy and Processes**

An important component of a Public Art Policy is the definition of the processes by which public arts take place. Public arts are valued and encouraged by the City of Poughkeepsie, with established processes for most art forms describing the means by which approval can be obtained from the City. These processes focus on property owned by the residents of the City of Poughkeepsie, including public buildings and structures, streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks, retaining walls, and City vehicles.

The purpose of this topic is to provide clarity on existing permit processes that provide “how to” information for those interested. The resulting approvals ensure that proposed activities are appropriate for the location requested to prevent scheduling conflicts, protect public safety, and coordinate support required from City personnel .

The existing City of Poughkeepsie public art policies in place do not cover every potential scenario associated with public art, and such situations are handled on a case-by-case basis. Additional policies may be considered in the future as the need arises and will be incorporated.

### **Policy Proposal: Art Installations on Public Property**

Prior to 2021 the City of Poughkeepsie had no clearly defined, consistent process for a member of the public to obtain approval to install art on public property. Given our strong community of artists, arts organizations, art enthusiasts, and community activists ideas frequently arise for enhancing our City with temporary installations of various art forms. While public artistic displays can have a positive impact, such installations require careful consideration to protect public property, the public at large, and the rights of artists.

#### **Our Goals**

Our goal is to have a consistent and thorough process supporting artistic expression in public spaces. Maximum flexibility is provided to allow the highest degree of creativity, coupled with an appropriate degree of review and evaluation. This satisfies our obligation to protect public safety, public property, and the rights of artists. The flexibility afforded by our process is intended to make the process easy to accomplish for those requesting something simple, to make an early distinction between that which is possible and what may be impossible, and to provide guidance to applicants when necessary toward successful display of artwork for the public to enjoy.

Of utmost importance is that installation of art on public property should not be initiated prior to receiving written approval by the City of Poughkeepsie Administrator. Should premature installation be initiated, immediate removal and remediation of the site will be required by those involved. Also please be aware that what one considers to be public property within our City may actually fall under jurisdiction of Dutchess County, the State of New York, or the United States Government, for which City approval cannot be granted.

The Public Arts Commission is available as a resource to assist applicants in the development of public art installation projects, and may be contacted by email at [publicarts@cityofpoughkeepsie.com](mailto:publicarts@cityofpoughkeepsie.com).

Prior to submission of a proposal to the City we strongly encourage applicants to seek the positive recommendation of the Common Council member representing the Ward in which the artwork is to be situated.

#### **Our Policy**

This policy applies to temporary, long term installation of artwork by members of the public on property owned by the City of Poughkeepsie including City streets, sidewalks, parking lots, parks,

buildings and other structures, and vehicles, where not otherwise prohibited by law. **Artwork installed on public property is considered temporary, regardless of the art form.**

Exhibition of privately owned artwork in the public domain for an extended period of time requires that consideration be given to the complete life-cycle of the artwork from the time of installation, for the anticipated exhibition period, through removal and potential site remediation. The issues listed below might not uniformly apply to all art forms. Nevertheless each should be considered by the applicant and will likely be evaluated by the City:

1. Appropriateness of the proposed artwork for the requested location, following legal and moral definition of the word “appropriate”,
2. Rights of ownership of the artwork,
3. The cost of artwork installation and any requirements the artist may have on the City for preparation of the installation location,
4. Potential risks the artwork may have to public safety and the potential need for additional liability insurance,
5. Potential for the artwork to become a public nuisance,
6. Responsibility for maintenance of the installation due to weather or vandalism,
7. The possibility for premature degradation of the artwork, requiring early removal,
8. The cost of artwork removal and any requirements the artist might have on the City for removal and/or remediation of the site,
9. How publicity will be managed and funded.

Applications may be submitted online or mailed to the City of Poughkeepsie Public Arts Commission, 62 Civic Center Plaza - 3rd Floor - Poughkeepsie, NY 12601. Applications will be reviewed carefully by the City, which may take up to 30 days. The Public Arts Commission will review the proposal in terms of appropriateness of concept, and if necessary the applicant may be contacted during that period to discuss the proposal further. The applicant may also be requested to present their proposal during the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Public Arts Commission.

A written recommendation will be submitted by the Public Arts Commission to the City Administrator, who has final authority for approving art installation proposals based upon City of Poughkeepsie ordinances and procedures as established and modified from time-to-time. Depending upon the nature of the proposal, applicant submission of an **Event Permit** or development of a more comprehensive, contractual **Memorandum of Understanding** specifying details of the artwork installation agreement may be required.

## **Events In The City of Poughkeepsie**

The City of Poughkeepsie has a long-standing special events policy and approval process governing events taking place on public property that have a short, well-defined duration such as an afternoon or a few days. The policy covers concerts, parades, festivals, community outreach events, large gatherings, and other activities beyond the scope of arts and culture.

The *Events - Policies & Application Process* information and submission form can be found online at <https://www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com/DocumentCenter/View/217/Events---Policies-and-Application-Process-PDF> which provides a detailed description of events covered and information that submitters must provide. The following text is extracted directly from this policy and is included here for completeness.

### **Our Goals**

In 2020, we are streamlining our Special Events application process, in order to make it more convenient for all who would like to hold their event in the City of Poughkeepsie. The City of Poughkeepsie's goal is to promote a growing number of culturally diverse and inclusive events in our

community. We have established a reliable event management system that will encourage the occurrence of special events that enhance quality of life, provide entertainment, promote economic development, attract visitors, and contribute to the dynamic atmosphere of our community. Our goal is to streamline the application process that will encourage collaborations.

### **Our Policy**

Applications will be reviewed carefully by the City. This process takes about 2 weeks. A planning meeting may be required, therefore, all event applications must be fully completed, signed and submitted to the City Chamberlain's Office 62 Civic Center Plaza - 1st Floor - Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 at least thirty (30) days prior to the first day of the event as set forth in Chapter 7 3/ 4, Article VI, Section 7 3/ 4--10(C) of the Poughkeepsie City Code (available online at the City's website, [www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com](http://www.cityofpoughkeepsie.com)) or will be subject to rejection.

Applications received less than 30 days before the event may not be accepted.

Exceptions to this requirement are defined in Chapter 7 3/4 and shall be evaluated by the City Administrator upon receipt of a completed Special Event form (available from either the City Chamberlain or the City website). These forms may be submitted less than thirty (30) days prior to the event where free speech activity is intended to respond to current events and depends for its value on a timely response.

Any misrepresentation in this application or deviation from the final agreed upon route and/ or method of operation described herein may result in the revocation of the permit. Please type or print the information clearly and attach additional sheets or maps as required. We ask that you completely fill out all required information. Incomplete applications, including those without insurance certificates, will be returned. All timing involved with evaluation of applications begins ONLY when the City is satisfied that an application has been completed in its entirety.

Community event dates will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. No dates will be held until a completed application is returned to the City Chamberlain, together with any applicable fees. The application fee must be paid at the time that this application is submitted or it will be returned. This application and fee should be returned to the address listed (in person or by mail) with an attached check or money order made payable to "Commissioner of Finance, City of Poughkeepsie" in the amount of \$35.00, which is the application fee. This fee is non-refundable and should not be considered a Permit for the Event.