

## Help shape the future of public art at March 31 forum

Help shape what public art means to ? and looks like in ? Aurora next Thursday as the Town of Aurora hosts a Public Art Forum.

A meeting that will help the Town shape its first-ever Public Art Master Plan will take place at the historic Aurora Armoury on Mosley Street on Thursday, March 31, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and feature an array of speakers and interactive workshops.

Those slated to speak include Queen Kikoyi and Nico Taylor of the Black Speculative Arts Movement, Catherine Dean, Public Art Officer for the City of Toronto, Collin Zipp, Public Art Manager for STEPS Public Art, and artist Clarissa M. Lewis on ?creating intimate experiences in public places.?

?This forum is meant to inform the development of our Public Art Master Plan and the Public Art Policy,? says Phil Rose, Manager of Aurora Town Square. ?We're trying to get many people together from different sectors, whether it is the business community, the artists themselves, municipal staff and residents, and we want to promote the fact we're actually developing the Public Art Master Plan. We want to raise awareness about the role of public art in the community.

?Public art has the ability to draw in a lot of people from different sectors of our population and different demographics. I think public art is actually a way of having a conversation with the community and it is really important that this [policy] is informed by what residents want to see. Public art is a way of thinking creatively about what we want our community to represent and the visual medium allows us to have a conversation together on what we see our community being like in the future. It allows us to engage our artists who are often under-served or under-represented in terms of community building exercises, and we have seen examples of that from other municipalities where public art is a priority: there is actually a tourism component where it draws people to come and see the creativity, the vibrancy, and the artistic nature of the community.?

But measuring where the community is currently is an essential part of that process.

The aim of next week's forum is to allow participants to voice what they want to see built into the Public Art Plan. Afternoon workshops will task people to think about their ideal public art project, the development of a mission statement within the Plan, what themes the public would like to see reflected in the art, including ?contemporary? issues like climate change, Truth & Reconciliation, and diversity and inclusion, as well as where public art could be installed.

?We have a Diversity & Inclusion mural, a street wall mural and both of those projects are going to be happening in the spring; the Cultural Centre is working with Indigenous artists to paint Bell boxes around the community, so we already have some awareness of public art and those (projects) have allowed us to let people see what public art can look like,? says Mr. Rose. ?We want people to connect as many dots for us and we want to be able to crunch that data afterwards and say this is where the first one should go and all the outcomes from the public art forum should be connected to an actual action item that we will bring forward to Council as a recommendation in the Public Art Plan.

?We have some data we've done through public engagement but we want to fill in the gaps and blanks that we have. We want to either validate the survey findings we have in terms of where they said they want public art to go and where that will look like? We haven't been able to do in-person engagement for quite some time, so this is the first opportunity we're going to be able to have people in a room and say, ?We have done all this public engagement as much as we could have with COVID restrictions and now we want to actually have these face-to-face conversations to fill in the blanks and validate or invalidate the data we have.?

If you'd like to take part in the Aurora Public Art Forum on March 31, RSVP to Phil Rose at [prose@aurora.ca](mailto:prose@aurora.ca) or visit [engageaurora.ca/publicartmasterplan](http://engageaurora.ca/publicartmasterplan).

By Brock Weir  
Editor  
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter