

Staff Report



Development Services Department

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REPORT TO: Planning and Strategic Initiatives Committee

DATE OF MEETING: September 18, 2023

SUBMITTED BY: Cory Bluhm, Executive Director, Economic Development, 519-741-2200 ext. 7065

PREPARED BY: Eric Rumble, Coordinator, Arts and Creative Industries, 519-741-2200 ext. 7424

WARD(S) INVOLVED: Ward 5

DATE OF REPORT: August 16, 2023

REPORT NO.: DSD-2023-368

SUBJECT: KPL Southwest Public Artwork Commission

RECOMMENDATION:

That the commission and installation of a new artwork, “Wintertime Stories” by Isaac Murdoch and Nyle Miigizi Johnston, at the Kitchener Public Library’s new southwest community facility, be approved; and,

That the Mayor and Clerk be authorized to implement an agreement, satisfactory to the City Solicitor, with the artists’ representative, Highness Global Inc., outlining the obligations of the library public art commission.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS:

- The purpose of this report is to explain the selection process and recommended proponent from the Kitchener Public Library Southwest Public Art Competition.
- The key finding of this report is the jury selection of one proposal, which resulted from a successful open call for submissions and a gradual deliberation process.
- The financial implication is \$65,000 from the consolidated public art account.
- Community engagement included a diverse jury composition as well as consultation with the Arts and Culture Advisor Committee and Public Art Working Group.
- This report supports the delivery of core services through the 1% for Public Art policy.

BACKGROUND:

City of Kitchener’s public art program installs site-specific artworks at newly constructed facilities such as libraries, community centres, fire stations, parking garages and other public civic buildings and spaces. These artworks include permanent installations in a wide variety of styles and materials, selected with a preference for artistic merit and innovation, site responsiveness, public engagement and accessibility, durability and sustainability.

Kitchener’s forthcoming new library is eligible for a public artwork allotment through the City of Kitchener’s percent for public art program, guided by Public Art Policy I-816.

*** This information is available in accessible formats upon request. ***
Please call 519-741-2345 or TTY 1-866-969-9994 for assistance.

KPL southwest branch (KPLSW) will serve a growing demand for library space, resources and services in the new Rosenberg residential area, which could reach 25,000 residents and more than 10,000 new residential units by 2040. The concept designs developed by mcCallumSather architects propose a 14,000-square-foot, single-story, Net-Zero building with natural light connecting open gathering areas and flexible program spaces.

Library staff envision a welcoming, inspiring facility that will offer resources, programs and spaces for artistic expression through music, writing, culinary arts or digital design. Southwest Kitchener residents want a place to borrow books and study, but also to access technology, digital tools, cultural programming and early learning and literacy. They also want a naturally lit space that promotes inclusion and incorporates sustainable principles.

The open call for proposals aimed to prioritize submissions from underrepresented artists. Proposals by artists of Indigenous background were prioritized out of respect for the 1784 Haldimand Tract treaty and the archeological discovery of a Late Woodland Iroquoian longhouse community that precedes European settlements near the new library site. Immigrant applicants were prioritized because census data indicates about one-third of southwest Kitchener residents as people whose first language is not English or French. Other equity-deserving groups were also able to self-identify, including racialized people, women, LGBTQ2S+, people living with disabilities, senior citizens or unhoused people.

REPORT:

The KPLSW public art competition was open to artists or artist teams with experience in creating site-responsive public art projects. A commission of \$65,000 was available, which promotional content indicated must be used to cover the artist's or team's design and production fees; insurance and legal costs; materials, fabrication and subcontractors' costs; studio, storage and installation expenses, including transportation of artwork to the site; any required official documentation; and the artist's or team's travel expenses.

Staff assembled a jury to recommend one proposal from those submitted to the selection process. Jurors were considered carefully to include the following members:

- Charl G. Smith (professional artist)
- August Swinson (professional artist)
- Suzanne Luke (professional curator)
- Sumaira Tazeen (professional artist & Public Art Working Group representative)
- Arnav Vashishth (Kitchener citizen & future KPLSW branch user)
- Ralph Bieber (Kitchener citizen & future KPLSW branch user)
- Mary Chevreau (CEO of Kitchener Public Library)
- Willems Ransom (Principal, architect at mcCallumSather)
- Ayo Owodunni (Ward 5 councillor for City of Kitchener)

Competition

A two-stage public art competition for KPLSW was announced in October 2022. An open call for expressions of interest was posted and promoted on the City's website for 100 days. After 43 submissions were received by January 20, 2023, staff identified eligible proposals and eliminated those that overlooked critical requirements or constraints of the open call.

In February 2023, jury members reviewed and rated 29 submissions of interest. About a dozen of the highest-rated proposals were discussed at a jury meeting, with three proposals selected for stage two. Short-listed artists or teams prepared and presented more detailed concepts to the jury in May 2023, with their deliberation afterwards narrowing the options down to two proposed ideas. The jury reconvened in June 2023 to make a final selection.

Jury statement

Wintertime Stories is a compelling concept for the main programming area of a new library, particularly for younger users but also the broader community that will rely on the facility. This accessible and engaging theme proposed by the artist team of Isaac Murdoch and Nyle Miigizi Johnston carries a deep connection to Anishinabek tradition, as well as to the experiences of living in a northern climate, cultivating relationships and sharing culture.

The proposed artwork features stylized, recognizable shapes and forms of woodland animals and other symbols that will appeal to audiences of many ages, identities, ethnicities and levels of familiarity or comfort with contemporary art or Indigenous heritage. The artists' design has a warmth and playfulness that lends itself to both interpretive content and programming options.

Given the proximity of the new library site to the archeological discovery of a longhouse village that pre-dates settler contact, the artwork will also serve to recognize the longstanding relationship between First Nations people and the land where the library will be. This aligns with other local reconciliation efforts and will help to acclimatize newcomers to Kitchener and other library users. Choosing *Wintertime Stories* begins to address the absence of Indigenous representation in the City of Kitchener's public art collection and adheres to the equity-deserving priority indicated in the project's open call for proposals.

Artwork

As the artists Isaac Murdoch and Nyle Miigizi Johnston explain, "the stories of the woodland animals are rich with lessons and teachings on our connection to all of nature and our roles as stewards and protectors of the lands. In addition to being visually striking, the artwork will be embedded with important messages about history, culture and eco-consciousness."

Its pictography will be formed by CNC machine-cut shapes in stained Baltic birch plywood and laser-cut acrylic made from recycled plastics that are UV-printed with custom colours. Materials were chosen to align with building design features. The artwork will be installed directly onto the surface of 53'-long, 8'-tall bulkhead above the main programming area.

Please see the appendix for more detailed description and visuals of the proposed artwork.

Installation

Construction of the new library is anticipated to begin in 2024. The artwork will be produced and stored to avoid cost inflation and installed in coordination with facility construction timelines.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

This report supports the delivery of core services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Capital Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Capital Budget. Funding for this public art project has already been allocated to the consolidated public art budget in accordance with Public Art Policy I-816. The construction costs of the new library facility resulted in a \$68,000 allotment, \$65,000 of which was offered as commission in the open call for expressions of interest. Of the remaining \$3,000, three proponents were each paid \$850 to produce a phase two proposal and presentation, and the balance will be used to produce interpretive signage for the installed artwork. Any ongoing maintenance costs will be funded through the City’s Public Art maintenance account.

Operating Budget – The recommendation has no impact on the Operating Budget.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

INFORM – This report has been posted to the City’s website with the agenda in advance of the council / committee meeting.

CONSULT – Staff produced an open call for expressions of interest draft and hired two reviewers to provide professional input pertaining to inclusion and equity. The open call was published on the City website and promoted on its social media and by paid advertising. The jury included both visual arts professionals and local citizens who will use the new library.

This project has been discussed numerous times at PAWG and ACAC meetings. On July 10, 2023, PAWG expressed support for the recommendations in this report, and on July 18 and August 15, 2023, ACAC expressed its support for the recommendations as well.

PREVIOUS REPORTS/AUTHORITIES:

- GOV-COR-816 Public Art Policy

APPROVED BY: Justin Readman, General Manager, Development Services

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment A – *Wintertime Stories* stage two proposals document