

**PLAN            FOR            PUBLIC            ART**  
**2016 - 2020**  
**DAVIDSON, North Carolina**  
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**Submitted by Davidson Public Art Commission**

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# **The Davidson Plan for Public Art**

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## **Executive Summary**

The Plan for Public Art 2016-2020 gives form to plans for public art throughout Davidson and supports town goals of economic development, community building, sense of place, open space, and citizen leadership. This master plan has been developed by the Davidson Public Art Commission (DPAC), building upon the 2007 Plan for Public Art developed by a Public Art Steering Committee. This plan takes into account the 2013 Arts & Science Council Cultural Vision Plan and is also informed by the past successes of the DPAC as well as recent surveys and workshops with community residents.

The plan helps fulfill the town's mission to sustain its distinct character; strengthen community opportunities for social interaction through art; contribute to Davidson's vitality; facilitate the creation of works of public art on public land and in private development; integrate public art into Davidson's built and natural environments; and expand opportunities for residents to experience, understand, and appreciate public art.

To this end, the plan:

- Defines objectives for public art in Davidson;
- Identifies top priorities for future public art;
- Sets responsibility for project management, maintenance, and conservation of works of public art; and
- Describes methods to formally engage the community in public art projects.

The Plan for Public Art is a dynamic, sustainable, and community-driven program that responds to town goals and residents' desires for extraordinary public art experiences.

The rationale for updating the Plan for Public Art was predicated on the idea that Davidson will continue to benefit by the work of public artists to articulate the town's priorities and history. The town is committed to creating a civic environment in which education and learning are valued and emphasized.

The framework and funding for Davidson's public art program was developed in the initial Plan for Public Art. This update builds on the initial plan with recommendations that support and enhance the current public art program.

This updated plan concentrates on identifying specific areas of town that are appropriate for public art and new types of projects that will engage our residents, students, and visitors. It also provides additional structure to the commission in the form of updated by-laws and guidelines, and offers direction in the form of new policies.

## The Davidson Plan for Public Art

### History 2004-2015

In 2004, the Town of Davidson contributed to the development of a cultural plan for North Mecklenburg, which was directed by the Arts & Science Council (ASC). This study concluded that there is *“interest among municipal leaders and residents in developing public art for beautification, wayfinding, historical demarcation, and advancing regional identity.”*

Furthermore, those who participated in the ASC planning process expressed a desire to bring public art to those sites where there is already a predisposition to congregate as well as sites where art would encourage social interaction.

In July 2006, Downtown Davidson Inc. in association with the Town of Davidson was awarded a Creating Places planning grant from the North Carolina Arts Council. The grant was used to define and give form to community aspirations for public art in Davidson. An eight person Public Art Steering Committee developed a Plan for Public Art to implement the public art guidelines for the Town of Davidson. This plan was approved by the Davidson Board of Commissioners in 2007. It established and funded Davidson’s public art program, and created the Davidson Public Art Commission.

### *Program Goals*

The purpose of the Davidson public art program is to:

- Help fulfill the town’s mission to sustain its distinct character;
- Strengthen community opportunities for social interaction through art;
- Contribute to Davidson’s vitality;
- Facilitate the creation of works of public art on public land that are integral to Davidson’s built and natural environments and become intrinsic to the community;
- Assist organizations or developers interested in pursuing public art on private properties; and
- Expand opportunities for residents to experience, understand, and appreciate public art.

### *Chronology of Completed Public Art Projects*

Since the creation of the commission, three public spaces in downtown Davidson have been rejuvenated, activated, and enlivened by public art:

The *Bouquet for Davidson* was created by British Sculptor Andy Dunhill and was installed in the post office plaza in spring 2009. “The abstract images that you see in the sculpture are derived from my response to the town, its history, its residents, and the physical nature of the site,”

said Dunhill. "I have incorporated sections of columns like those that stand in front of the post office, I reference open books, roof tops, fishing nets, picture frames, farm machinery, riding tackle, and the natural environment around Davidson."

The *Book Garden* was created by Artist Lydia Musco and Landscape Architect J'Nell Bryson, and was installed in fall 2013. "Davidson is full of authors and readers; the Book Garden honors Davidson's literary legacy and celebrates the written and visual arts through design, sculpture, and words," said Bryson. "Its location next to the library, a block from Davidson College, and across the street from Main Street books, is perfect to celebrate Davidson's literary pursuits."

*Dance of Life* was created by Sculptor Douwe Blumberg and Landscape Architect J'Nell Bryson and was installed in April 2015. "I saw this project as having two main goals: 1) to celebrate Pat Knox's life and communicate this in an uplifting, spiritually energetic way and 2) to be a permanent artwork for the town and serve as an iconic piece of public art as the decades go by," said Blumberg.

The completed projects have transformed previously unused public spaces in downtown Davidson into welcoming, pedestrian-friendly sites that impart a distinct sense of place. These spaces have become a magnet for visitors and provide distinctive settings in which citizens gather. They have created a heightened awareness of the value and contribution of the arts to the way we live and inhabit space.

### *Chronology of Funding*

The Davidson community has supported the installation of public art through monetary donations from citizens and corporations, annual municipal funding through the town budget, and citizens' volunteer work on the Public Art Commission.

Municipal funding has been pledged every spring in the annual budget process. Subsequent to approval of the Plan for Public Art, the Davidson Board of Commissioners agreed to fund public art through the Prepared Food and Occupancy (PF&O) tax revenue that the town receives. This revenue can only be spent on tourism-related projects and services. Originally funded at 15% of the PF&O tax revenue annually, the percentage was lowered during the recession to 5% in FY 2011, 2012 and 2013. In FY2014 and FY2015, the town's contribution was changed from a percentage of the PF&O tax revenue to a flat \$20,000 per fiscal year. That amount was increased to \$32,000 for FY2016.

The three public artworks developed by the DPAC have had a variety of funding sources. The *Bouquet for Davidson* was funded by the North Carolina Arts Council (\$14,950), Arts and Science Council (\$5,500), the Town of Davidson through the PF&O tax (\$20,000), totaling \$40,450.

The *Book Garden* was funded through the Arts and Science Council (\$5,000), the Town of Davidson through the PF&O tax (\$26,663), private donations from Davidson citizens (\$23,340),

and corporate donations (\$65,000), totaling \$120,003.

Funding for the *Dance of Life* was funded through the Arts and Science Council (\$10,000), the Town of Davidson through the PF&O tax (\$52,286), and private donations (\$35,000), totaling \$91,286.

## **Public Art Commission Responsibilities**

### *Public Art Program*

The primary responsibility of the commission is to oversee and support the direction of the town's public art program and to implement public art projects. They are accountable for successful management of public art projects in Davidson as well as administration and oversight of a broader public art program, which includes public education, advancing artist selection processes, contract negotiation and management, community forums, design reviews, and coordination and communication among approval agencies, artists, and funders.

The commission provides public forums to discuss ideas about public art projects and to recommend sites for public art and public art projects. They make decisions about artists in collaboration with municipal government and other interests. The commission and staff of the Town of Davidson are involved in the planning of public art as well as responsible for its care and maintenance once fabricated and installed. This municipal support and engagement is necessary to the sustainability of the program.

### *Community Engagement*

The public art commission is responsible for continued engagement with the citizens of Davidson to encourage understanding and appreciation for art in all its forms. Community involvement is fundamental to the work of public artist; the making of a contemporary public artwork is predicated on active community participation and dialogue with the artist(s).

Specifically, community conversations should direct the early identification and development of public art projects, including their general site locations, as the commission has done with this plan. Once projects are underway, residents appreciate the opportunity to express their views on the project as it evolves. For example, the public art commission periodically holds public forums with the artist to educate residents about the work. Dedication ceremonies are always well-attended and appreciated by the artist, citizens, and contributors. Outreach and community participation in the program and/or project is facilitated by the commission; they are charged with public education about public art and the specific work of the artist commissioned for a project.

Successful community engagement is increased when participants are informed about how a public artwork is conceived and how the work of public art fits into other contemporary artistic expressions. This aspect of a public art program requires a sustained commitment to community education about challenging ideas about art, the history of the artist, and

celebrating the source of artistic creation and role of the artist.

### *Public Art in Private Development*

The Davidson Public Art Commission encourages public art developed in conjunction with private development. The members of the DPAC are willing to assist and advise developers on the public art process.

### *Maintenance of Artwork*

Public art maintenance and conservation decisions will be made by the commission in consultation with the Town of Davidson's director of public works.

## **2015 Community Engagement Process**

Through a series of citizen engagement strategies, including workshops and surveys, the Davidson Public Art Commission identified specific areas within the community for new artworks and specific types of art that will be valued by Davidson citizens. A result of that process is the affirmation of several program goals:

- *Works of public art should be integrated into the environment, buildings, and landscape.*
- *Public spaces in downtown, parks and greenways, and neighborhoods should be primary project sites for public art going forward.*
- *Public art should be both an expression of individual public spaces and neighborhoods as well as their shared physical, political, and cultural geography with the Town of Davidson.*
- *Public art should connect people to place, particularly through interaction between people and works of public art.*

The Public Art Commission should identify specific constituencies who should be involved in the project from inception through installation. Members of these planning committees could represent either the neighborhood or be geographical proximal to the proposed project, or have direct expertise with the medium the artist is suggesting for the work.

Building general consensual direction, yet permitting the artist to do what s/he does best, which is to reinterpret and reorient us to ourselves, requires continual community contact. To this end, regularly scheduled open conversations and discussions about the progress of the proposed work are important so that the community is not surprised when the work is complete and installed or constructed

## Discussion of Project Priorities

The public engagement process garnered a variety of responses and ideas from Davidson citizens about their expectations for public art. They selected priority sites for new artworks and indicated their personal preferences for types of public art they would like to see in the future within the Town of Davidson.

The town boasts wonderful parks, greenways, and open space for recreation and would like to accentuate its old and new neighborhoods. These areas are ripe for public art that emphasizes their unique characteristics. Because sites and themes for public artworks are as varied as the history and culture of each place, all works will be original and site specific.

There were 194 total responses to an online public art survey through the Town of Davidson website. To publicize the survey, the town sent an eCrier and posted on social media. 81 percent of survey respondents said they would like more public art in Davidson.

When asked what types of art they would like to see:

- 83 percent would like benches.
- 71 percent would like bike racks.
- 71 percent would like murals.
- 77 percent would like sculpture.
- 74 percent would like water features.
- 56 percent would like sidewalk art.
- 54 percent would like veterans' memorials.

When asked an optional open-ended question about other types of art they would like to see, 40 people responded:

- 11 people wanted art that was functional and interactive.
- 9 people said that they would like to see more natural art and gardens.
- 8 people complained about the design of the Bouquet for Davidson statue.
- 7 people think that there is enough art, criticizing the cost of new art installations.
- 3 want art aimed at children.
- 3 responders would like to see more art by local artists and reflecting the town's character.

When asked where they would like to see more art:

- 83 percent would like more art in parks.
- 74 percent would like more art in public buildings.

Asked about specific areas of town:

- 62 percent of responders mentioned Roosevelt Wilson Park
- 59 percent mentioned Knox Court
- 56 percent mentioned East Rocky River Road Roundabout

- 50 percent mentioned the Village Green
- 46 percent mentioned the Post Office Plaza
- 34 percent mentioned the Kincaid Greenway
- 25 percent mentioned the End of Armour Street
- 22 percent mentioned the Nature Preserve at Lake Davidson
- 20 percent mentioned the Greenway Trailhead at Hudson Place
- All other responses fell below 20 percent.

### *Top Priority Sites*

#### **1. Roosevelt Wilson Park**

Citizens were enthusiastic about improvements to Roosevelt Wilson Park, a heavily-used recreation area on the town's west side. It is visited by residents of many Davidson neighborhoods and by students at several nearby schools. Amenities that could be influenced by public art are a new or renovated picnic shelter, benches around the pond, lighting at the memorial trees, landscaping, play features, and gardens.

#### **2. Knox Court**

A water feature for children was frequently mentioned as an amenity that would be appropriate in the downtown area and appreciated by citizens. The length of Knox Court, but particularly the southern portion, is an informal gathering area for citizens with children and for residents attending the Davidson Farmer's Market and restaurants in the area. An improved, more attractive tot lot was cited as a facility that would improve the area and encourage social interaction.

#### **3. East Rocky River Road Roundabout**

Although owned and maintained by NC-DOT, the East Rocky River Road roundabout is a prominent entry to downtown Davidson and denotes the changing character from rural to urban. Citizens would like to see the aesthetics of the area improved with artistic landscaping and/or public art.

#### **4. Village Green**

The village green is in the heart of town and is heavily used for events, informal gatherings, and play space. It is highly visible and therefore a suitable location for temporary art installations. There are opportunities for joint programs with art students and faculty at Davidson College in conjunction with Art on the Green and other annual events celebrated on the green.

#### **5. Post Office Plaza**

The public art commission would like to complete a design master plan for the post office plaza as a town sculpture garden or community gathering area to enhance the public space. The focal points could be outdoor "living rooms" that could include sculpture, landscaping, and seating. It would complement and supplement the existing sculpture garden on the Davidson College campus.

## 6. Kincaid Greenway

Our greenway system is seen as a tremendous amenity for town residents. It connects destinations and encourages walking. A wide variety of art-inspired infrastructure and amenities were suggested to enhance the town's greenway system. Works would be nature-driven and express the contrast between the built and natural environment. Entry markers, benches, solar lighting, distinctive paving, artist-designed bridges, and birdhouses are some of the examples cited for improving the greenways.

An online tool locates each priority site with pictures and maps. The link is:

<http://townofdavidson.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapJournal/index.html?appid=12ce7111c03c4366ba659bbb95734105>

### *Preferred Types of Art*

At the public art workshops and in the online survey, citizens voted for the types of artwork they would like to see in Davidson. The top vote-getters (shown below) are whimsical and colorful and they encompass a variety of sites and styles. Some are functional pieces, including benches and planters, while others are more traditional forms of fine art such as sculpture, painting, and mosaic. These citizen preferences will be considered as the public art commission considers artists and new commissions.

<b>Art in public buildings</b>		<b>Sculpture</b>	
			

**Infrastructure  
art**



**Benches**



## Recommendations and Work Plan

The Davidson Public Art Commission will respect Davidson citizens' priorities for public art as it continues to grow the public art program. The six sites are listed in the order of priority determined through discussion with the Davidson Board of Commissioners; however, since town projects and budgets influence the work of the DPAC, and since unforeseen opportunities sometimes arise, they may shift those stated priorities to respond to funding. Since 2007, when the DPAC started its first project, it has installed three public artworks. At that pace, one art installation at each of the six sites prioritized by Davidson citizens will take approximately 18 years to fund and install. Recognizing that priorities change as our community changes, the DPAC will revisit the priorities on an ongoing basis and re-evaluate its work plan bi-annually. This is the DPAC's current thinking on the six priority sites:

**Site priority # 1, Roosevelt Wilson Park:** The DPAC has had several conversations with the Davidson Parks and Recreation and Public Works staff regarding Phase II improvements to Roosevelt Wilson Park, which will begin in FY2017. The DPAC will develop a theme for the park, perhaps based on nature, and will weave that theme throughout the park and into the planned improvements. That may include the new play structure, renovations to the picnic shelter, benches, child-friendly sculptures, lighting, and signage. This will be a multi-year endeavor for the DPAC.

**Site priority # 2, Village Green:** The Town of Davidson celebrates "April is for Arts" every year with gallery crawls and "Art on the Green." Citizens see the Green as a special place at the heart of Davidson, and they want to recognize and celebrate it with public art. The April festival is an opportunity to work with Davidson College art students, regional artists, and citizens to install temporary installations for a short period of time once a year.

**Site priority # 3, Post Office Plaza:** The DPAC proposes to complete a master plan for the post office plaza during FY2017 or FY2018. It may be an appropriate site for a sculpture garden or it may become a special gathering space for citizens.

**Site priority # 4, Kincaid Greenway:** Rather than propose large or formal art installations, the DPAC hopes to integrate artworks into the natural environment of Davidson's greenways. Signage, benches, birdhouses, and paving are options for small projects that honor the natural environment. In the future, we may have the opportunity to include public art in the planning of the proposed greenway extensions.

**Site priority # 5, East Rocky River Road roundabout:** Currently owned and maintained by NC-DOT, the East Rocky River Road roundabout is seen as an entry to old town Davidson. It is an opportunity for permanent public art in the future; however, to improve its current appearance, the DPAC, along with the Public Works department, would like to work with NC-DOT to landscape the roundabout with native, drought-resistant plantings. In the future, as

development proceeds east and that intersection becomes a small commercial center, the town may choose to take over maintenance of Concord Road. At that juncture, the DPAC would like to commission an appropriate work of art for the roundabout.

**Site priority # 6, Knox Court:** The provision of public art at Knox Court will be dependent on the decisions made regarding changes to town hall, municipal facilities, and town-owned land downtown. If it remains in its current configuration, Knox Court would be an appropriate site for a new children's play area where the current tot lot is located. A splash park, preferred by the Parks and Recreation department, offers myriad opportunities to integrate art. A recognizable, significant entry feature for the Farmers Market is also a potential project for Knox Court. If the town decides to move ahead with changes in the area, the DPAC will work to ensure that public art is an important component of any new development.

## **Conclusion**

The citizens of Davidson owe a debt of gratitude to their elected officials through the years, who had the foresight to create the program and the ongoing determination to continue funding it. It is with that history in mind that we encourage the elected representatives of the town to consider increasing funding for public art as the town grows. One citizen recently wrote, "I love that we have one of a kind, Davidson-centric public art in our town." We have such imaginative and inspiring things because our leaders and citizens have been committed to make it so.

Much is written about the importance of art in our lives, in the way it brings us together and gives us a recognition of beauty in a busy, complex world. In Davidson, we have but to look at the birds taking joyous flight in Douwe Blumberg's piece, or sit in the book garden and watch children and families taking a moment there to read and talk and look at the famous quotes, or ponder the symbols in the late Andrew Dunnill's bouquet of metal references to our town.

Public art is just that. It is a public expression of a town's desire to uplift and honor its citizens and visitors. It draws us in to one another and provides us another way to live in community. As we deliberate the next expressions of public art in Roosevelt Wilson Park, we have a rare opportunity to make art a part of the entire experience of the space. Imagine the theme of nature, appropriate for a park, with sculpted animals cavorting along the new walkways and play structures that evoke natural forms - a place that stimulates mental and physical health.

We present this report to you, the leaders and residents of Davidson, with our gratitude and our hope that, together, we can create more soulful places to bring us together and lift us up.