

City of Newburgh

Press Release

83 Broadway, Newburgh, N.Y. 12550
(845) 569-7354 – (845) 569-7370

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City of Newburgh Celebrates Creation of “One Percent for Public Art”

City officials, members of the Arts & Cultural Commission, and local artists celebrated the institution of the new “One Percent for Art” ordinance at a reception in City Hall today. On November 26, the City Council unanimously adopted the historic piece of legislation, making the City of Newburgh one of only five municipalities in New York State to do so. The others are Buffalo, Huntington on Long Island, West Nyack, and New York City.

Following a precedent set in Europe, early builders in the United States used art to embellish buildings and public spaces and represent the power structure. By the mid-20th century, the idea of using public funds for art gained support. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt commissioned writers, photographers, and other visual artists to document the country and its people through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). This established the legitimacy of government-sponsored public art, and the first percent-for-art legislation passed in Philadelphia in 1959. Today, more than 400 municipalities in the United States have passed similar legislation or policies.

What is public art? In addition to conventional media such as sculpture or paintings, public art can take the form of architectural design features, lighting, sound, signage, performing arts, or even security devices, such as decorative fencing.

Why is it important? Public art is a significant and recognized tool to promote economic development. In depressed areas, it boosts civic pride by creating landmarks and points of interest. A case in point is the New York City Subway system. When public art was added to subway system renovations, the MTA began to realize its importance as a marketing tool, adopted a percent for art policy, and created the Arts for Transit Program as part of its Marketing and Communications department. Ridership has increased, and the public perception of the subway system has improved greatly.

“One Percent for Public Art” was drafted by the City of Newburgh Arts & Cultural Commission, formed in late 2005, which identified this legislation as a priority.

The new ordinance applies only to capital projects planned on lands either owned by the City of Newburgh, or obtained from the City of Newburgh. These capital projects

are defined as new construction of buildings of no less than 10,000 sq. ft, or an addition to an existing building of at least 10,000 sq. ft. The ordinance also applies to the reconstruction or renovation of buildings at a cost equal to or exceeding \$250,000.

A developer, or in the case of city-owned property, the City, must allocate funds equal to one percent of the capital cost of the project for public art. The City Comptroller will establish a special Public Art Account for Capital Project Art Funds, as well as other funds such as gifts or grants for public art. The City Council is responsible for disbursing the funds, subject to the approval of the City Manager and the recommendations of the Arts & Cultural Commission, and in accordance with the Public Art Annual Plan, or applicable law.

Additionally, the developer must meet with the Director of Culture and Economic Development, the City Manager, and the Arts & Cultural Commission to determine an artist selection process and how public art can be incorporated into the intended project. Up to 70% of the “one percent” allocation will be designated for art, to be integrated either into the project design or on the site. The remainder goes into the Capital Project Art account to support public art. If the City and the Arts & Cultural Commission determine that public art is inappropriate or impracticable for a given project, the City Council may require that the entire allocation be paid into this account.

City Manager Jean-Ann McGrane commented, “We are proud that the City of Newburgh is one of the many municipalities world-wide that have recognized the importance of bringing art into the public realm. Newburgh is gaining recognition as an arts-friendly community, and it can only benefit our revitalization efforts.”

Stuart Sachs, Chairman of the Arts & Cultural Commission said, “Percent for Art places Art and Culture back into the heart of Newburgh's development. In a city that boasts the finest architecture of the 19th century, we rightfully return to a standard where functional and good enough do not suffice. Percent for Art shows the City's commitment to lead the way into the 21st century with a higher standard of quality and beauty, and a focus on public space, and raises the bar for development projects to include the needs and amenities that make our City attractive to investors, tourists, and taxpayers.”

Kendal Henry, City of Newburgh Director of Cultural and Economic Development said, “Public art has the capacity to reinforce a sense of place, foster civic pride and bring communities together. As Newburgh enters its renaissance, this new percent for art legislation ensures that the rich history, civic beauty and cultural legacy that attract people to the City remains and flourishes. I commend the Arts and Cultural commission for their incisive vision and the City Council for seeing it through.”

Mayor Nicholas Valentine concluded, “I would like to thank the Arts & Cultural Commission and Kendal Henry of the Department of Planning & Development for their hard work, as well as all the members of the public who provided input in the crafting of this ordinance. We look forward to an exciting array of public art projects as the renaissance continues.”