

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

December 3, 2007

Remarks by Stuart Sachs

Chair, City of Newburgh Arts & Culture Commission

Friends, Artists, Newburghers, lend me a paintbrush and a chisel.

Public art is not simply art plopped down in a public space; it is art that creates public space. It involves the collaboration of the artist, the developer, and the public to make art that is created specifically for the site in question, and draws the public into it. The Arts and Culture Commission is dedicated to the highest standards of public art, and we insist on process that adheres to these ideas of collaboration and inclusion. We will issue public requests for proposals and appoint independent juries of arts professionals to select artists who will collaborate with the design team on each project.

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 are not good enough. “Percent for Art” is a big step in that direction. It shows the City's commitment to lead the way into the 21st century with a focus on public space, and a higher standard of quality and beauty. Public art raises the bar for development projects to include the needs and amenities that make our City attractive to investors, tourists, and taxpayers. I am proud to say that the City will be leading the way by its own right example.

It is important to recognize what a huge team effort this was. Several members of the Commission worked on this bill. In addition, we have enjoyed the help and support of many other individuals whose efforts and vision was essential to this success. As always, in efforts like this, we stand on the shoulders of our fathers. With a lot of help from Google, we were able to read and download dozens of “percent” bills – and, of course, improve on them! I cannot list all of the participants in our project, but several stand out for their extraordinary work and support, and I want to thank them publicly:

- Garin Baker, the first Chair of the ACC, worked forever and a day on this – I cannot over estimate his efforts.
- Kevin White, the second Chair of the ACC, helped write the legislation and guide it to the council.
- Torrance Harvey, Teacher, member of ACC.
- Peter Cody, Artist, Member of ACC.
- Attorney Gary Schuster volunteered countless hours helping us research and write the “percent” ordinance.
- Sara Pasti has been part of this process from the beginning. She moderated the original Arts Forums and chaired the newly formed Commission until we wrote by-laws and elected officers.

- Geoffrey Chanin, Corporation Council, made himself available more times that I can count to us give advice, offer thoughts or bounce ideas around.
- Bob McKenna has the biggest job in Newburgh: Economic Development. His collaboration and support is crucial to the success of our project, and our project is crucial to the mission of his office. Without his support, we would not be here today.
- Kendal Henry was hired by the City after we had submitted a draft of the bill, but he offered several improvements and helped guide the process through completion. His work was instrumental in getting us where we are today, and we will be looking to him to help guide the process as we implement projects. When we hired Kendal, I wanted to make sure he knew what he was getting into, so I told him that the City of Newburgh's budget is about 1/1000th of his former employer, the MTA. He assured me with a gleam in his eye that he was aware of that but was still looking forward to the opportunity. It has been my pleasure to get to know Kendal over the past year.
- Before there was Kendal, there was Courtney Kain – need I say more? We've leaned on you a lot, and you can expect some more.
- The vision of setting up the Arts Forums and then allowing a highly democratic process to take over was a gutsy thing, and City Manager Jean-Ann McGrane deserves a lot of credit for that.
- The enthusiastic support of Mayor Valentine has been a constant.
- Even with all this support, we would not be here today without the vision and support of the City Council. Regina, Sal, George, Mary-Ann – thank you.

Thank you all for coming to celebrate this momentous step for Newburgh, and stay tuned as important projects move ahead.