

Item 25-0203: Request to approve from Creative Downtown Appleton, Inc. to install a selfie sculpture on City-owned property located within Houdini Plaza at 121 West College Avenue

City Plan Commission

Wed, Mar 12, 2025 3:30PM

Mayor Jake Woodford 04:17

Moving along, we have item 25-0203, request to approve from Creative Downtown Appleton Inc, to approve Creative Appleton—Appleton Downtown Inc's installation of a selfie sculpture on city owned property located within Houdini plaza at 121 West College Avenue. Need a motion. We have a motion and a second to approve. All right open the floor for discussion. Jennifer, since you here, do you do you have any comments you wish to share with the plan commission? Yeah, please come on up.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 04:54

Hello. I'm Jennifer Stephany. I'm the executive director with Appleton Downtown Incorporated and Creative Downtown Appleton Inc, and we have proposed this selfie station. I'd like to give a little bit of background on the where, why, how, and why not. So, we started to look at this project as we looked around at other neighboring communities such as Green Bay and Sheboygan that have a similar selfie station. Green Bay has "I heart GB" and the heart looks like cheese. Sheboygan has "She Boy Gan" and a surfboard. It says "The Malibu of the Midwest". It's interactive. It's fun. It's not designed to be fine art. I'm going to say that again; it's not designed to be fine art. It's designed to be interactive, to help tell your story, to build social media content, and to help build the brand of your district. And that's exactly what we're trying to propose here.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 06:00

We built off of our logo, which, if you're not familiar, we use the locator pin in our logo with "One Great Place". So, we started to play off of that, have some fun with the shape, and make it interactive so people could stand behind it or in front of it—little kid level, adult level—and then highlight some of the words that really bring out the variety of activities in our downtown. Those words have not been fully selected yet. "Beer" will very likely not be one of them. If you see that on—

Mayor Jake Woodford 06:32

It'll be Pilsner. It'll be specific— **[It sounded like he was joking.]**

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 06:34

Yes, "craft beer" has made the list twice already, though, however. And the idea is that those words would be on like clear Plexiglas. We'd be able to take them off and interchange them. So, during certain seasons of the year, we might be able to put something different. I always use the holidays as an explanation, where we could put Avenue of Angels or Great Gift Shopping, or what have you. And it's an opportunity for us to make it a little more engaging, and kind of change it periodically as well. It wouldn't be an every month kind of change, but maybe by season.

Mayor Jake Woodford 07:13

Thank you.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 07:14

Absolutely, and I'm happy to answer any questions. And just as a side note, we did look at other locations, kind of up and down the avenue. We selected Houdini Plaza for many of the obvious reasons, the walkability, the central location, the interaction with various events that are taking place within that corridor, having concrete to be able to anchor it in securely, be able to walk up to it, not be in the way of any snow plowing or pedestrian right of ways. So, we did work with the park and rec department to select the proposed location. Thank you.

Mayor Jake Woodford 07:50

Discussion from the Commission? Okay, go ahead.

Sabrina Robins (Commissioner) 07:57

I have a recommendation. I think the idea is lovely, and one of the things, if you guys had not considered, is Small Business Week. I think we have some really cool businesses downtown. And to celebrate Small Business Week, and I think this would be a good way of highlighting the types of businesses that are downtown to draw people there to shop.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 08:21

Yeah, love that.

Mayor Jake Woodford 08:25

Alder Fenton.

Alderperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 08:26

Thank you, Your Honor. So, I want to thank you for emphasizing that this is not a sculpture. I think that we got some—I don't want to say bad PR, but I think there was some confusion when we were looking at the action item and talking about putting a sculpture. I think some of us still have a little trauma from the one that was further down College Avenue a few years ago. And so, with it being called a sculpture, I got some pretty negative feedback from my constituents, so I'm wondering if we want to call it a selfie station or something like that to differentiate that we're not talking fine art here. We're talking—I mean, it's, it's really—I don't want to call it marketing, but it, but it's something like that. So, to my questions—so I watched in the Public Arts Committee meeting. It's going to be painted aluminum. Is there any concern about weather issues or with the material, or...?

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 09:52

Always, regardless of what material you use. GROW has been out there. It's made of wood. We actually have it repainted every year and maintained. It would be the understanding that it would be our organization's responsibility to maintain it, and that we actually propose to have an annual review with city staff to make sure that we're upholding the expectation of keeping it in good order and in good shape. So, we do feel like there's going to be some maintenance that we're going to have to budget in every year to take care of it, but it is our intent to have it—especially if it's in photos—looking really good. We may discover that there's a better material out there, and then we would have to re approach the city about different material needs, but this is what's been proposed by the sculpturist.

Mayor Jake Woodford 10:45

Unlike the College Avenue Bridge discussion, which was extensive about the light poles and whether we should use galvanized steel or not, aluminum in this application is likely the best material, most, most corrosion resistant. But ADI has made a commitment to maintain the peace and, and between ADI and the Parks and Recreation Department some meticulous eyes are going to be on this.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 11:13

Correct.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 11:13

One more?

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 11:14

And I may just be repeating things from prior meetings, but—and it is my understanding that this was designed and will be fabricated by a local artist?

Mayor Jake Woodford 11:14

Please.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 11:24

That's correct, by Rob Neilsen from Lawrence University. He's the 3d sculpturist at Lawrence.

Alderson Denise Fenton (District 6) 11:30

Okay, thank you. Thank you, your honor.

Mayor Jake Woodford 11:32

Thank you. Further discussion from the Commission? Yeah, I would—oh, go ahead. Two? Okay, go ahead.

Isaac Uitenbroek (City Plan Commissioner) 11:45

I think it's a great idea. Love it. I did have some concerns about the "Beer" being on the top as versus the music, because we have those signs on the bridge corridors as to music, but I'm understanding that these are going to be interchangeable. Any illumination proposed for—?

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 12:00

Not currently.

Isaac Uitenbroek (City Plan Commissioner) 12:01

Okay, okay. All right. That's it.

Mayor Jake Woodford 12:05

Be along the right of way. So there, there, there's, there's some fairly significant ambient light at that corner of Houdini Plaza.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 12:12

Correct.

Mayor Jake Woodford 12:14

All right. Thank you. Further discussion from the Commission? I just like to also note, I've been I've been following some of the commentary about this idea and the piece, and I—first of all, I want to recognize the efforts of Appleton Downtown Inc, which is Appleton Business Improvement District, which was an entity created by the city of Appleton to promote the downtown, to support local businesses. ADI of any organization in our community has a vested interest in doing things that that look good, that promote the district, that

support business development and retention in our downtown district. So, I would have thought that would go without saying, but I think it bears repeating, and we appreciate the work that ADI does to that end.

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:08

And in terms of the approval process and why we need to go through a process like this, and some of the we might call it, jargon around sculpture is really about municipal code and making sure that we're—we as a city are following the right process to move this along. But it seems, you know, just as art is subjective, language about art is subjective. So, you call a sculpture, call it a selfie station, but fundamentally what we're what we're doing, is working our way through an approval process to allow for the placement of this piece—whatever you want to call it—this piece in public right of way and on public land.

Mayor Jake Woodford 13:52

And so as far as getting into the elements of the piece, the design of the piece, from my perspective, our role as a local government and our role as elected officials, in this case, is not to micromanage the details of the piece or to apply our own aesthetic sensibilities to the piece. It is to make sure that we're following an appropriate process for the placement of the piece. And from that perspective, I appreciate the efforts that Appleton Downtown Inc, has gone to make sure to do this the right way. And so, I would encourage folks who are viewing this with a with a particularly critical lens from a fine art perspective, to recognize that what this is an effort on the part of Appleton Downtown Inc to carry out its mission, which is, again, to promote having a vibrant, livable downtown district, to create opportunities for people to connect with this community. And from my perspective, the proposal meets those ends.

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:04

And beyond that, Appleton Downtown Incorporated has engaged a local artist and one of one of the most important sculptural artists in the state, if not the country, to help with this project. So, I have every confidence that what is delivered will live up to the expectations of the organization and the community. So, I just want to state that for the record, because I don't get to get on a soap box at the council meeting, but I— again, I appreciate the work that ADI does every day for the district and hope that when this item appears before the council they'll keep my comments in mind. So, with that, if there's any, any further discussion. Alder Fenton, please.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:48

Thank you for indulging me, Your Honor.

Mayor Jake Woodford 15:50

Of course.

Aldersperson Denise Fenton (District 6) 15:51

When when—on Monday, when I went through my materials and wrote my newsletter to my constituents, I was lined up with some of the emails that I had gotten, but I watched your remarks at the Public Arts Committee from the week before, and I watched the Parks and Recreation Committee, and then I got to thinking about the whole incident with the sculpture on further down College Avenue. And I think the mayor made a really good point in that we are not art judges; that that is for somebody else. And so, over the course of the week, I've changed my mind, and I am going to be supportive of this next week for Council, and just—I want to thank you for your advocacy and for your efforts at helping people understand what's what the goal is here. So, thanks for that.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 16:55

Appreciate the opportunity.

Mayor Jake Woodford 16:56

Thank you. Any further discussion from the Commission? Alder Hartzheim.

Aldersperson Sheri Hartzheim (District 13) 17:02

District Three, please. Thank you, Chair. I agree completely with what you said and what Alder Fenton said as well. We are not judges of whether this is good art. No one can be. My concern is how this this item will be kept up, if there will be vandalism, if there will be, you know—I'm wondering if there will be some sort of MOU that says that—and I understand that ADI's obviously, they want to be responsible and make sure that this is kept in good shape. But is there going to be something that will make sure that that remains in good condition where it's placed and remains at that at that spot?

Mayor Jake Woodford 17:41

Certainly. Lily, could you speak to the details of the the—or the conditions? Alright, go ahead.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 17:50

Yep. So, we actually will have an agreement with them. The agreements are similar to how we do our murals. So, all murals that are put in public property in the city, they actually have, like, an anti-graffiti layer over it. So, if that's something we need to address or talk to the sculpturist about, if that's something we need to apply to it. That's—I would recommend putting that into our agreement with that. And then, again, ADI understands that it's their responsibility to upkeep the structure as well.

Mayor Jake Woodford 18:20

The agreement is conditioned on those terms, so failure to meet those conditions could result in the removal of the piece from Houdini Plaza. Further discussion from the Commission? Hearing none we have a motion and a second to approve. All those in favor please signify by saying, aye. Aye. Any opposed? All right, with none opposed that item has been approved.