

Item 25-0225: Approve request from Creative Downtown Appleton, Inc. to install a selfie sculpture on City-owned property located within Houdini Plaza

Parks and Recreation Committee

Mon, Mar 10, 2025 6:15PM

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 00:59

We have no public hearings or appearances this evening. If there are no objections, I'd like to start off with item number 25-0225 the approve—to approve the request from Creative Downtown Appleton Inc to install a selfie sculpture on city owned property located within Houdini Plaza.

Aldersperson Vaya Jones (District 10) 01:19

Move to approve.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:22

We have a motion to approve.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 01:24

Second.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 01:24

And a second. I did see that we have a representative from Appleton Downtown. We also have Economic Development Specialist—is that correct?—Lily Paul. Did you want to say anything regarding this item? Okay, what is your microphone number, please? District 11. There you are.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 01:49

I guess what I can talk about, mainly, if you have questions, I can answer them, but just kind of walk—talk through the process, I guess. So, we just reviewed this at our Public Arts Committee last week. They are recommending it to now you. You will then recommend to the city council. Plan Commission will also be seeing this as well, because it is a improvement to public property. So just want to talk through the process there, but ultimately it will go through council for final approval. Just something that ADI and Jen Stephany is she has come to us about, she's had conversations with Tom Flicks, specifically, on just location, making sure that maintenance isn't an issue or anything like that, which it is not. It's not in any par—it's not in private—right of way. We think it's a great addition to the downtown. I think it's cute. I think it's a great, great asset. Otherwise, I have no issues. I did include a memo to the park and rec committee as well. So.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 02:52

Thank you. Did Director Stephany, did you want to make any comments? If you could just state your name and address. You know the drill. And tonight, we're going to try to keep everyone under five minutes. I'm sure that you will do that just fine. But.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 03:12

Absolutely. I'm Jennifer Stephany. I'm the executive director with Appleton Downtown Incorporated and our 501c3 affiliate, Creative Downtown Appleton Inc, of which this is a project of. So, it's connected to our mission to bring accessible arts and activities and engagement into the district. It's really designed to be an interactive kind of selfie station.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 03:37

I know there was quite a bit of activity on Facebook around this item. Nate and I have had a chance to discuss this item, and, unfortunately, like not all of the images came out at the same time, so I think there was a little bit of a gap on context around what this is. We've had it called a sculpture. We've had it called a selfie station, and that's really what it is. It's like this selfie station. It's not meant to be fine art.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 04:07

I'll be very clear on that. It's not meant to be fine art. The process was, of course, to take it through the public art committee. My understanding is they would weigh in on aesthetics. We'd bring it to park and rec to talk about logistics and location, onto Planning Commission and then, of course, Common Council.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 04:07

Okay.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 04:27

So just to give you a little framework, it's designed with our locator pin. If you're not familiar, the Appleton Downtown kind of logo uses a locator pin. "One Great Place" is the tag. So, we were playing off of that. It's a little tongue in cheek. This is One Great Place for: live music, for shopping, for great dining. We can change out those words on the sculpture. They're going to be on clear plexiglas to bolt on. So, during the NFL Draft, if we're able to get this installed in time, we could play off of some football terms. During the holidays we could play off of Avenue of Angels, great shopping, and just kind of keep that rotating and keep it top of mind of all the variety and all the great things that happen in downtown.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 05:16

So that sounds kind of interactive to show how excited people are about the businesses downtown. Excellent. Any questions or discussion? Alder Wolff.

Aldersperson Nate Wolff (District 12) 05:29

Thank you, Chair. Hi, Jennifer. So as was mentioned, I did—when I looked at the agenda last week, I didn't necessarily like the design too much or the location, specifically in Houdini Plaza. So I thought I would ask the public what they thought about the project, because one man's opinion should not be the determining factor of any piece of art. And so I started getting a lot of—I tried to post a non-judgmental post so that I wouldn't lead people into agreeing with me, perhaps, or—so originally, the post was a couple pictures, and just what it was. I later added on more pictures and a description. After I—those additional photos and description, people still had issues with the location, the design of it, what it looked like and what people would use it for. Just disregarding like the first 20 minutes of the post being up, and the shortened version of that post, people still seemed to not like this piece, where it was being suggested to be put. So, I would ask that we do not put this in Houdini Plaza, or in a different spot in Houdini Plaza, perhaps. I will be voting against this, but I am willing to discuss different alternatives.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 07:14

Could I just ask our staff to comment on why the location was chosen? Give us some background on the location from your standpoint.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 07:25

Sure. Yeah. And so actually, Jen approached this about the location, and we thought it was fitting, one, because of the fact that it's supposed to be kind of like a centrally located, accessible piece of art, essentially. You know, I'm not—off the top of my head, I can't think of another location that would be good for it, I guess, for the

purpose that it's supposed to serve. And then, like I said, we've had conversations with Jen, with Tom, and like I said, with the maintenance, it is in a good location because it's already, one, concreted. This is something that needs to be anchored to concrete. So, it already has concrete. It's not encroaching on a sidewalk, and it's also not going to impede on grass either.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 08:11

Okay. Any other questions? Comments? Alder Smith.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 08:16

Thank you, Chair. It looked like—I have a couple of questions, but my first one is just on the it looks like the cost to the city is maintenance. And does that mean that the piece itself is financed by the Appleton Downtown?

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 08:30

We'll just direct that actually to staff.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 08:32

Okay.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 08:33

In in terms of maintenance, "maintenance" is snow removal.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 08:37

Yeah.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 08:37

So that—there is no extra cost. Maintenance to the actual sculpture would be the responsibility of ADI who is the owner of the sculpture then.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 08:47

Okay, and the making of the sculpture and all that comes—okay.

Lily Paul (Economic Development Specialist - Community Development) 08:51

Also their responsibility. Yes.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 08:53

And snow removal would take place regardless of if there was a sculpture or art piece there, correct? Okay.

Aldersperson Martyn Smith (District 4) 09:02

And then I just wanted to make a comment coming from Alder Wolff that I, you know, I think effective public spaces in our time are related to social media, and I find this as a way to encourage social media interaction with the downtown area. I do hope that that central square, at least, of the downtown—I do hope this isn't the end all of our public art, but as a way to kind of get engagement I think that you see these, this kind of sculpture asking for social media engagement is common, and I think we'd be well served by something like this. I'll be voting in favor of it, but that doesn't—but I would like to see more than this as well in that as we think about the Houdini Plaza. But this is, I think, a good step.

Aldersperson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 09:48

Thank you. Alder Jones.

Alderson Vaya Jones (District 10) 09:50

Thank you, Chair. Love public art, and what I love about this is that it seems like it's doing more than just being beauty for our eyes. It is that social media aspect piece. It has our branding on it. When people share it on social media, more people are going to see it than just a regular photo of a beautiful art piece. And so, I feel like this is also promotion of what Appleton offers, and it's going to hopefully get that FOMO of people like, "Oh? What? Avenue of ice? What is this? I want to go next time." And so, some may not like the design, but do they understand the importance of the design, the importance of why it exists, for marketing, for branding, for who we are? So, I am going to vote for this because I think that it's sustainable to get the word out there. Thank you.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 10:40

I think also, we want to be mindful of where people would congregate to look at such a thing. I think that a place that is appropriate for people to kind of gather and take a look at something would be a place like a plaza versus a sidewalk or outside of a single business. Especially since we're promoting different types of businesses, we don't want it in just one specific location. Any other questions or comments? Alder Wolff.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 11:08

Thank you, Chair. So, I was actually thinking, if everyone remembers where the Collective was, I do think the backdrop would be really cool, having the bridge and the beauty of that shot. I think that that would be a cool location for it. It's just my opinion.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 11:28

Can I speak to that?

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 11:30

If you could go ahead, yes.

Jennifer Stephany (Appleton Downtown Incorporated) 11:32

This piece is really designed to be in a walkable corridor and to be able to interact with visitors and guests to the downtown. That particular location is really the edge of the residential neighborhood and kind of—and technically outside of the Business Improvement District.

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 11:49

Okay, thank you.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 11:52

Any other questions or comments from alders president? All right, hearing none, we'll vote. All those in favor, say, aye. Aye. Any opposed?

Alderson Nate Wolff (District 12) 12:02

Nay.

Alderson Alex Schultz (District 9) 12:04

Abstain.

Alderson Katie Van Zeeland (District 5) 12:05

We have—so there are three in favor, one opposed, and one abstention. So that motion does pass.