

## HATTIESBURG PUBLIC ART PROGRAM EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While Hattiesburg has many assets—a rich and varied history, two rivers, a significant creek that meanders through the city, one of the last standing Long Leaf Pine forests, universities and community colleges, a lively historic downtown, and a healthy economy—there is little of a visual nature to reveal its story.

What Hattiesburg lacks is a sense of itself as a particular community that visibly incorporates its history, its natural setting and its culture—in a word, a discernable “sense of place.” It has become clear through conversations, questionnaires, meetings and a brainstorming session with nearly 100 local residents that Hattiesburg’s citizens would like to see this lack addressed through the development of a Public Art Program.

The Public Art Program would be responsible for the continuation and further development of the city’s existing public art collection. It would work with the City, County, and/or developers and communities to commission site specific artworks for placement throughout the city. “Site specific” artworks are created by artists who take their cues from the historical, cultural, and physical surroundings---both natural and man-made---for the design of the artwork.

The goals of the Public Art Program would include helping to visually define Hattiesburg’s identity; bringing the arts into everyday life as an element of community education; developing a culturally and media diverse collection; contributing to downtown and neighborhood revitalization and redevelopment efforts; attracting visitors to Hattiesburg; enhancing public and private construction; adding to the beauty of Hattiesburg; and contributing to economic development.

Initial projects of the Public Art Program, suggested because of their funding potential, include, in no particular order, to: a) commission a sculpture for the green space across from the Walnut Circle Grill; b) install a plaque telling Oseola McCarty’s story in the park named in her honor; c) commission a sculpture of Oseola McCarty to be installed in her park; d) commission a sculpture of “Miss Hattie and the Goat” for the Hattiesburg Zoo as well as a book telling their story for the gift shop; and e) install lighting to feature the curved brick smoke stack in the Mobile Street District.

Two other projects, both major in scale and in the public’s interest, are the creation of gateways marking the entrances to the city, historic downtown, and neighborhoods and the development of green spaces for public use throughout the city, especially along Gordon’s Creek.

Residents envision the creation of amphitheatres and family oriented parks, artists’ live-work spaces, and the commissioning of artworks for the new fire station, bridges, parks, City Hall, the County Courthouse, the old and new high schools, police substations, and the Forrest County Tax Facility, among others. Restoring the Frostop Mug and the “Hub” was also proposed.

Sites suggested for temporary artwork exhibitions or installations include empty lots and spaces downtown, empty buildings and storefronts, permanently placed sculpture pads and “billboards” or other flat surfaces, and publicly accessible City and County lobbies and offices.

The Public Art Program could be funded through City and/or County percent-for-art programs, a developers’ fund, and private contributions and grants. Developers could also include artworks on their own projects.

If the City, County, or Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association were to develop formal public art programs, they could assign staff to manage their programs, or contract with an organization like the Hattiesburg Arts Council.

A high standard of quality for public artwork was deemed to be of utmost importance by the charrette participants (and by the Downtown Hattiesburg Economic Enhancement Strategy 2000). This is best accomplished by engaging selection panels of arts professionals, with advisors from the construction project and the community, where appropriate. Whenever possible, community members should be included in discussions of potential artwork projects before the selection process commences.

Along with creating a Public Art Program, there are five actions that would transform Hattiesburg immeasurably:

- 1) Developing the right-of-ways along both sides of Gordon’s Creek into greenswards, in order to create “Heritage Park.” The park would have flora and fauna themed artist-designed benches and other artworks, as well as walking and biking trails.
- 2) Turning green spaces, both publicly and privately owned, into passive parks with benches.
- 3) Enforcing both the trash and the derelict structures codes. The City could provide assistance for those not able to manage this on their own through a “Stash the Trash,” or “Trash the Trash,” or “Recycle the Trash” campaign for which City garbage trucks and drivers could be engaged.
- 4) Replacing the numerous chain link fences in the city with fencing more appropriate to an urban setting.
- 5) Landscaping the stretch along East Hardy Street, a major entrance into Hattiesburg from north Mississippi and Petal (some twelve thousand people travel this road each day).

Lyn Kartiganer, for the  
Hattiesburg Arts Council and  
Historic Hattiesburg Downtown Association