

Mayor Boley, Vice-Mayor Larsen and Lawrence City Commissioners
City Hall, PO Box 708
Lawrence, KS 66044

August 5, 2018

Dear Mayor Boley, Vice-Mayor Larsen and Lawrence City Commissioners:

My name is Matthew Burke, Chairperson of the University of Kansas Visual Art Department. I am writing as a concerned private citizen, and as a practicing, professional artist for the past 31 years.¹

I am writing with regard to item number 12 on the Consent Agenda for the upcoming August 7th commission meeting that would “[a]uthorize the City Manager to execute a *Public Mural Agreement between the City and Connie Fiorella Fitzpatrick.*”²

From my understanding of the project, after talking with Marylin Hinajosa, Lead Artist on the WoC Mural project, and after reviewing the documents pertaining to the issue as available on the Lawrence City Commission webpage (<https://lawrenceks.org/agendas/>), it appears the qualifications of the project as “art” and the WoC as “artists” are not being called into question. It appears to me, that the GOALS of the donation and the appropriateness of the SITE and INSTALATION PROCEDURES, are more at issue. Therefore, I would like to address each of these issues while communicating my highest support for the project, as proposed by the WoC.

SITE & INSTALATION PROCEDURES + GOALS

I respectfully put forward that the *site/installation procedures* for the mural are inexorably linked to the *goals* of the project and that these two points must be understood not in isolation, but together as unified. Ms. KT Walsh stated that, “...the

¹ I received my Master’s degree in Sculpture from Queens College, C.U.N.Y. in 1995 and have a substantial exhibition and collection record of my works, including the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).

² <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/08-07-18/woc-mural-staff-memo.html>

*mural is removable, but as a sign of respect, it needs to go on the library wall and remain permanent.”*³

I submit that considering the site/installation procedures in concert with the goals is the best way to show the civic respect long overdue to the people for whom this mural is dedicated and by whom this mural is being created.

To affix this mural to the Library on panels rather than permitting it to be directly painted onto the concrete would be, however unintended, a sign of disrespect. It would send a message that while “tolerated”, the intentions of the WoC and the women/womxn whose stories are represented within the mural, will not be granted “permanency.” The treatment of this issue by not permitting permanency is akin to granting exception *to* rather than acceptance *of*, the common humanity and the ability to equitably express this humanity, which is at the emotional heart of this technical issue.

Further, I am in strident opposition to the point raised in the July 2nd letter from Kevan Vick, Chair, Friend of the Library, that “*Given our community’s specific situation of a new city building and the various architectural awards it has won, their recommendation is for the mural to be painted on panels, recognizing minimal damage from anchoring to the building will be necessary.*”⁴ A compromise of this sort would send a business-as-usual message of tolerance and exception while refusing to acknowledge the permanence and acceptance of that which is ultimately a matter of a racial injustice. I encourage the Mayor and the City Commissioners to be on the right side of history on this issue.

In my opinion, the LCAC is correct in stating that “this is a precedent-setting issue.”⁵ The issue when painting directly onto a “board formed finish” and how this is “a character-defining feature”⁶ of the Library is important. However, if the mural is granted permanency, as pointed out by Marylin Hinajosa, “...the only damage [that] could arise [would be] from the removal of the mural, which is not the intent.”⁷ From the public documents, I see that the Commission framed the topic around the idea

³ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/hrc-action-summary-mural.pdf>

⁴ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/woc-lpl-letter.pdf>

⁵ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/woc-lcac-mural-reveiw-ltr.pdf>

⁶ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/hrc-action-summary-mural.pdf>

⁷ [ibid.](#)

of the mural not being “inappropriately removed”⁸, and I enthusiastically support the continuation of this mindset.

To Commissioner Veatch’s statement “...it’s an architect designed city owned building, and the design was to have board formed concrete, not a mural”⁹, while I understand the Commissioner’s point, it is not relevant because if applied as a policy, it would mean the end of any remodeling or addition to any building within this category. The design intentions of a building must always be carefully weighed against proposed amendments to said building and in this way, the designed intention is not fixed in time, but flexible.

From public documents, I see the support of Gould Evans for the mural which addresses concern,

*“...that since this is proposed to be on perhaps the city’s most public building there has been a lack of public engagement opportunities. While the mural team held meetings amongst themselves and their Facebook followers and other select groups, they did not proactively facilitate public engagement and input meetings from the broader community. The issues created by not including everyone (as in the East 9th Street process) should be avoided here.”*¹⁰

In addition, after meeting with Marilyn Hinajosa, she explained that the WoC group has since sought significant additional public engagement opportunities in an effort to fulfill due diligence.

As pointed out in the public documents on this issue, the main vehicles for the installation of artwork in Lawrence are the Percent for Art program and the Lawrence Downtown Public Sculpture Exhibition. I agree with Commissioner Erby’s point, that “...the building is new enough that it should be considered in its current state as unfinished, and the mural would complete the building.”¹¹ In this way, we might frame the mural as a much anticipated and long-awaited realization of an artwork in the spirit

⁸ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/hrc-action-summary-mural.pdf>

⁹ [ibid.](#)

¹⁰ <https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/agendas/cc/2018/07-10-18/woc-lcac-mural-reveiw-ltr.pdf>

¹¹ [ibid.](#)

of a percent for art project that presents stories of women/womxn of color BY women/womxn of color.

Lastly, I argue that the project, as painted permanently on the concrete wall of the library, meets every one of the principal goals of the Donated Public Art Program, which are,

A. *To enrich the public environment for both residents and visitors to the community through the visual arts. This mural enriches our imagination as it challenges the community to acknowledge every member of the human family, regardless of race. This as we regularly see vehicles decorated with the Confederate flag in our community; a symbol of hate and division.*

B. *To nurture and enhance our art community. This enhances the agency of artists and the power of art to tell relevant and difficult stories.*

C. *To increase public access to works of art and to promote understanding and awareness of the visual arts in the public environment. This mural will appeal to the community both as a work of art and as a message of the necessity of inclusion mindsets.*

1. *To promote diversity and pluralism in Public Art and to reflect a wide range of expression.*
2. *To contribute to the civic pride of our community. Yes to 1 and 2*

In addition, the project meets the site criteria,

1. *Relationship of artwork to the site, in terms of the physical dimensions, social dynamics, local architectural character and surrounding context of the site, existing or planned. Points as raised throughout this letter.*
2. *Visibility of the site by the general public. The proposed site is heavily trafficked and widely visible*
3. *Public safety. The area is well lighted.*
4. *Ability to improve the design of an area by emphasizing a particular location through the creation of landmarks, gateways and/or linkages to other parts of the community. This mural will most certainly creatively enhance the site and create “gateways” between the adjacent areas, perhaps drawing even more people into the public library than currently visiting as a result of the successful renovation.*
5. *Support of interior and exterior vehicular and pedestrian traffic patterns. Yes.*

6. *Site planning including landscaping, drainage, grading, lighting and seating considerations.* Yes.
7. *Relationship of proposed artwork to existing artworks within the site vicinity.* Yes, specifically the mural's proximity to sites sued for the Lawrence Downtown Sculpture Exhibition.
8. *Compatibility of the design and location with the historical character of the site.* Yes, it is within this area where the people of Lawrence hid during the raids of the late 1800's. The motivation for these raids were at-heart racially motivated by fear, which is akin to the objection being vocalized about this project.
9. *Environmental impact such as noise, sound, light and odor.* None
10. *Public accessibility to the artwork, particularly handicap accessibility.* This mural can not solve all of the issues that face our community. The City and private companies (which make millions) can also throw a little (more) skin in the game to repair sidewalks and make all of Lawrence accessible.
11. *Impact on adjacent property owners' sight lines and sight views.* Negligible

The project also meets the LCAC/Mural Review Criteria¹²

“Relationship of the proposed work of art to the site in terms of the history and cultural and social dynamics of the neighborhood, and the local architectural character and surrounding context of the site, existing or planned.”

See points made previously.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Matthew Burke

Artist and Educator

835 Highland Drive

Lawrence, KS 6044

Mburke01@ku.edu | 785-424-3537 cell

¹² https://assets.lawrenceks.org/assets/artsandculture/lcac/LCAC-Mural_Review_criteria.pdf