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New Rogers Arts Commission Eager for Projects

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ROGERS — A trio of red, white and yellow bird sculptures recently found a new home downtown, becoming the first donation accepted by the Rogers Public Art Commission.

The commission, started in January, has spent recent months creating applications and legal guidelines, Chairman Roger Reithemeyer said. Rogers is the latest city in Northwest Arkansas to adopt an art commission or committee to oversee the installation of art on city property. The Fayetteville Arts Council and the Bentonville Public Art Advisory Committee both started in 2007.

“The Rogers Public Art Commission envisions a community where creativity is not only encouraged, but celebrated,” Reithemeyer said. “We believe promoting artistic displays in public spaces creates a vibrant sense of community pride.”

But there are some roadblocks the commission still faces, Reithemeyer said.

“Funding is our greatest challenge,”

Reithemeyer said. “At this moment we do not have a funding channel established. It is an ongoing conversation. We don’t know where that is going to come from.”

The Fayetteville Arts Council also had trouble with funding in the past, and projects it pitched fell through because of finances.

Dede Peters, Fayetteville community outreach coordinator, will take over as that city’s liaison to the arts council in coming months. She previously had served on the arts council as a resident.



The arts council has worked on some successful projects in the past, Peters said. The placement of a Steve Hoover sculpture on the Frisco Trail in 2008 is one example, she said. The sculpture was donated to the city as a memorial for Hoover and his family. It has been several months since the arts council met, Peters said. It will start to meet again soon to decide locations for more public art, she said.

The Bentonville Public Art Advisory Committee also sat stagnant for several years before being revived recently.

Tom Hoehn, committee member, said a one-year lease with three pieces of art last year helped get the committee going. It decided to purchase two of those pieces through funding from the Bentonville Convention and Visitors Bureau, he said.

The sculptures SunKissed by Nathan Pierce and **Pac-Man by Craig Gray will be placed along the city's trail system**, Hoehn said.

"They have been a wonderful success," Hoehn said. "The committee bonded as a team. We learned how to select art and how to install it."

The committee has a request out for a proposal for a \$15,000 piece of art at Train Station Park in the 400 block of South Main Street, Hoehn said.

Area artist Michael Reese started to work with Rogers officials to start the art commission after some other artists said they were unable to donate pieces to the city.

"There was no mechanism for them donate private art to the city," Reese said.

Now that the commission is in place, artists are considering projects to donate, he said. Reese would like to donate steel butterfly sculptures for the butterfly park on First Street downtown.

The sculptures are about 2 feet wide and weigh about 45 pounds, he said. They are suspended in the air by a metal pole.

Artists have to fill out an application that will be reviewed by the commission before any art can be approved as a donation, said Bob Schopp, commission member. The commission wants to make sure artwork is not offensive or dangerous, he said.

The bird sculptures on Walnut Street near Trolley Line Bookstore are an example of the type of art that can be donated to the city, Reese said.

Betsey Wright, former chief of staff to President Bill Clinton when he was governor of Arkansas, once owned the sculptures, Reese said.

Myra Moran, owner of Trolley Line Bookstore, said the sculptures were moved to her house for safekeeping when Wright moved to Texas several years ago. She received permission from Wright to donate the works to the city, but she has been unable to confirm the name of the artist.

The commission hopes to do more than receive donations in the future, Reithemeyer said. A funding source could help the city attract national artists for commissioned work, he said.

A nonprofit arm of the commission is one option, Schopp said. The nonprofit could help fund projects the commission wants to undertake, he said.