



Jim Lockridge <jim@bigheavyworld.com>

---

## PACC Item, 3/30

1 message

---

Jim Lockridge <jim@bigheavyworld.com>

Mon, Mar 28, 2022 at 5:13 PM

To: Karen Paul <kpaul@burlingtonvt.gov>, adieng@burlingtonvt.gov, jshannon@burlingtonvt.gov

Bcc: jim@bigheavyworld.com

Karen, Ali, and Joan —

Please find a couple minutes before the Wednesday, 3/30 PACC meeting to read this commentary which is a response to the Percent for Public Art ordinance, <https://hyperallergic.com/709621/the-power-of-cities-to-serve-the-arts-needs-to-be-harnessed/>

At the PACC meeting, would you provide answers to these questions for the public record?:

Why is all the funding from this ordinance prescribed for the purchase of "visual art or an artistically designed feature created by an individual" and not to be invested in capital infrastructure that would serve other art forms, including the performing arts?

By what other new permanent city funding mechanism will the performing arts be served, to achieve equity and inclusion, a baseline responsibility of BCA, the PACC, and full City Council?

If no other new permanent arts funding source is being established coincident to Percent for Public Arts, will you revise the ordinance to accomplish fairness in how the funding is distributed among art forms in Burlington? If not, why not?


I've attached the ordinance so you can reference it easily.

Thank you for taking this concern to heart. Whatever role you had in the ordinance approval process, it may be amended to heal the injury; thank you for making that effort.

—  
JAMES LOCKRIDGE (he/him)  
Executive Director, Big Heavy World | WOMM-LP 105.9FM The Radiator  
VT Music Library | Museum of VT Music History  
Chittenden Zone Agent, Vermont Creative Network  
Brigade Co-Captain, Code for BTV  
The Cherry Coal

LinkedIn • Instagram • Facebook

---

 Ordinance-Percent\_for\_Public\_Art.pdf  
14680K

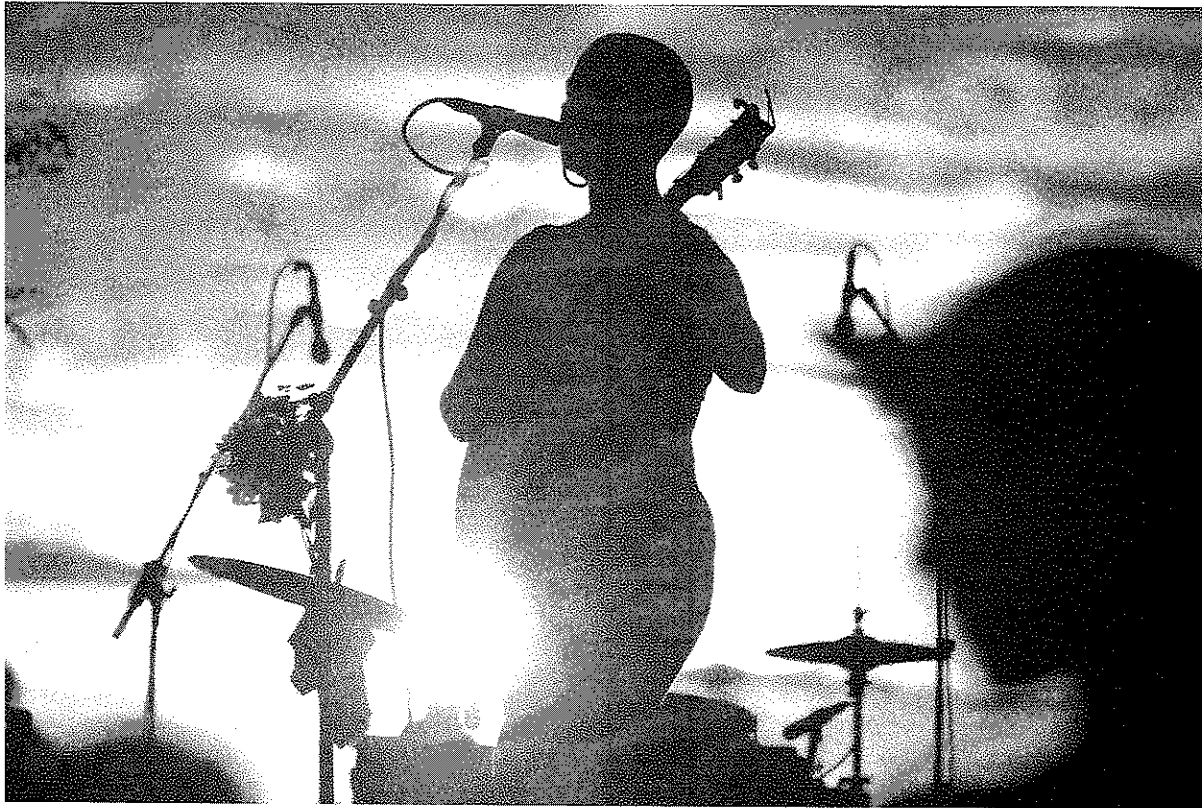
Opinion

## The Power of Cities to Serve the Arts Needs to be Harnessed

An ordinance passed last year in Burlington, Vermont, directs city funds for public art only to work that is permanent and purchased from individual artists.



by James Lockridge  
February 7, 2022



Ivamae releases the album "Tender Meat" at Waterworks Park in Burlington, (August 22, 2021) (all photos by and courtesy Luke Awtry Photography)

BURLINGTON, VT — I live in a very small New England city that has a reputation for being progressive. Here, public conversations about livable wages, non-citizen voting, and tenant rights are frequent. For a few decades it's also been a garden of

converse discoveries: A fertile learning environment providing lessons about how government action — particularly policies deciding how the arts are resourced — should come from a foundational value of inclusion. It often doesn't.

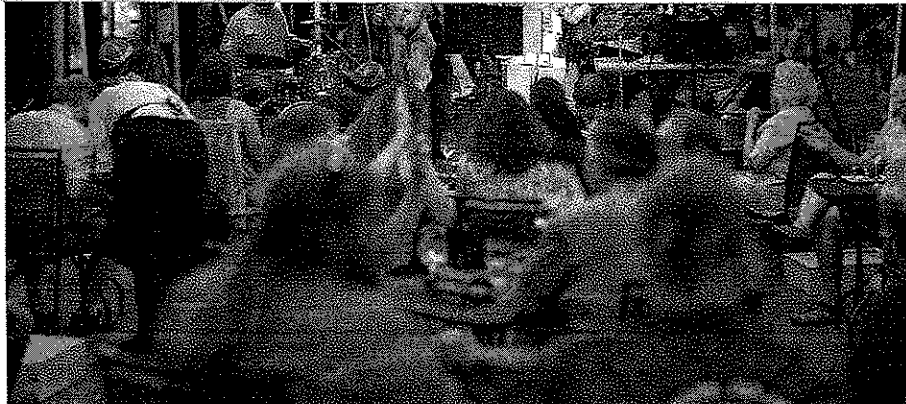
The pandemic era has made it very clear that our society has flaws baked in; that the machinery of our democracy was built with bad math, and that people have suffered because of these imperfections. An earnest look at how a government views and treats the arts reveals opportunities to make adjustments toward inclusion and fairness. We're in a time that has validated systemic changemaking; the next steps are on us.

My municipality — led by a combination of city councilors and an administration that includes a city arts office — enacted an ordinance last June that delivers 1% of the capital budget of any city development project to our municipal arts office. There, the ordinance dedicates those funds to be used to create public art within each project, or for those funds to be collected and used elsewhere for public art. The language is specific about the use of these funds: They're for “work ... intended to be permanent or longstanding, not temporary or transitory,” *purchased from an individual artist, to be owned by the city and maintained by staff paid by the arts office from the funds*. This ordinance might offer a positive first impression. It also represents an outmoded worldview.



# HYPERALLERGIC

Membership



Jenni Johnson performing at Leunig's on the Church Street Marketplace in Burlington during the Discover Jazz Festival (June 4, 2021)

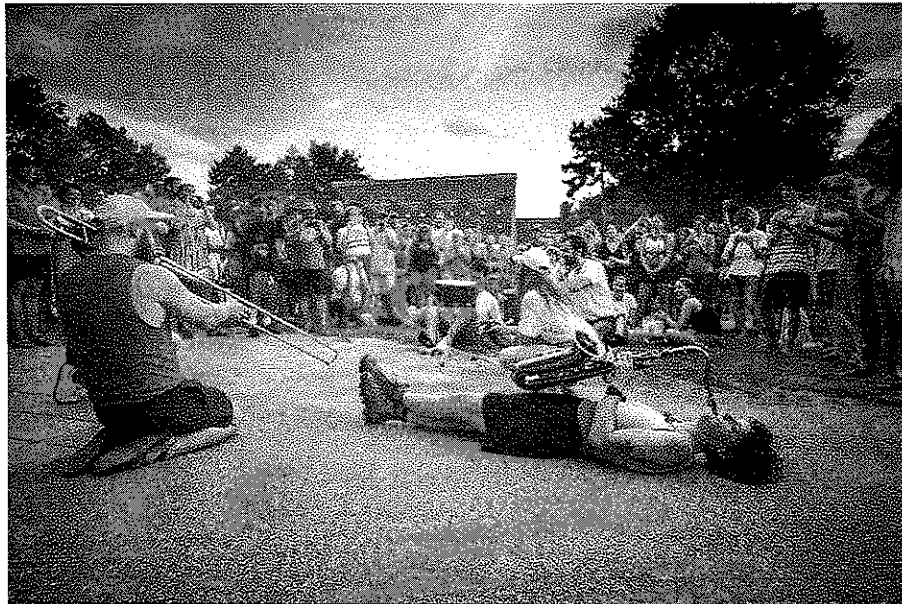
This new arts funding appears during a period when arts leadership could have — like other leaders — been deeply contemplating the imperative of inclusion and applied empathy to arts funding strategies. Serving all arts, and all people, should be the baseline of a city's policymakers and arts office. Striving to expand effectiveness through new, nuanced understandings, and committing to including the public in public projects, follow from that premise — especially when creating entirely new revenue streams to support the arts.

With these values in mind, I asked our arts office whether this ordinance was an expression of purposeful fair-mindedness. How does the new ordinance serve youth, the blind, the deaf? How does it provide capital support to the performing arts? How does it meet goals of public enrichment when it purchases permanent art pieces, rather than builds infrastructure on which to curate art that changes often enough to eventually enrich everyone — and include artists who aren't well-established? How does the ordinance support processes that engage the public in decisions about public art, inviting local artists or schoolchildren to participate?

The language of this ordinance did not address these questions, but rather fell back onto legacy art-funding practices that don't responsibly, inclusively and equitably serve an arts community in a modern era. Yes, permanent, ongoing funding from capital projects and staffing could strengthen arts infrastructure broadly conceived. But there was no effort to leverage this new funding monopoly to achieve the greatest good. This ordinance was *basic*.

The director of our city arts office described this new capital-project-derived support as only one of multiple funding sources, thus facilitating “a positive outcome, not a narrow perspective.” And they describe contemporary public art as “frequently multi-disciplinary and does not preclude artists of any discipline from being included in a project's conception and design.” Yet, they are among the authors of this new ordinance that now channels 100% of all arts funding from capital projects, by rule, into a permanent collection comprising art purchased from

individual artists. The entire universe of the potential for service to the wider arts community is circumvented; the outcome is literally exclusive and determined by authors who are habituated to serving a dominant art form — the visual. The definition of public art that was shared in conversation didn't inform the actual legislative work, providing us with a reminder of where to find the proof of an authentic commitment to fairness: in actions, not words.



Rubblebucket performs at The Point FM Battery Park Concert Series, Burlington, on July 5, 2018

Is ours the only city that systematically marginalizes, under-resources, and neglects non-visual art forms and the people who create them? I strongly doubt it. Likely, most of our cities could use a healthier outlook. In the meantime, those with clearer vision are proposing federal legislation that would fund temporary or permanent public artwork in categories as broad as two- and three-dimensional visual artworks, interactive or sound-based artworks, and performative artworks like concerts, readings, festivals, or displays of dance or theater. These many art forms are versions of coming together, of sharing, of communing amid interpretations of human experience. They all provide the *enrichment* and community-building that we so often declare is the fundamental value of the arts. Our aspiration for art — reflected in the investments we make in the capital that fosters art in our cities — should embrace our complexity.

Let's be optimistic that if our congressional delegates can grasp the imperative of inclusion in public art when they propose arts funding of \$300,000,000 in the **Creative Economy Revitalization Act**, our municipal leaders should be able to grasp this core value as well. Locally, these leaders should ensure any local arts fund — for capital public art projects or otherwise — meets this standard and normalizes it.

---

© 2022 Hyperallergic.