
MINUTES: 2nd Meeting of Cambridge Advisory Committee on City Art, Monuments & Markers

Wednesday, February 10, 2021 • 6:00-8:00 p.m.

Attendees: Councilor E. Denise Simmons, Brian Corr, Charles Sullivan, Christine Hutchinson-Jones, Emmanuella Fedé, Eryn Johnson, Greggory Bazile, Janie Ward, Jason Weeks, Melvin Downes, Neal Alpert, Ora Grodsky, Sarah Burks, Suryani Dewa Ayu, Timothy Patrick McCarthy, Tiya Miles, Valerie Beaudrault

At 6pm, Co-Chair Councilor Simmons opened the meeting, and Co-Chair Brian Corr said the desired outcomes and agenda for the meeting would adhere to the following:

Desired Outcomes:

- Overview of how Cambridge City Art comes to be
- Consideration of what we mean by “shameful acts”
- Consideration of Guiding Principles and criteria for examining objects

Agenda:

- Welcome and Agenda for today
- Introductions
- Arts Council Presentation
- Consideration of Definition of Shameful Acts
- Guiding Principles and Criteria for Examining Objects
- Next Steps and Closing

Co-Facilitator Ora Grodsky provided an overview of the POP (Purpose, Outcomes, Process) for today’s session, and then reviewed the following **Committee Norms:**

- Share your voice. We come from our diverse experiences to create something together
- We don’t have to agree, but we commit to listening deeply with an open mind
- Read materials between meetings—come to meetings prepared

Ora welcomed **Timothy Patrick McCarthy**, who provided an introduction and described a longstanding interest in the power of art, expressions of counter narratives, speaking truth to power, and how we tell people’s histories.

Jason Weeks, Executive Director of the Cambridge Arts Council, spoke next, providing context for some ways in which Cambridge City Art comes to be. He presented a slide show, “More Than the Sum of the Arts,” that discussed 15 artworks in Cambridge and their stories. Jason invited committee members to think about the following themes during the presentation: history, social context, industry, a sense of place, work and service on behalf of the Cambridge Community, civic neighborhood engagement, activism, public space and public ownership of space, intergenerational celebration and play, public safety. The Co-Chairs stated that Jason would be coming back in future meetings to talk more about the process used at the Cambridge Arts Council. Questions for Jason included the following, summarized below:

- **Tiya Miles:** How can we thank you and the Council enough for taking care?... I felt like the life of the City was encapsulated.

- **Jason:** Thanks goes to the City, 1979 set-up and insists by law that artists would be involved when we develop and grow our City... one of the few communities that has dedication from the City like this... so thank you goes to the City and Council.

Ora then turned the Committee’s attention to the task of discussing the definition of shameful acts. The committee discussed the proposed definition worked on by Neal Alpert, Councilor Simmons, Sury, and Brian. Ora asked the Committee what they thought should be changed. Responses from committee members are summarized below:

- **Timothy Patrick McCarthy:** noted that the phrase “Directly engaged in, profited from, or was principally known for” could include everybody. Tim proposed including all categories under Cambridge’s anti-discrimination ordinances, so we are in alignment with the City. Tim proposed writing, “based on race, gender, and/or” acknowledging intersectionality.
- **Eryn Johnson:** noted the need to better define point three and think in levels of extreme behavior.
- **Tiya Miles:** proposed wording it as “hierarchy of human value based on race, gender, and/or” including sexual violence and gender-based violence.
- **Valerie Beaudrault:** agreed with what had been discussed about the first point with nothing else to add at the time.
- **Greggy Bazile:** had nothing to add at the time.
- **Janie Ward:** appreciated Tim’s edits and added that points one and two felt focused on the historical while point three focused more on the present. Janie brought up the question of how we will apply this definition across the City.
- **Cristine Hutchison-Jones:** called for making the definition more explicit, particularly in terms of religious intolerance. Cristine agreed with Tiya and highlighted the importance of keeping in mind Shameful Acts on a personal scale, including sexual violence, partner violence, treatment of people with disabilities.
- **Emmanuella Fedé:** noted agreeing with Christine on highlighting specific acts that may seem individualized. Emmanuella agreed that there are places where the definition could be more specific.
- **Melvin Downes:** agreed with Janie in that points one and two are more historical and point three is more focused on the present. Melvin noted how important point three is, especially today with everything going on during the impeachment.

At 7:10, Brian looked to dig deeper into transitioning into the excerpts from the New York City report’s guiding principles and criteria for examining objects. He led the committee members through a discussion about the proposed guiding principles and criteria for examining objects, offering some details about the New York City process. Brian asked the committee members if anything should be changed or added to fit the context of Cambridge. Feedback from committee members, summarized below:

- **Melvin Downes:** noted that it’s a good guideline to use but it needs more work to make it specific to Cambridge.
- **Janie Ward:** noted that item four really gets to the complexity of the task and might be the principle that results in discordant voices.
- **Cristine Hutchison-Jones:** noted too much focus on history and not enough on the present.
- **Eryn Johnson:** raised the need to include public art and points of representation and culture in public space.

- **Tiya Miles:** appreciated Eryn’s point and appreciated the focus on diverse perspectives, narratives, and complexity in the principles. Tiya agreed with Jamie’s point about who is included—asking if the focus is just Cantabrigians or guests or visitors in the City?
- **Timothy Patrick McCarthy:** built on this thought process of how we define Cantabrigian and highlighted the importance of thinking through how principles become commitments and values become practices. Tim noted the importance of using verbs, thinking of the principles as active practices. Tim built off the points of Janie, Cristine, and Tiya noting the importance of connecting the past and present and discussing living history.
- **Greggy Bazile:** noted liking the guiding principles, agreeing with Cristine in that the present and near past need to be included.
- **Valerie Beaudrault:** noted generally liking the principles, agreed with Janie about item four, and proposed having a connection between past, present, and future in both the principles and “shameful act” definition.
- **Emmanuella Fedé:** noted agreeing with Tim’s point about principles being active processes. Emmanuella highlighted the importance of centering stories that are usually marginalized, focusing on points of inclusion and justice.

Brian then offered space for committee members to discuss what additional guiding principles and criteria might be used for examining objects in Cambridge. Feedback from the Core Group and committee members, summarized below:

- **Janie Ward** asked if NYC included City art in their process or if this was unique to the Cambridge committee. She then sought to hear from some of the artists in the committee about how adding City art shifts the guiding principles and criteria. She asked that if we *are* going to include City art, might there be additional principles that we’d want to add to this list so that it’s more inclusive and not so heavily focused on the past, but also speaks to the present day?
 - **Brian:** Said that he thought in NYC it was monuments, markers, memorials.
 - **Councilor Simmons:** the whole policy order grew out of monuments, markers, memorials, and we’ve subsequently added art to the mix. She said in some ways, we’re going into new terrain; we’re not *just* going to look at the past. She said one aspect that makes our city so rich is our public art. Going forward, we want to have a guidepoint as we display any kind of art, monument, marker, or memorial.
- **Eryn Johnson:** It’s very easy for arts to hide behind quality and institutionalized ideas of whose art is important, and there’s a big rift on this even within the artistic community. She said people think of art as separate from life, but the privilege of not having to confront is a type of assault.
- **Tiya Miles:** We have an opportunity to think about art in a new way, so we’ll be expanding on what NYC has done. We should try to thread it though, and every place we see the word “history,” we should get a companion term to get at artistic representation, the present and the future. Perhaps thread it through cultural engagement as another bullet high on the list as we flesh out our values?
- **Cristine Hutchison-Jones:** We seldom think about the artists and makers behind the public art and monuments. We might also need to think about how we deal with public art or a monument that might be representationally wonderful but which was *created* by someone whom we do not wish to elevate in the public esteem.
- **Melvin Downes:** One of the things that draws people to this area, from an artist perspective, is seeing the public art. He thought the committee might need time to consider all the information it received, and he thanked the co-chairs for coming up with some guidelines we can use to move forward with.

- **Emmanuella Fedé:** She was thinking about the justice aspect and how much of community art is actually made by people of the community and things that people feel ownership of. She wondered how we might give people that sense of ownership? She also would like to make our public art more interactive, if possible, so that it's not just art for art's sake.
- **Greggy Bazile:** Said he is excited to see what specific type of art plays a role in connecting a community, and how architecture, along with markers and statues, create influence.

Ora discussed next steps and what the group members should expect in advance of the next meeting (**Wednesday March 10, 6-8pm**) stating that materials would be sent out to the members for their review. She reminded committee members to email Sury with any additional thoughts.

Ora thanked Jason for presenting and thanked Sury, Neal, Charlie, and Sarah for the technology support. Councilor Simmons and Brian alluded to a brief overview of what's coming up in future meetings ("criteria and process for examining objects"), and the meeting adjourned at 8 pm.