

Public art process works well for Kansas City, with or without local contributors

07/03/2014 5:25 PM | Updated: 07/04/2014 3:37 PM



Iowa artist David Dahlquist's concept involves a tiled gateway for the East Patrol project. SUBMITTED RENDERING

Anyone who has parked in the city garage at 12th and Oak streets is familiar with the intriguing and eerie drone emanating from Kansas City artist James Woodfill's sound and blue light installation in the stairways.

Similarly, users of the city-built parking garage at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts get to hear the bright saxophone lines of Kansas Citian Bobby Watson as part of the Terpsichore "light organ" installation funded by the percent-for-art program.

Another major public art project is on the docket for the Kansas City Police Department's new East Patrol complex, and some City Council members have questioned why the commission went to an Iowa artist rather than to local talent.

Good question, but one that was well answered by Porter Arneill, the able and trustworthy administrator of the Municipal Art Commission's percent for art program. (The program sets aside 1 percent of the construction of city-funded building projects for a work of public art.)

As reported by The Star's Lynn Horsley (<http://www.kansascity.com/news/government-politics/article660183.html>), Arneill explained that few Kansas City artists have the resources, expertise and experience to produce major, million-dollar works of public art. Such projects require liability insurance of \$1 million or more. And, besides, as he and others suggested, the goal of the program is to select the best possible proposal submitted by any qualified artist.

This latest project attracted 61 proposals, only one of which came from a Kansas City artist.

Arneill expressed the hope that as the city's new Office of Creative Services gets under way, more resources will allow him the time to offer a certain level of training and professional development for local artists interested in pursuing large-scale public projects. It's a specialty and a career choice that artists don't tend to make on a whim.

For now, artist David Dahlquist, of Des Moines, will be refining his concept for a tiled gateway for the East Patrol project at 27th Street and Prospect Avenue, a work contracted at \$425,000. And good news for locals: Dahlquist plans to involve young people from the neighborhood in creating tiles and other elements of the installation.

The public art program is one of the surprising aspects of Kansas City's creative landscape. The Kauffman project, by two Boston artists, won a 2011 national award. The program gets people talking, arguing and appreciating how provocative, entertaining visual stimuli contribute to a unique community.