

Elmer, Linda

From: Katie Avila Loughmiller <kml366@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, July 28, 2020 11:59 AM
To: Elmer, Linda
Subject: Re: Virtual link for the Aug. 3rd HPC meeting -- and the mural file number is 200429
Attachments: HPC Call to Action letter_ .pdf

Hi Linda,

Thank you for your help on this.

Attached is a letter that I and fellow artists and activists wrote in objection of this mural. We hope the commission will deny this project's certificate of appropriateness.

We have taken a lot of time and consulted a lot of people from various backgrounds. I myself have an MFA in Art and Public Practice -- so the intersection of art, community and public space is something that I have spent years researching, investing in and making a serious commitment to as a practicing artist, cultural worker and educator. There are a few signatures on this letter, we may have more by the end of day or even week's end. We have encouraged people to use this letter as a guide so may see different parts of this objection letter with other ideas as well.

I also want to note that there are a handful of people who helped with this letter who wish to remain anonymous due to the powers at play. Not everyone has the privilege to use their voice in a public way which makes projects like this even more sensitive.

Thank you,

Katie Avila Loughmiller
www.katieloughmiller.com

On Fri, Jul 17, 2020 at 9:08 AM Elmer, Linda <lelmer@milwaukee.gov> wrote:

Historic Preservation Commission 8/3/20 at 3pm

Mon, Aug 3, 2020 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (CDT)

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone.

<https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/751639293>

You can also dial in using your phone.

United States: [+1 \(571\) 317-3122](tel:+15713173122)

Access Code: 751-639-293

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<https://global.gotomeeting.com/install/751639293>

Here's the link to file 200429 so you can see the application and what else is in the file:

<https://milwaukee.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=4587368&GUID=C8EB3504-CBAF-4D4E-92A6-303DE0A56141&Options=ID|&Search=200429>

The draft agenda is complete – item 6 is discussion and possible adoption of HPC mural guidelines. Items 7 and 8 are both murals (yours is number 8).

I have also attached a “best practices” to participate via video.

You can e-mail me any objections (or pass this e-mail along to others as well).

Linda Elmer

Staff Assistant

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Dear Historic Preservation Commission,

We are writing this letter to request the Historic Preservation Commission postpone approval of the Certificate of Appropriateness for the Shepard Fairey mural installation on the Railway Exchange Building for further community dialogue. We feel that this alteration will impact the core historic value that has been placed on this building and district but also because we feel that community input should be central to a mural of this scope and scale. As community members who are invested in the well-being of all of our City's artists and BIPOC communities, we hope this letter will encourage all involved to consider new and diverse perspectives, as well as the ways in which projects like this are harmful not only to the historic district, but to our communities and city at large.

Historic Preservation

We support consideration of murals and public art on historically designated buildings and in Milwaukee's significant historic districts. We feel, however, that the proposed Shepard Fairey *Voting Rights are Human Rights* mural is not compatible with the historic and architectural character of the building or district as outlined in the *Historic Designation Study Report*.

The mural in question is proposed to go on one of the tallest, if not the tallest, buildings in the *East Side Commercial Historic District*. This means it will affect many other structures in terms of visuals and sightlines. This district is notable for its "visual cohesiveness," meaning the visual aspect has been an important part of the historic designation from the start.

We also encourage members of the Historic Preservation Commission to consider these items outlined in the Commission's Stated Purpose and Intent:

- Effect and accomplish the protection, enhancement and perpetuation of such improvements and of districts which represent or reflect elements of the city's cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history.
- Safeguard the city's historic and cultural heritage, as embodied and reflected in landmarks and historic districts.
- Foster civic pride in the beauty and noble accomplishments of the past.

The *Voting Rights are Human Rights* image that was designed as a poster in February 2020 is based on a collaboration with a New York photographer, Steve Schapiro, who documented civil rights protests in the 1960s. While it carries a worthy message, this particular image is in no way specific to Milwaukee and does not reflect our city's "cultural, social, economic, political and architectural history." Although the HPC ordinance does not yet directly address murals and public art, guidelines outlined generally in the ordinance should be considered in this decision.

We realize that this is a privately owned building with private funds supporting the project, but facades of buildings are on display for the public to view. We would like to see transparency in decision making when it comes to our public art.

While the Historic Preservation Commission does not have to base its decision on anything other than preserving historic buildings/districts and upholding architectural character, we urge HPC to think about cultural competency, cultural equity and investment as well when making a very serious decision.

Cultural Competency, Cultural Equity and Investment

Cultural Competency is defined as the ability to understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural Equity, as defined by Americans for the Arts, “embodies the values, policies, and practices that ensure that all people—including but not limited to those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion—are represented in the development of arts policy; the support of artists; the nurturing of accessible, thriving venues for expression; and the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.” We believe the arts institutions involved in this project, Wallpapered City, Black Box Fund, Obey Giant and other partners, have shown a disregard for cultural competency and are promoting a project that is culturally inequitable.

If the *Voting Rights are Human Rights* image is supposed to be supportive of voting rights, particularly with respect to Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), it seems incongruous that the development and consultation of this project lacks sufficient BIPOC leadership. This would not be okay under normal circumstances, but especially right now—when the Black Lives Matter movement has international momentum and is one of the largest social justice movements in our nation’s history, it feels particularly inappropriate. Given how active Milwaukee has been in support of Black Lives Matter, this project demonstrates an egregious disconnect between those planning the mural and our city’s present-day reality.

Shepard Fairey has a track record of plagiarism from street art to commercial work, as outlined here: <http://www.art-for-a-change.com/Obey/>. We specifically find his blatant plagiarism of works by BIPOC artists including Rupert Garcia and the Young Lords Party problematic and harmful.

The Barack Obama *Hope* poster put Fairey on the map for many of us. This image, however, was not commissioned by, nor ever endorsed by, the Obama Campaign. Additionally, this artwork resulted in a lawsuit between the Associated Press (AP) and Fairey over copyright infringement. Fairey destroyed evidence that would likely have proven that he based the poster on an AP photograph. He was sentenced to 300 hours of community service and a \$25,000 fine.

We find it troubling that our city’s arts institutions and funders would consider giving resources to a problematic white male artist who purports to represent BIPOC people but has not reached out to Milwaukee’s BIPOC artists. We should be taking every opportunity to invest in local, and specifically BIPOC artists, especially during a pandemic that has made the already limited resources for artists even more scarce.

While we support bringing nationally and internationally recognized artists to create art with and for our city, we are against championing an artist such as Shepard Fairey, who has profited off of controversy--not to mention others' work. With a little research, and/or by hiring consultants knowledgeable in this field, the organizations supporting the Fairey mural would find there are many other important artists, particularly BIPOC artists, who are more relevant, represent the community they are making work about, and can do so authentically.

Actions

As our society faces the realities of systemic inequities and cultural dominance, we have the opportunity to create more equitable processes to address these issues.

We're asking that the Historic Preservation Commission deny this Certificate of Appropriateness.

In addition, we encourage stakeholders including Wallpapered City, Black Box Fund, and the Railway Exchange Building to instead consider the following actions:

1. Acknowledge the problematic lack of cultural competency and inequity in the planned mural by Shepard Fairey on the Railway Exchange building.
2. Support the creation of an inclusive public input structure and act on that public input. To date, there have not been any opportunities for this, nor has feedback been welcomed by the commission. It is unacceptable that the public was only made aware of this commission through an *Urban Milwaukee* article regarding the project's Certificate of Appropriateness.
3. Use public art to positively impact important issues, such as voter rights, by engaging and empowering those who are most affected by those issues. Create intentional dialogue with artists, community members and local arts institutions to create public work that is by, for and from those most affected by a topic—making sure that the narratives that affect BIPOC communities are being told from their perspectives.
4. Work with BIPOC artists and consultants to create a transparent, community feedback process for projects of this nature.

Because of the prominence and scale of the location of this installation, it is crucial that we as a community make the right decision about the process and resulting image.

Thank you,

Ellie Jackson
Erick Ledesma
Katie Avila Loughmiller
Vanessa Parker

