Budgeting for Bronze: Understanding Design and Maintenance Needs for Public Art

Webinar begins at 2 p.m. EST

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LIVE CAPTIONS

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Hi, I’m Lindsay.
Architectural and Public Art Conservator
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Phases of Public Art Planning
Phases of Public Art Planning

1. Conception
2. Design Review
3. Fabrication
4. Installation
5. Maintenance
6. Deaccession
Conception

Before anyone starts putting together the specific appearance and construction of a piece, there are a lot of decisions that can affect the cost and level of oversight needed.

- Design Intention
- Site selection
- Permanent vs Temporary
- Primary material
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The goal of the design review is to catch potential immediate and long term material and contextual issues, but it’s also a good time to pull together a lot of the specifics of long term management budgets.

- Catch reactive materials, coatings, structural design, placement, and design concept
- Consider artist’s vision vs public perception
- Acquisition contract, including artist’s warranty and maintenance plan.
Design Review

• Have someone on the review board who understands the fabrication techniques, as well as environmental and design considerations of different materials.

• While we don’t want to stifle creativity and don’t want to limit material choices, but we do want to make sure that the public investment reaches its fullest potential lifespan in a fiscally responsible way.

• Sealants and Protective Coatings
• Metals – Bronze, carbon steel, stainless, aluminum
• Wood – cuts, species, treated
• Ceramic
• Stone – Igneous, sedimentary, metamorphic
• Concrete and Cast Stone
• Plaster and stucco
• Terrazzo
• Glass
• Plastic and epoxy
Design Review

- Review boards should consist of, or at least subcontract to the following professionals for final review:
  - Landscape professionals
  - Structural Engineer
  - Art conservator and/or professional mason / welder / etc.
  - Owner / Owner’s Rep / Community it’s for
Design reviews can be contentious. You can minimize that by making sure all things are considered ahead of time!

- Ask for a 2 year warranty from the artist and check condition within 2 years!
- Ask for documentation of the phases specified in the fabrication plan (don’t hover)
- Ask for a recommended maintenance plan and product specifications from the artist
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Fabrication

- While a lot can be caught during design review, the actual material construction of the piece can easily vary.
  - Timing issues
  - Material availability
  - Use of uncommon or newly designed products
  - Surfaces that don’t drain water away
  - Dangerous to the public
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Installation issues can occur whether the piece is fully assembled prior to installation or if it is completed in location.

- Angles of water diversion
- Landscaping
- Public Interaction and safety
- Stability / foundation
- Weep holes accidentally blocked
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Different materials need different maintenance!

- Bronze – Wash and wax, 1 to 2 times per year. Patina fixes
- Chrome – Wash and wax
- Plastic – wash and manually clean – never solvents
- Stone – wash and grout
- Cement – wash yearly, seal every 3 yrs(ish)
- Wood – Exterior pieces should get protective coatings redone every 3 years minimum.
Maintenance

For collections including pieces where the art was acquired and only maintained when major damage or deterioration is noticed, it is recommended to have the collection surveyed and documented by a qualified conservator who can provide you with a priority list of maintenance and repair needed.
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On the surface it may not make sense to consider costs for removal of a piece you’re just considering for installation, but pieces get removed all the time for all kinds of reasons:

- Political climate
- Danger to the public
- Property development
Keep a Record

Begin with all the Artist’s documents

- Warranty information
- Material Construction
- Maintenance Recommendations
- Artist’s intent
Keep a Record

Visit the Piece Regularly

- Visual inspection
- Make sure the community is able to reach out to you if anything happens to it.
Keep a Record

Take Pictures

• Take pictures when it is installed, and at least once yearly of the overall piece.

• Note any changes, such as color fading, dirt and dust collecting on flat surfaces, water runoff trails, any rust spots or flaked paint
Keep a Record

Keep a living document

- Put all your photos into a folder and title them with the date. Make it clear what you’re looking at in the photo.
- Write out every time an inspection is done. What changes were seen? What maintenance is needed? When was maintenance last completed? What products were used? How have they aged?
Investigation and Restoration
Investigation and Conservation

Things you can do on your own

- Keep your own record of the conditions
- Conduct the regular maintenance cleaning and waxing (conservator on-site training encouraged for first round)
Investigation and Conservation

When to contact a conservator

- When graffiti occurs
- When a damaging reaction occurs or aging has changed the look of the piece
- When the piece has no maintenance records
Investigation and Conservation

Services a Conservator can provide

- A base document with complete material investigation record and photographs for your team to use for all future maintenance
- Recommendations for hierarchy of treatments needed in your collection for budgeting purposes
- Physical conservation treatments and maintenance