

*Together, We See Sparks*  
**Creative Placemaking Plan for  
Victorian Square**

Draft: December 11, 2019



## **City of Sparks**

### **Our vision**

Be the city of choice for residents, businesses & visitors.

### **Our mission**

By establishing financial stability and an effective work environment, the City of Sparks provides a safe environment, economic development, special events, cost-effective sustainable services, and opportunities for citizen involvement.

### **Mayor and City Council**

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Ward 1 Donald Abbott  
Ward 2 Ed Lawson  
Ward 3 Paul Anderson  
Ward 4 Charlene Bybee  
Ward 5 Kristopher Dahir  
City Manager Neil Krutz

### **City of Sparks Arts and Culture Advisory Committee**

The Arts and Culture Advisory Committee supports the community by facilitating investment in the arts and culture in order to nurture creative communities, enhance quality of life and encourage civic pride.

Ann Higgenbotham, Retired Educator  
Stephanie Farias, Founder of TheatreWorks of Northern Nevada  
Eileen Gay, Mosaic Artist, Business owner  
Melissa Melero, Founder of the Great Basin Native Artists Collective, Visual Artist  
CHAIR Sarah Toney, Development Director at Note Ables, Developmental Coach

### **Together We See Sparks Committee**

Francine Burge, City of Sparks, Project Lead  
Lisa Bonie, Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living  
Charlene Bybee, City of Sparks City Council  
Kim Ciesynski, Spaces Design & Planning/39 North  
Tina Drakulich, DJD Foundation  
Paul Fenkell, Artist  
Angela Handler, LoKa Tile Group/39 North  
Cheryl Hare, Community Leader  
Randy Kennedy, Nugget Casino Resort  
Grace Larkins, Graphic Designer  
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## INTRODUCTION

As the United States emerged from a recession in 2015, Sparks began one of its largest and most ambitious redevelopment projects in downtown Victorian Square. Planned for completion by 2022, the eight-square-block area of downtown Sparks began a transformation which will ultimately provide housing (apartments and condos) for approximately 3,500 new residents, and feature dozens of new restaurants and retail spaces, an event venue, a central plaza and community gathering space.

During early planning, the Sparks City Council recognized the importance of integrating art into this historic redevelopment project. As a result, in 2016 they set aside funding and established an Arts and Culture Advisory Committee (ACAC) to guide the process and oversee the wider policies and procedures for incorporating art into this and future city development projects.

Once funded the ACAC launched a cohesive planning process known as placemaking to determine how and where the allocated art funds would be spent.

*Coined by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus for the National Endowment for the Arts in 2010, **creative placemaking** refers to the process in which “partners from public, private, non-profit and community sectors strategically shape the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.”*



Seitu Jones, *CREATE: The Community Meal* (September 14, 2014). Two thousand people gathered in St. Paul's Frog Town at a half-mile-long table to eat together. Photo courtesy of Public Art St. Paul.

The ACAC invited 12 members of the Sparks community including educators, artists, city council member Charlene Bylee, representatives of the business community, and city staff to oversee an initiative called, *Together, We See Sparks* (TWSS). The TWSS

Committee set an early goal to create a cultural district rich in public art, exceptional facilities, and landscape designs that would convert Victorian Square from a hodgepodge of parking lots and disjointed buildings into a cohesive, vibrant neighborhood. To accomplish this, they set the following goals:

1. Create and implement a master plan to serve as a framework for future development efforts;
2. Engage the community in a creative process to develop the plan;
3. Articulate Sparks' identity based on the perceptions and aspirations of the community;
4. Explore the community's needs and identify solutions; and
5. Commission at least two works of public art for downtown Sparks.



TWISS Victorian Square walking tour, February, 2019. Photo courtesy of Ashley Robison.

Francine Burge, City of Sparks Special Event Supervisor, was able to leverage initial city funding with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to create a wider vision of public art as outlined in the following plan.

As part of the planning process, more than two dozen interviews with stakeholders, four community workshops for artists conducted by Springboard for the Arts, trainings for city staff and TWSS committee members, and a community survey created by TWSS helped inform the plan.

The plan is consistent with (and complements) the major city policy goals outlined in “Ignite Comprehensive Plan: *The Plan Guiding the City of Sparks to the Year 2030*” which was adopted in the fall of 2016 AND the goals for downtown Victorian Square.

**Ignite COMPREHENSIVE PLAN:**  
**The Plan Guiding the City of Sparks to the Year 2030**  
*Adopted, October 24, 2016*

**Managing Growth Goals and Policies**

- Prioritize development and enhancement of the Downtown Sparks Center (Goal MG5).
- Enhance Victorian Avenue west of the Downtown Sparks Center (Policy MG16).

**Community Character Goals and Policies**

- Ensure that Sparks’ physical environment, services and amenities make it a city of choice for residents and businesses (Goal CC1).
- Coordinate with private partners to make affordable arts and culture programs available to all citizens (Policy CC5).
- Encourage public art in major private and public works projects and provide opportunities for the display of art in public spaces (Policy CC6).

**Economic Vitality Goals and Policies**

- Provide the facilities and public services necessary to support a vibrant economy by maintaining fiscal strength (Goal EV6).
- Build on Sparks’ position as a leader in special events by investing additional resources in event venues and adding events, including family-friendly events Policy (EV1).
- Enhance Sparks’ appeal to visitors to the region by strengthening arts. entertainment offerings (Policy EV2).

The survey was conducted from June 15 to October 31, 2019 and was promoted through advertising, social media posts and direct email. More than 74% of those surveyed supported the concept that art and culture were a priority for Sparks. There were hundreds of ideas, suggestions, and desires articulated through the surveys, interviews, and artist tools that are captured in section’s two and three of the plan. Section four outlines suggested processes and policies for commissioning works of art in the future.

The TWSS Committee’s second goal - to engage the community using a creative process to develop the plan – was met through the work of artists Jennifer Charbonneau and Paul Fenkell. Selected through a competitive process to create mobile and participatory temporary public artworks, the artists designed projects to engage the community in conversations about Sparks and Victorian Square. The artists worked at six separate community events and locations that ultimately helped direct the recommendations set forth in this plan.



*Big Easel*, by Paul Fenkel, 2019, Third Thursday. Photo courtesy of Ashley Robison.

Major elements of the plan include:

- A description of Victorian Square
- Development challenges
- A description of what art should accomplish in Victorian Square
- Recommendations
- Artist selection process

The plan's focus is Victorian Square, and is meant to be implemented in the next five years. However, it is designed so its funding and policy recommendations will be considered citywide as the community engages artists and designers in the future development of Sparks.



## ONE: Description and history of Sparks and Victorian Square



Downtown Sparks 1904. Image courtesy of Sparks Heritage Museum

Victorian Square was a hub for Sparks long before the city's master plan designated it as the downtown cultural district in 1991. The eight-block area, bordered by Pyramid Highway to 15<sup>th</sup> Street and C Street to Victorian Avenue, was a central focus of Southern Pacific Railroad Company and town leadership from the time the city was platted in 1903-04. Victorian Avenue, originally named Harriman in honor of the Southern Pacific Railroad owner and then changed to B Street to match the developed grid system, was always considered the main street of Sparks.

Named for Nevada Governor John Sparks, the town virtually was created by Southern Pacific Railroad when it moved its center of operations, railroad workers and much of the housing from Wadsworth to undeveloped land east of Reno in 1905. Soon dubbed Rail City, the nascent Sparks became home to the working-class population associated with the railroad or businesses supporting their day-to-day living needs.

By mid-century, important economic and cultural changes transformed Sparks' identity and future dramatically:

- The advent of diesel engines replaced the steam locomotive, causing Southern Pacific to demolish its mighty roundhouse and maintenance shops. In 1956, the company ended 54 years as Sparks' primary employer and revenue generator for the town, leaving important centrally-located land empty;
- In 1962, Dick Graves, who built a 36,000 square foot casino on the former train site, sold it to John Ascuaga. By 1989, Ascuaga created a major hotel convention

destination. Unfortunately for Sparks, the tourist mecca's main entrance faces south, the opposite direction from Victorian Square and the city's main population.

- In a final disorienting blow to community unity and identity, the mid-seventies saw a newly constructed and elevated I-80 freeway, replacing old U.S. Hwy 40 whose traffic had funneled visitor dollars directly into Sparks. The streamlined roadway was built to bypass the city and forever divided it into two disparate areas.

Finally, in the relative prosperity of the mid-eighties, City Council recognized a need to revitalize the Sparks community, and in 1991 designated Victorian Square as its cultural downtown district. As originally planned, proposed architecture was to have a Victorian theme, but during the building boom, development became relatively generic. As aging buildings were removed, the open space of the square became a staging area for the large events, which draw locals and tourist crowds all summer. But yet again, redevelopment plans were delayed, this time due to major economic downturns in 1999 and 2008.

Eventually, Victorian Square encompassed an amphitheater, a civic fountain, monuments, and a history museum with train displays commemorating Sparks' origins as a railroad center. An existing theater in the square was recently purchased by Galaxy Theaters and totally remodeled as an IMAX multiplex and aptly renamed Victorian Theater.

By 2015, the city began to consider future possibilities for Victorian Square, and soon entered into partnerships with Silverwing Development Company and Nugget Casino and Resort to revitalize the eight-block district. It has been a hub of building activity and new business development, with great opportunity both for economic growth and cultural and community enrichment ever since.

Silverwing, responding to a population boom from the influx of employees from Tesla, Microsoft, and other companies, purchased many of the empty lots within Victorian Square. It has constructed 434 apartment rental units with 90% already rented, and another 340 units nearly complete. LandCap developers have constructed another 98 units. While no single-family houses are planned, the project eventually will provide a total of 1,500 rental units and 75,000 square feet of retail space. With the exception of two 10 to 11-story buildings that will include parking garages, the rental units will be six stories or lower.

New food and drink establishments have begun to populate the retail space as it is built and currently include Engine Eight Winery, Mari Chuy's Mexican Kitchen, and Pinion Bottle Company. In the planning stages is a Chinese dim sum and The Kitchen Table, an Italian restaurant based in San Francisco.

In 2019, Nugget Resort and Casino constructed an 8,500-seat outdoor theater in the square, with its first concert season debuting in June and featuring country singer Toby Keith as the headliner. The Nugget will present ten top-tier acts every summer, and other productions are planned for the theater as well.

Today, more than 37,881 people (or 38% of the city's population) live in the 89431 zip code, an area of 4.25 square miles with Victorian Square and surrounding neighborhoods at its center (US Census 2017 ACS 5-Year Survey). By 2020, most of the growth in this area will be limited to the area of Victorian Square's housing development.

## TWO: Development challenges



Cai Guo Qiang, Sky Ladder (2015), 1,650 foot-tall ladder, held by a giant balloon, rigged with explosives that ignite. Image courtesy of Cai Studio/Netflix.

With the growth in Victorian Square comes significant challenge. The new apartments fill a definite housing shortage in the area, but many residents consider it “transient” housing for recent employees of high-tech employers nearby. The new apartments also infringe on “festival space” necessary for the larger events of which Sparks is rightfully proud. Many believe that downtown parking has become too difficult, and has discouraged the use of the distinctive small town amenities, where parking was usually in front of the store they visited.

- The open space in Victorian Square has been reduced due to the added housing and other construction. The city needs to consider which events will still work in the newly configured square and what to do about the events no longer appropriate. Rib Cook-off, Hot August Nights, Lavender and Honey Festival, Pumpkinpalooza, Artown, and Sparks’ tree-lighting ceremony and parade all need to be re-evaluated with these space constraints in mind.
- The Square’s new configuration means less perceived available parking for residents and visitors. The general public is not yet aware of new parking garages (with nearly 1000 spaces) that are available to them.
- The popular public interactive fountain, a family favorite for years, will be removed.
- A new plan must be devised for Nugget visitors to easily move from hotel/casino to the new outdoor theater in the square.

Ongoing issues for the city as a whole must also be considered. For example, how will Sparks:

- Identify itself as a unique place to visit;
- Inspire young people to live, work, play, and stay in Sparks;
- Ensure that Sparks residents continue to feel safe;
- Become a visionary city, while making sure that it honors its history.

On a national level, the creative placemaking white paper for the Mayors' Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative of the NEA in Partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation reports that the most common challenges in the development of a placemaking plan are: "Creating partnerships, countering skepticism on the part of communities and public leaders, assembling adequate financing, clearing regulatory hurdles, ensuring maintenance and sustainability, avoiding displacement and gentrification, and developing performance metrics."

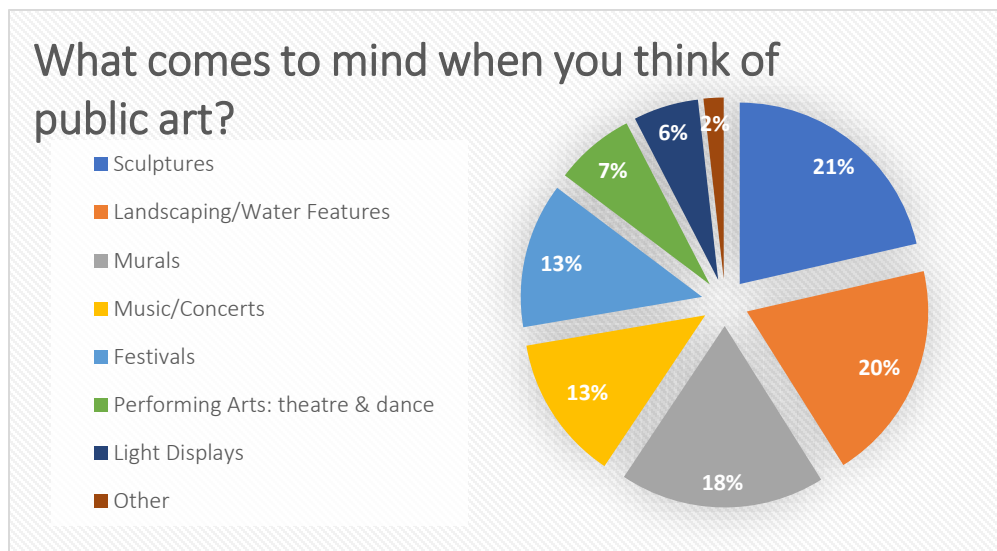
These challenges and issues became the core of how the art plan for Victorian Square began to develop.

### THREE: Description of what art should accomplish in Victorian Square



Felice Varini, *Cercle et suite d'éclats*, (2009) Exposition sur le village, Vercorin. Image courtesy of [www.varini.org](http://www.varini.org).

What does the community want creative placemaking to accomplish in Victorian Square? This core question has informed all recommendations of this report. As mentioned in the report's Introduction, conclusions have been gleaned from a broad spectrum of meetings with city and cultural leaders and staff, past city reports and documents, a public survey, and public participation in unique temporary public art projects commissioned specifically for this plan (see Appendix page 32 for a complete list). Anecdotal insights from a cross section of residents have been valuable as well. Through this research, five specific goals emerged.

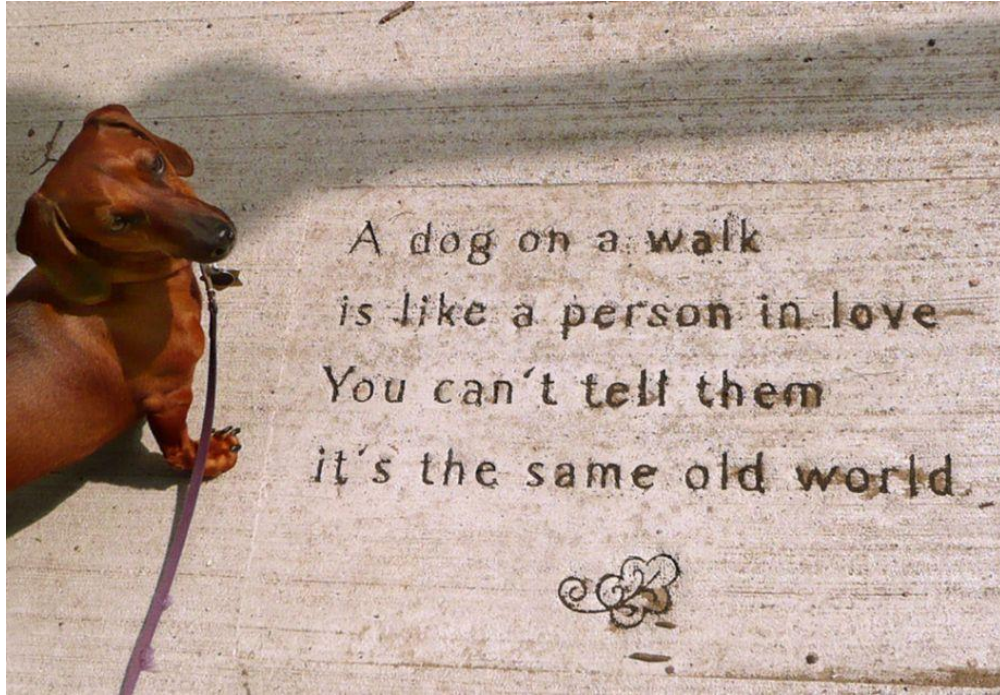


From TWSS Survey, 2019. See Appendix for entire study.

## Creative placemaking should:

- 1. Support and highlight the annual festivals integral to the town's identity.**

Residents surveyed listed festivals and special events as a favorite aspect of Sparks (44%), and wish to encourage, highlight and build the city's annual festivals. Many respondents agreed with the woman who wrote, "Our festivals make everyone happy." Now that Victorian Square's event space is reduced by two-thirds, the public is concerned with the future of events. The addition of the Nugget Event Center also must be considered.
- 2. Reinforce Victorian Square as the center of Sparks' art and culture community.** A majority of respondents believe Victorian Square is key to cultural and community identity. It is the district where neighbors would like to shop, see a movie, or meet friends. Results of the "Together We See Sparks" committee survey showed 76% percent of the respondents identified Victorian Square as the town's center. As local business owner Bonda Young explained, "Victorian Square is our extended living room. We want locals to continue to feel connected."
- 3. Retain the "home-town" feel of Sparks while representing the contemporary aspirations and ideals of the community.** Among residents' most cited expectations and hopes for Sparks' future is to maintain and strengthen its "hometown" identity and character. Residents seek a level of comfort and safety while surrounded by an increased street level charm that more art, trees and landscaping will bring. They hope for a pedestrian friendly environment where they will see familiar faces and landmarks on the sidewalks, square and businesses.
- 4. Charm residents and visitors and inspire them to return to Victorian Square again and again.** Site specific, exciting art installation and programming will make Sparks memorable, and create Victorian Square as a true destination . While proud of the community's history, residents are looking for ways to continue to identify and highlight what's unique about Sparks. Four residents interviewed said that their husbands proposed to them in Victorian Square. The fountain was cited as a place where neighbors would meet and watch their children play. Another interviewee noted, "The new community events make it so much fun to get out on the weekends. Shout out to Third Thursdays and all the great bike events." Another statement, "We need art that connects different backgrounds and gives people the opportunity to be seen." And, "We need an Art Month full of art and inspiration" for the community. They want the square to feel welcoming. They want families to be drawn to the square. It should feel safe and friendly.

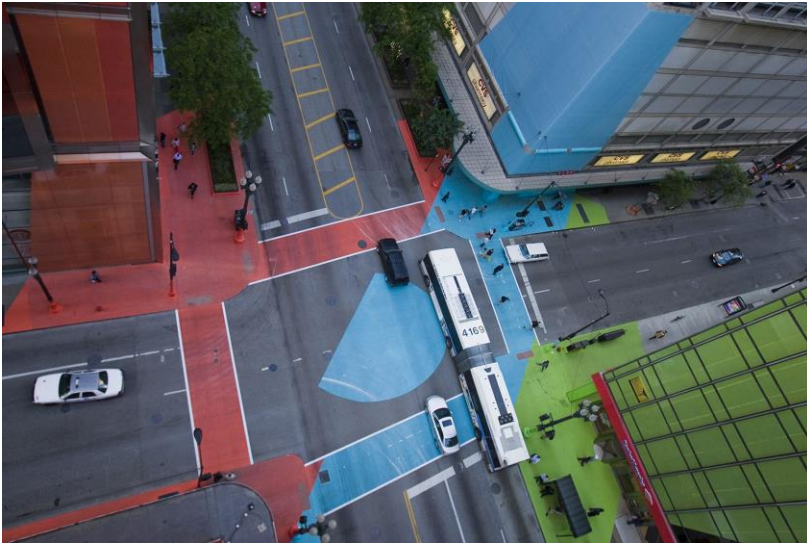


Pat Owen, *A dog on a walk...* (2010), a collaboration between the City of St. Paul and Public Art St. Paul to commission local artists to create poems on city sidewalks. Image courtesy of Public Art St. Paul.

- 5. Support the economic growth of downtown and Victorian Square.** The City of Sparks' investment in the revitalization of Victorian Square mirrors communities across the US that are changing the way they approach economic development. Quality of life is essential to attracting talent, entrepreneurship, and encouraging local businesses. When carefully planned, art and creativity will create a welcoming, comfortable and authentic experience for its residents and businesses and create places where people want to locate, invest and expand.



## FOUR: Recommendations



Jessica Stockholder, *Color Jam*, (2014), Intersection of State and Adams streets, Chicago, IL. Curated by Chicago Loop Alliance. Image courtesy of [www.jessicastockholder.info](http://www.jessicastockholder.info)

Many of the challenges associated with Victorian Square’s new growth are multi-dimensional, but the master planning research leads to six short-term and six long-term strategies that use placemaking to help mediate those challenges, and allow the community to appreciate the positives that change will bring.

These short and long-term recommendations are paired with suggested implementation and funding strategies. In general, however, placemaking in Victorian Square should be funded in three primary ways:

1. Funding for short-term recommendations has already been allocated from the city and from the National Endowment for the Arts Grant.
2. Base funding for the program should be established by allocating a small portion of publicly funded capital construction or renovation budgets and private development projects (usually 1%) to fund the program including the purchase, commissioning, and installation of artworks.
3. Partnerships, collaborations, and other alternative funding sources should be sought for specific projects. This is key to the success of the program. In Paducah, Kentucky (population 26,000) for example, a local bank, the city, and an artist transformed one of the oldest neighborhoods in the town through an “Artist Relocation Program” in which artists apply to acquire and rehab city-owned properties.

### SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2016 the City’s Tourism Facility and Revitalization Committee set aside \$150,000 to commission artworks in downtown Sparks and Victorian Square. Staff is in the process of leveraging these funds with additional grants, through partnerships, and other sources.

The construction of Victorian Square is well underway, creating an urgency to expedite the following in the next year to take advantage of integrating art into the Victorian Square project. This plan must be aligned with the City's Victorian Square Master Plan.

1. **Produce a temporary public art program in Victorian Square** (See Mid and Long Term Recommendations page 20). Allocate \$75,000 from the City's Tourism Facility and Revitalization funding for this purpose.
2. **Commission a permanent work of public art in Victorian Square's central plaza, the area of open space from the Nugget's North Entrance to the Galaxy Theatre's entrance.** It is recommended that consideration be given to art that connects the plaza in some way. Since the artist will need to work with the planning department as they develop the site as a gathering space, this project is high priority.

Set aside \$75,000 from the City's Tourism Facility and Revitalization funding for this purpose. Because \$75,000 is minimal for permanent art work, additional funding is important and could increase to \$225,000 dependent on the outcome of the FY2021 National Endowment for the Arts Grant to be announced in early 2020.

It is recommended that the city work closely with the Nugget as a potential funding partner to ensure this permanent work of public art that connects the Nugget's back door to Victorian Square is commissioned.

3. **Establish a public art program and establish public art policy and procedures to fund, administer and maintain Victorian Square's public art program.**



Joseph Kosuth, *W.F.T. (San Francisco)*, (2019), Bill Graham Civic Auditorium, San Francisco. This is the first public art project in San Francisco, California to be funded through the Public Art Trust with a contribution made by The Emerald Fund, the developers who are constructing two residential properties across from the Auditorium. Image courtesy of the San Francisco Arts Commission.

Set aside \$25,000 from the city's small arts fund, managed by the ACAC.

The City of Sparks has the opportunity to establish groundbreaking programming in the long term, but this is going to take a funding commitment to the Victorian Square project and placemaking overall.

It is recommended that a small portion of publicly funded capital construction or renovation budgets and private development projects (usually 1%) to fund the program including the purchase, commissioning, and installation of artworks.

Funding art through this standard mechanism has resulted in more than 350 similar programs in the country. According to Americans for the Arts Public Art Network, local percent-for-art ordinances have been applied to publicly-funded capital improvement projects since 1959. Today, cities are also expanding percent-for-art programs to include private development. American for the Arts says that the vast majority (97%) of these programs are housed in a local arts agency or municipality. Nationally, 283 of the 350 programs are located within government agencies based within city, county or state government.

The programs are not limited to big cities, but are being adopted in mid-to-small towns across the United States. In the State of Nevada both Las Vegas and Reno have programs that dedicate capital improvement costs to art.

Reno has a 2% for art ordinance. The 2% allocation is calculated using a five-year CIP eligible budget cost averages, but the funding is actually allocated from the City's Transient Occupancy Tax.

Although Carson City, Nevada has not yet implemented a percent-for-art program, they currently fund public art through a 1% allocation from the city's Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) which pays for all public arts programming, plus the administrator's salary and benefits. At current trends the annual 1% revenue is approximately \$200,000.

In other states, Moscow, Idaho (population 25,000) dedicates 1% to public art; Missoula, Montana, population 116,000 (similar in size to Sparks), has a 1.5% for public art program.

Funding through a percent-for-art program will help provide administrative oversight of the program including artist selection, development, and maintenance of the art.

A private sector percent-for-art policy and program can be created that allows developers to commission public art for public areas or on development sites, or pay into a special fund for public art in Victorian Square.

4. **Provide a realistic human resource plan to implement programming strategies.** It will be difficult to establish the long and short-term strategies without a carefully considered and funded human resource plan. Currently one full-time position provides oversight for all festivals, special events and public art programs for the City. Even with the help of a part-time temporary special events assistant, the majority of time (70-75%) of the special events supervisor is necessarily allocated to festivals.

In order to oversee the implementation of projects directly related to the immediate and future funding priorities it is highly recommended that the city hire a full-time arts professional. At least one full time staff person should be dedicated to the city's art program in the future. This position's responsibilities will include:

- Publicity
- Administration
- Procuring additional funding
- Development of current and future partnerships

It is a standard practice in the field of public art to allocate 15-25% of funding from the 1% allocation for administration of the program. As construction occurs, therefore, funding for this new position could be allocated from those sources.

5. **ACAC to implement the master plan and make recommendations about the arts in general moving forward.**

It is further recommended that the Together We See Sparks Committee be used as advisors throughout the implementation of this master plan and that a member of the TWSS be included on artist selection panels for the temporary and permanent artworks listed above.

6. **Re-evaluate the special events in Victorian Square and make recommendations based on the Victorian Square Master Plan or other future development plans that affect festivals.**



Rib Cookoff, Victorian Square, 2018. Image courtesy of City of Sparks.

Space for festivals has been reduced by one-third, the square has been reconfigured, hundreds of new residents are moving into the area, and the surrounding neighborhoods are considerably impacted by the transformed use of the square. In future festival planning, the city and event planners must consider these changes. In addition to the new road closure protocols including permanent bollards and road closure devices, the square's new design demands strategies to control noise, event parking, shuttle plans, and careful space planning due to the elimination of key open space areas. By developing a concise communication plan posted and made widely available to the public, the residents and festival goers will be aware of parking and shuttles that will help the success of events. Publicity and communication stressing new public parking will reduce the complaints about its perceived lack.

## MID AND LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS



Mary Catherine Newcomb, *Giant Hare*, (2011), Cambridge Sculpture Garden, Cambridge, ON.

### 1. Develop temporary public art programming

Temporary public art refers to ephemeral works of art in all artistic disciplines that can last anywhere from a few minutes to several years. Artists have been making temporary work for decades, and it can be produced in storefronts, or to replace advertising posters in underutilized bus stops and buses. It can be installed in crosswalks, in plazas or on the tops of trees or buildings. Temporary public art can transform an empty lot into a welcoming area where people can read or play. With creative lighting installations, a dark street can be transformed.

The benefits both to the public and to the artist are several. According to a recent story in the Wall Street Journal, "Many cities across the country are finding that temporary contracts – renting an artist's work instead of buying it – make it possible to

cut costs, compared with the expense of purchasing and maintaining a work of art on permanent display.” Furthermore, “Replacing art faster can also be a shot in the arm for businesses in the area. With each new unveiling becomes an event that can draw people to the city’s downtown or a little-used public space. Often, these are interactive, engaging pieces of art that get people talking or lend themselves to being shared on social media.”<sup>1</sup>

The costs to produce and maintain public art can also be less, and demand less staff time for approval and permitting. Temporary public art allows for many art forms such as performance, writing and poetry, artworks involving technology, and/or built with materials that aren’t able to last over long periods of time, to be experienced by the public. It allows artists an opportunity to experiment and explore current issues, ideas and topics. Although temporary, the memory of the work lingers, and helps the public see the place in fresh ways again and again.



Jim Campbell, *Scattered Light* (), 1,600 LEDs encased in standard light bulbs and suspended. Image courtesy of Northern Lights.mn.

#### Recommendations for temporary art include:

- a. Create an ongoing temporary and site-specific public art program that may include the following:
  - Commission temporary public artworks in conjunction with special events in the square that reflect the theme of the event and are funded in partnership with event producers.
  - Create a temporary kiosk poster series in the five existing kiosks and two bus shelters located along Victorian Ave. that currently display advertising.
  - Activate key areas of the square with light installations during the winter months.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Art Isn’t Always Meant to Be Permanent, Wall Street Journal, Daniel Grant, June 26, 2018



Seyed Alavi, *Who Am I*, a series of six composite portrait images installed in kiosks, each created by layering photographs of individuals encountered along Market Street in San Francisco. Image courtesy of [www.here2day.netwiz.net](http://www.here2day.netwiz.net)

- b. **Develop a collaborative partnership with Sierra Arts, Sparks Heritage Museum, 39 North and local businesses, to produce an outdoor, semi-annual exhibition of existing artworks installed on footings throughout Victorian Square.** This program could be produced concurrently and in conjunction with 39 North and Sierra Arts Foundation's Third Thursday's. Its event schedule and galleries program places artwork in downtown businesses and will attract people downtown for monthly art tours of the temporary exhibits placed in businesses.

This smaller, year- round event should replace the summer Farmers' Market which proved difficult to manage. The goal of collaborative Third Thursdays is to continue attracting people to downtown while alleviating pressure on city staff caused by coordinating the summer Farmers' Market.

Examples of what may work for Sparks include the successful exterior sculpture exhibitions of Sculpture Milwaukee (established in 2007 to revitalize W. Wisconsin Ave. in downtown Milwaukee and make sculpture accessible to visitors and residents of the city.); The Chicago Sculpture Exhibit (founded in 2001 to beautify the Lincoln Park neighborhood in a new way); and the City of Napa's Downtown Artwalk sculpture exhibit.

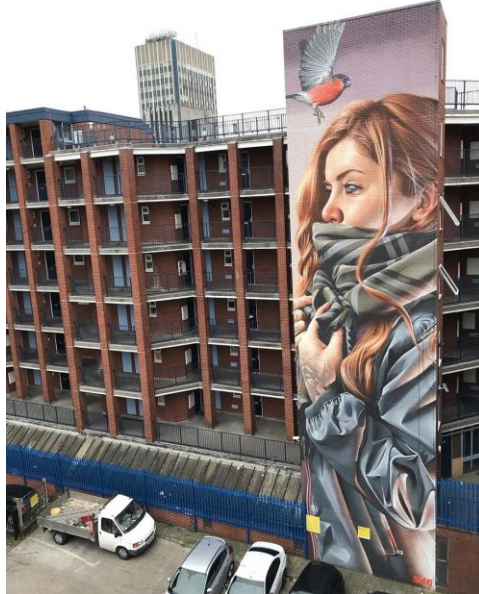


LT Mustardseed, *Treasures from the Sea* (2007), Napa Art Walk. Photo courtesy of CaliforniaThroughMyLens.com

- c. Develop a collaborative partnership with the University of Nevada to produce an annual performing art series in existing but underutilized venues downtown such as Victorian Square’s two small gazebos, the 300-seat amphitheater, and other open spaces throughout the square. This series could be in collaboration with community organizations such as Sierra Arts, 39 North, and others.
- d. Develop an agreement with the Nugget for city use of the new event center and establish at least one collaborative event. Modeled on 2019’s successful production of a free concert at the Nugget Event Center (NEC) featuring singer/songwriter Ruthie Foster, produce an annual free concert in conjunction with Northern Nevada’s annual Artown month-long celebration of performances in July each year. The City of Sparks, with Tourism and Marketing Committee funding, partnered with Artown and the Nugget Event Center to host a free concert at the NEC for the public. The Nugget generously paid for part of the artists fees, provided the space, security and hospitality staff, and provided two VIP suites. The event included space for visual artists to show their work before the concert and was well attended.
- e. Commission temporary murals with a life span of one-to-five years for walls facing the square and on other large walls throughout the district. Mural making has seen a remarkable global resurgence in recent years, with dozens of mural festivals featuring a network of artists who travel from place to place to make work. Such festivals have proven to activate its citizens and give the community an opportunity to watch artists in action, and combine art and performance to create a special event. While Sparks does not have enough walls available to



create such a festival, a similar feeling of community action and pride can be generated by instituting a revolving murals program every two-to-five years.



Smug One, *Bring the Paint Street Art Festival*, (2019), Yeomans Street, Leicester, United Kingdom 2019. Image courtesy of [www.bringthepaint.co.uk](http://www.bringthepaint.co.uk).

2. **Create an artist/designer-in-residence program in partnership with Victorian Square developers and Sierra Arts Foundation.** Provide a live/work space for three-to-six month residencies for one or more artists or designers throughout the year. The residency will require the artist/designer to develop a new temporary work of public art in the Square. For example, artists from burning man could be selected each year to build artwork for the festival in Sparks and then exhibit it in Victorian Square following the festival. Sierra Arts Foundation has expressed interest in collaborating with the city on such residencies, allowing artists to use the Depot Gallery as a studio space.



Theaster Gates, *Dorchester Project*, (2006 to present), Dorchester, Chicago. The artist restored vacant buildings into cultural institutions in south side Chicago and in other communities. The Dorchester Project is a two-story building that has been turned into a library slide archive and soul food kitchen. Image courtesy of [www.theastergates.com](http://www.theastergates.com).

### 3. Create gathering places for people to enjoy art and community interaction.

- a. Replace the Victorian Square fountain with a non-interactive, intimate water feature designed by an artist that allows the community to see and hear water during the summer months.
- b. Create a mobile dog park. Sparks residents have requested additional places for their dogs to enjoy exercise and each other. Pop-up dog parks have proven to be popular and well-received in cities such as Bothell and Vancouver Washington, but require a reasonably large space that can be dedicated for at least two months. In addition to providing room to roam for four-legged friends, they also allow their human friends to interact and enjoy social time.
- c. Provide additional green space for play and picnicking.
- d. Create, fund, and implement a lighting plan for the Square. The plan will include architectural, streetscape, landscape and other creative lighting throughout the district. As a 501c3 business group with a mission to bring people downtown, 39 North is an ideal liaison to local businesses. They could become a collaborative partner in landscaping projects and installation of murals on private property.
- e. Work with Nugget to “open up” its backdoor facing Victorian Square to allow easy movement between the Square and Nugget.



Brian Hartley and stillmotion, *Scotch Hoppers* (2014), Glasgow, United Kingdom. Parnie Street was filled with reimagined versions of traditional street games. Image courtesy of [www.stillmotion.co.uk](http://www.stillmotion.co.uk).



Hector Esrawe and Ignacio Cadina, *La Musidora*, (2019), interactive outdoor art installation, Martin Plaza, Denver Art Museum. Image courtesy of Denver Art Museum.

**4. Reinforce Victorian Square as the center of Sparks’ art and culture district with branding and signage.** The City of Sparks Planning Department will soon unveil a new master plan for the city. It already has created vehicles for marketing and branding in Victorian Square including kiosks, gateway elements and gazebos. All will be re-employed as additional brand enhancement for the square’s new art plan. New branding elements should:

- a. Create branding materials including a logo.
- b. Produce a digital cultural amenities map, APP and website to show the location of the Heritage Museum, Sierra Arts Depot Gallery, the amphitheaters and gazebo, artworks already located in Victorian Square. It is

recommended the city collaborate with the Chamber of Commerce to produce the map.

- c. Integrate Victorian Square as an arts and cultural center in all city signage (especially from the freeway). Branding could also be designed for the gateway arch monuments at the entrances to Victorian Square.

The Visitor's Bureau's mission to bring visitors to downtown Sparks makes it a natural partner in developing Victorian Square as a destination for residents and visitors. It is recommended that the bureau immediately become a funding partner for a "branding" campaign designating the square as the center of Sparks.

5. **Create opportunities for community education as every art project or program is developed.** Partnerships should be developed with all K-12 schools, the University of Nevada, local and regional art centers, the Heritage Museum, and businesses.
  - Schools should be encouraged to use the amphitheater and gazebo spaces for performances.
  - As artists are commissioned for temporary or permanent installations, opportunities should be developed for artists to present formal public lectures and provide workshops and demonstrations as is appropriate.
  - Imagine and plan for new types of education programs. For example, forums at specific festivals might be conducive for artists to do demonstrations.



Yue Minjun, *A-maze-ing Laughter*, 2009-2011 Vancouver Biennale exhibition. Image by Roaming-the-Planet.

6. **Decommission the artwork commonly referred to as the “Four Seasons,” a thirty-year old prefabricated sculpture located outside the Nugget on Victorian Avenue.**

## FIVE: Art Selection Process Recommendations



Michel de Broin, Entrelacement, (2002), a segment of a bike path in Canal Lachine, Montreal. Image courtesy of [www.micheldebroyin.org](http://www.micheldebroyin.org)

It is highly recommended the ACAC and City Council prioritize creating an ongoing funding source for public art by dedicating a percent of public capital improvement projects AND private development projects to public art city-wide. It is further recommended the city develop policies and guidelines to govern and facilitate the program. The specifics of these requirements and the policies and procedures should be created based on the opportunities and challenges facing Sparks, but usually include the following:

1. **Purpose and intent of the program.** For example, the City of San Jose and the redevelopment agency of the city of San Jose, “desire to expand the public’s experience with works of art and to improve the design of public places by encouraging the involvement of artists on design teams for certain capital projects.”
2. **Definitions** which may include the definition of artwork, artist, artist fees, art project budget, public place, eligible capital improvement project, municipal construction project, public art fund, proposal honorarium, proposal, and so on depending on the specifics of the policy.
3. **Roles, powers and duties of the Commission, Council, and other relevant city agencies.** For example, in Sparks, the ACAC’s responsibilities might include reviewing and approving all capital construction projects for compliance with the percent for art code; recommending where artworks will be placed; how artists are selected; determining budgets for artworks and projects; and developing and recommending policy to City Council.

4. **Funding allocation (public)** including the funding mechanism, what the funding can or cannot be used for, how funds will be budgeted and expended, the allocation of funding to administration.
5. **Funding allocation (private).** Funding through a private sector project, in addition to specific funding requirements, might include the time of the collections, exceptions, and alternatives to paying for art. The City of Tampa, Florida’s policy *recommends* private developers contribute to public art, “Any private developer/owner who applies to the city for building permits to construct or reconstruct a commercial structure shall be encouraged to commit one (1) percent of construction or reconstruction costs up to but not limited to the sum of \$200,000 to the provision of fine art in conjunction with such commercial structure.” Furthermore, if the private developer/owner does not wish to have fine art in conjunction, he may donate to the city an amount equal to the percentage of the construction cost of the commercial structure as a charitable donation.
6. **Program guidelines** may include things like what is allowable in an art project budget, the elements of a public art project plan, criteria for selection for artists and artworks, site criteria, and the artist selection process depending on budget thresholds. It could include artist selection panel qualifications, composition, and roles and duties. It may also include artist’s fee policy.
7. **Collection management including deaccession, removal, alteration, and artwork destruction procedures.** As a collection grows it is essential that guidelines are established to facilitate the care and maintenance of the collection. This section of the policy might include a policy to sell or exchange works of art, reproduce artworks, remove artworks from display, and for the destruction of a work of art.
8. **Acquisition of Artworks through gifts and loans.** This section should include the process and criteria for accepting a gift or loan. Criteria may include the quality of the artwork, ability of the agency to maintain the artwork and/or the requiring that all costs associated with the gift or loan are borne by the donor.

*Until the above is established, it is recommended that artists and artworks for Victorian Square be selected in the following way.*



Tamara Johnson, *A Public Pool*, (2013), concrete, Socrates Sculpture Park. Image courtesy of Tamera Johnson.

The Department of Parks and Recreation, should administer the artworks selection process with policy and approval recommendations established by the Arts and Culture Advisory Committee.

An art plan should be developed by staff and approved by the ACAC for each new project. At minimum the art plan should include:

- **A project description** including a written description of the project and visual illustrations describing the physical site.
- **How the artists will be recruited and selected:** For example, through a limited selection process, open competition, direct selection, or curatorial process.
- **Budget**, including administration allocation, artist design honorariums, artwork design fabrication, and installation budgets, and panelist honorariums if required.
- **Criteria for artwork:** For example, ability of the city to maintain the artwork, the artworks relationship to the site in scale, form and context to surroundings, and the merit of the work of art artistically.
- **Selection criteria for artist:** For example, the quality of their past work, professional experienced, and the artist's ability to execute the project within the project timeline.
- **The artwork review and approval process:** A description of how and by whom the project will be reviewed
- **Timeline** that includes the selection process and the time given to the artist to deliver the project.

A selection panel should be established with every new public art project. The role of this panel should be to select and recommend an artist or artist team and artwork designs to the ACAC.

The panel should be carefully selected and include a diverse group of individuals with the unique perspectives needed to inform the selection process. The selection panel should be comprised of a minimum of five-to-seven voting members:

- **Community representative:** At least one or two individuals from the Victorian or downtown community;
- **Arts professional:** At least two or three arts professionals or someone with expertise in an arts related field (for example artist, contemporary art historian, curator, and/or a public art curator/administrator).
- **Art and Culture Advisory Committee representative**
- **Together We See Sparks Committee representative**



Additional non-voting members can be included to offer advice concerning the site, community, or technical expertise.

Consistent with city policy, contracts with budgets under \$50,000 should be executed by the city manager or the purchasing department. Contracts with budgets over \$50,000 should be approved by city council.

## SIX: Conclusion



Terry Allen, *The Scioto Lounge*, (2014), Columbus, Ohio.  
Image courtesy of City of Columbus, Columbus Arts Commission.

Achieving the intertwined goals of economic development and a vibrant community town center for Victorian Square must transcend erection of new buildings and improved streetscapes. Careful adherence to partnership development and the funding and staffing timeline based in reality is essential.

Work by the TWSS Committee and city staff has resulted in the essential, strong commitment and enthusiasm from Sparks citizens and community organizations. The city's economic partnership with Silverwing Development and the Nugget has been crucial in framing the physical framework. Now the next committed steps must begin.

The first and arguably most important act is to provide staff leadership for what must follow. One person will develop much: establishing new policy and procedures, advancing and nurturing existing and new partnerships, creating collaborative relationships, and grant/funding responsibilities.

Strong underpinnings for Victorian Square's creative placemaking plan have been accomplished. But the city must leverage this momentum through steady next steps to achieve fruition of the community's dreams and desire for a unique and economically thriving Victorian Square.

## APPENDIX

### TWSS Artists:

- Jennifer Charbonneau
- Paul Fenkell.

### Interviews:

- Jennifer Charboneau, participating artist
- Paul Fenkell, participating artist
- Doug Hunter, General Manager of Silverwing Development Company
- Wendi and Mike Rawson, Engine 8 Winery
- Steve Driscoll, Sparks City Manager 2016-2019
- John Martini, Assistant City Manager
- Neil Krutz, Sparks Assistant City Manager 2016-2019, current City Manager
- Mark Sterbens, General Manager, Nugget Casino Resort
- Charlene Bybee, City Council Member, Member of TWSS
- Donald Abbott, City Council Member, Sparks Heritage Museum Board Member
- Richard Simmonds, President of the Sparks Heritage Museum Board of Directors and Retired Professor, University of Nevada
- Barbara Young, Volunteer, Sparks History Museum
- Tracey Oliver, Executive Director, Sierra Arts Foundation
- Jim Rundle, City of Sparks Planning Department
- Shoshana Zeldner, Nevada Arts Council/University of Nevada
- Francine Burge, City of Sparks Special Events Supervisor
- Taylor Russo, Director of Member Engagement, Reno-Sparks Chamber of Commerce

### Creative Placemaking Training Workshop Participants:

- Together We See Sparks Committee Members
- Brandon Baxter, Community Services Department
- Chris Cobb, Community Services Department
- Nick Corona, Fire Department
- Julie Dewel, Community Relations Department
- Tracy Domingues, Parks and Recreation Department
- Pete Krall, Police Department
- Tom Krompetz, Fire Department
- Neil Krutz, City Manager
- Alyson McCormick, Legal Department

### Springboard for the Arts Artists' Workshop Participants:

- Nathaniel Benjamin
- Zoe Bray
- Jessica Brown
- Albert Brown
- Carolyn Brown
- Salena Carr-Piccioni
- Vincent Casio
- Bryce Chishom
- James Cowan
- Tina Drakulich
- Tia Flores
- Paul Frankel
- Robert Garrett
- Ken Heitzenrader

- John Houseman
- Joseph Hunt
- Janis Knight
- Debbie Lambin
- Rachael Lambin
- Elizabeth Lepe
- Sarah Metzler
- Craig Newman
- Claire Nightingale
- Robin O Neal
- Tracey Oliver
- Amanda Palmer
- Michelle Patrick
- Donna Rennea Smit
- Luann Ritch
- Kelly Smith Cassidy

**Other Participants:**

- **Mark S.W. Salinas**, Director, Department of Arts & Culture, Municipality of Carson City, Board Member, Nevada Arts Council

**Sources: documents, articles, policies:**

- Victorian Square Arts Overlay Plan 2020: Victorian Avenue from Pyramid Highway to 15<sup>th</sup>, C Street to Victorian.
- Artist RFP
- Artists final reports (Jennifer’s newsletter and whatever Paul’s narrative documentation is).
- Ignite, City of Sparks Comprehensive Master Plan 2016
- Victorian Square Master Plan (if completed)
- “Images of America: Sparks,” By Joyce M. Cox
- “History of Sparks: Centennial Edition” by Sparks Centennial History Book Committee, published, 2004
- Victorian Square Master Plan, Sparks Tourism Facility and Revitalization Steering Committee approved June 10, 2016
- Add an “American’s for the Arts Economic Data Report” link
- “Creative Placemaking” by Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa, A White Paper for The Mayors’ Institute on City Design, a leadership initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the United States Conference of Mayors and American Architectural Foundation, 2010.
- <http://www.churchillarts.org/>
- <https://www.carson.org/government/departments-a-f/city-manager-s-office/arts-culture#ad-image-0>
- <https://www.mesquitefineartscenter.com/>
- <https://www.tuscarorapottery.com/>
- <http://stmarysartcenter.org/>
- Reno Municipal Code on Public Art:  
[https://library.municode.com/nv/reno/codes/administrative\\_code?nodeId=PT2READCO\\_TIT22PUAR](https://library.municode.com/nv/reno/codes/administrative_code?nodeId=PT2READCO_TIT22PUAR)
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/03/travel/burning-man-art-installations.html>
- <http://www.ci.bothell.wa.us/1573/Pop-up-Dog-Park>
- <https://www.cityofvancouver.us/parksrec/page/pop-dog-parks-coming-vancouver-summer>
- <https://www.good.is/articles/bench-bombing-one-simple-way-to-transform-public-space>

**TWSS News Stories:**

- <https://www.newsreview.com/reno/making-sparks-fly/content?oid=28401934>

- <https://www.doublescoop.art/podcast-public-art-not-just-sculptures-in-city-centers/>

### Summary of surveys

The Department of Parks and Recreation create a 15 Question Survey. The survey was distributed online from 6/15-10/31, 2019 through the City of Sparks website. It was also distributed at the following events; Third Thursday in June and July of 2019; Honey and Lavender Festival, summer 2019; Lantern Festival, summer 2019, and the Rib Cook Off, summer 2019. The survey was promoted in the “This is Reno Blog”. It was included in a full-page advertisement in the Wingfield Springs Newsletter, included in assorted social media ads and posts in English and Spanish. Two hundred and seventy people responded, 89% of the respondents were from Sparks, 9% Reno, 2% out of State, 1% Other.

### Biographies

After more than 25 years working for government, non-profit, and university systems, in January 2017 **Shelly Willis** began working in the private sector as a public art consultant. Her current clients include the County of Sonoma, County of Sacramento, Stonebridge Properties, McKinley Village, LLC, and the City of San Leandro, the Rail Arts District Napa, Sacramento Municiple Utility District, and multiple artists, among others.

**J.Charboneau** is a contemporary painter and muralist residing in Reno, Nevada. She has been working as an artist for 10+ years in cities all over the globe. Inspired by travel and exploration of new places and social environments. J.Charboneau’s work typically reflects subtle observations of people, landscapes, and social dialog. She weave’s poetry, philosophy, and gestural abstractions together as an open-ended conversation to be had with the viewer. Some muses that influence Charboneau’s artwork are impressionism, Expressionism, street art, nature, philosophy, jazz, haiku & prose poetry, and social anthropology.

Sparks-based artist, **Paul Fenkell**, designs and builds art in public places. Paul comes from an art and architecture background and has spent the last 20 years drafting and designing public buildings and spaces. He believes that the most successful projects are the ones that respond to the context in which they stand. Paul has created art works for Camp El Tesoro at Burning Man, the City of Reno, the City of Las Vegas, the University of Nevada Las Vegas, and the City of Sparks.