



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Options for Permitting Street or Intersection Murals on Local Streets

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| Date: | October 22, 2015 |
| To: | Public Works and Infrastructure Committee |
| From: | General Manager, Transportation Services |
| Wards: | Ward 36 |
| Reference Number: | p:\2015\ClusterB\tra\pr\pw15007pr |

SUMMARY

In July 2015, City staff were directed to examine the implications of a potential new Street Mural program, whereby local residents are granted permission to paint murals on the asphalt road surface of city streets. City Staff have investigated these projects in other cities, reviewed potential requirements in the City of Toronto, and do not recommend pursuing a new Street Mural program at this time.

While street murals do offer a community-building impact, they place considerable administrative, regulatory, and maintenance burdens on the City. Based on case study research, street murals provide no tangible traffic safety benefits.

City staff instead propose that during community road closures with appropriate approvals, communities are free to create temporary street murals with chalk or other materials that are naturally removed by the elements. This approach would provide community building impacts at no cost to the City and essentially no added risk to motorists or the artists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Transportation Services recommends that:

1. The Public Works and Infrastructure Committee receive this report for information.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts associated with this recommendation in this report.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact statement.

DECISION HISTORY

City Council on July 7, 8 and 9, 2015, adopted the following:

1. City Council direct the General Manager, Transportation Services to report back to Public Works and Infrastructure Committee in the fourth quarter of 2015 on a process to permit community groups to install "street or intersection murals" on local streets, including the benefits to communities, any traffic impacts, and staffing and other cost implications for such a program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2015.MM8.14>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

Street murals are citizen-led projects, found in some cities in North America, where local roads are painted with community art. Started in Portland, Oregon more than 20 years ago, these projects have been created in Minneapolis, Vancouver, Halifax, Kitchener, and Ottawa, among others.

Street murals are large murals painted directly onto the asphalt road surface by community groups and organizations. They serve as community engagement activities to bring neighbours together with the stated goal of street beautification. They are considered a simple grassroots form of place-making resulting in a temporary aesthetic transformation of a street or intersection. Street murals are often painted during street parties and festival closures to encourage participation. In cities like Portland with long-standing programs, murals are repainted every year as part of annual street parties.

The City of Toronto does not currently permit any paintings on the public right-of-way by public or private parties. In June 2015 in conjunction with an annual street party in which the street was closed, the Regal Heights Neighbourhood Association painted a street mural, similar to those found in other cities, along Springmount Avenue, south of Rosemount. This mural was painted on a public right-of-way without permission. Refer to Attachment 1 for images of this street mural.

COMMENTS

Traffic Implications

Street murals are almost exclusively installed on local roads with low traffic volumes. As of yet, there is no evidence from other cities that street murals improve or reduce traffic safety. While many neighbourhoods, community groups, and citizens report an increased sense of safety and a perceived reduction in vehicular speeds, there is also some concern that murals painted on the roadway may distract or confuse drivers. At this time there is no evidence to suggest there is a real measurable impact, positive or negative.

Of the cities researched and contacted, only Ottawa reported any reduction in speed (4km/hour reduction of speed). This, however, was measured one week after installation, making it difficult to determine if the reduction was a result of the novelty of the mural or if the change would be longer lasting. Newer installations will be studied over time by governing municipalities, but long-term observations have yet to be recorded.

Therefore, the perception of increased safety that some residents claim cannot be substantiated by evidence, and the promotion of street murals as a mechanism to enhance road safety and slow down traffic may not be accurate.

Staffing, Costs, and Administration

Any program to allow community groups to install street murals would need to be regulated and monitored by the City due to the risk the artwork could distract or confuse drivers, and that the paint materials used could reduce vehicle traction on the road surface. A street mural pilot would require considerable resources for the City of Toronto to develop and administer as a completely new program of work, including a multi-step application process. The City would need to assess the proposed location and determine if the mural would be a potential hazard to traffic safety. This would include a site visit and a requirement to collect vehicle counts. All applications would need to be reviewed and revised by City staff to ensure the artwork does not distract or confuse road users, is appropriate for a neighbourhood and of high artistic integrity, and that the roadway is closed while the artists are on the street installing the mural. To ensure local neighbourhood support, the applicant would need to conduct some form of community consultations and collect signatures from residents within a given (to be determined) distance from the proposed location.

Transportation Services staff would also need to monitor the vehicle speeds before installation and up to 12 months after installation to ensure there are no negative impacts on traffic safety.

The City already administers community art projects, such as the StreetARToronto Program which addresses chronic graffiti issues on public-facing buildings and beautifies neighbourhoods with artwork. Unlike the proposed local street murals which would be located on low volume roads, StreetARToronto projects are located to the extent possible

in highly visible areas where a proposed lifespan of 15 years is considered appropriate. It is questionable whether localized street murals provide the same overall civic value to the City.

Maintenance

Street mural paint often fades after one or two years which leaves the street with an unattractive eyesore. Utility repairs in the street often require sections of asphalt to be dug up which could result in patches of the mural being removed. Ensuring maintenance so that street murals would continue to be a positive influence would require a commitment by the community that may not be sustainable.

Therefore, the burden would then be placed on the City for any improvement or removal should it fade or fall into disrepair that would distract staff from well-established and existing programs.

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Street Mural Images

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