

VAC Explanatory Document: Dec. 20, 2017

Civic Center Plaza Temporary Art Work by Zak Ove

The Arts Commission has received an allocation of funds from the Mayor's Office of Economic and Workplace Development to bring temporary public art to Civic Center Plaza. Many of our colleagues in City departments recognize the value and benefit of temporary public art in terms of animating and beautifying the plaza.

After conducting a good deal of research, I am recommending an installation entitled *Invisible Men* by British/Trinidadian artist Zak Ove. The installation consists of 40 identical black figurative sculptures that are reminiscent of traditional African Nubian figures. Each sculpture, fabricated from resin and graphite, is approximately 6.5 feet high and weighs about 300 lbs. For structural stability, the pedestal upon which each sculpture sits is filled with concrete. The sculptures are each to be mounted on a 3' square base with a height of less than ½ inch to prevent the sculptures from being tipped over. Holmes Structures Structural Engineers has confirmed that the sculptures are structurally stable in terms of wind resistance and seismic forces. City Risk Manager, Matt Hansen, has been apprised of the weighting of the sculpture and the design of the base plate and has signed off on the installation. It has also been reviewed and approved by the Mayor's Office of Disability. The artist and his gallery have agreed to augment the \$90,000 funding to be provided by the Arts Commission so that all project costs will be covered. This will be a condition of the loan agreement to be executed between the artist and the Arts Commission. The dates of the installation are from late July 2018 through mid-October, 2018.

The exhibition of this project at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park has been extended for another year due to its immense popular success. The sculptures have also been displayed at Somerset House in London which is a similar civic setting as our Civic Center and were designed to directly reference a play performed there in 1605 entitled *The Masque of Blackness* which featured white actors in blackface which was reflective of the societal shift towards a preference for lighter skin in the early 17th century. The artist also alludes to Ralph Ellison's acclaimed novel *The Invisible Man*, a pioneering consideration of racism and marginalized communities in America told through the eyes of its black protagonist. The "hands up" stature of the figures could be construed as channeling the tensions of the political 'don't shoot' symbolism employed in the Black Lives Matter movement.

At a time when slavery era monuments across the country are being removed, this is an opportunity for our city to place the solemn, strong and peaceful sculptures of black men in our Civic Center. It is an assertion rather than a deletion.

Motion to approve the temporary installation of 40 sculptures by Zak Ove entitled *Invisible Men* in Civic Center Plaza commencing late July 2018 through mid-October, 2018 and to authorize the director of Cultural Affairs to execute a loan agreement with the artist for a budget not to exceed \$90,000 with all additional costs to be borne by the artist and the Tobey Clarke gallery, contingent upon approval from the Recreation and Park Commission.

