

Council supports community engaged art project

By Nate Smelle

North Hastings Community Integration Association asked council to support its proposed community engaged art project Oct. 10. If the funding application for the project to the Ontario Arts Council (OAC) is successful, said NHCIA independent living, planning and design room facilitator Marlena Zuber, it will work with the local arts community to permanently install a public art piece in Bancroft or the surrounding area.

As an artist, Zuber has been involved in several community engaged art projects in Toronto. Through this work she has realized how powerful a tool the arts can be for building and sustaining successful neighbourhoods. During her presentation, Zuber explained that community-engaged art-making is a unique and effective approach to community building. She said she has seen first-hand how the process of producing exciting and unique art can help to foster relationships between artists and residents, while nurturing mentoring opportunities.

“The result is a dynamic explosion of creativity that changes how art is made, how communities are built, and how we live together,” said Zuber.

“It’s a really great opportunity for aesthetic civic engagement. There are a lot of amazing artists in this community and the surrounding communities, and this is an awesome opportunity to tap into their talent and share their skills.”

Zuber said there are several examples of creative initiatives such as this underway in communities throughout Ontario. She said they are often located in public spaces such as parks, libraries, community centres, storefronts and street locations. She believes that one of the most interesting elements of a community engaged art installation is that everyone tells a different story – that story being an expression of the community that creates it.

“This is an opportunity for innovation, dialogue and creative exchange for individuals of all ages and abilities, all contributions will be valued,” said Zuber.

“Bancroft is lacking in a large-scale community engaged art piece. This is also an opportunity to transform Bancroft’s public space with some form of exciting and meaningful public art. This will be a dynamic, lasting and impactful community building project.” The project will take place in three phases, with the NHCIA acting as the lead partner. Phase One is composed mainly of conducting arts based research. During this stage, Zuber said they plan to engage with the community in a number of ways to begin building partnerships. Between the spring and fall of 2018, six gatherings will take place where artists and community members will work together to plan and design the nature of the project. Phase Two will occur from March 2019 to September 2019, and Zuber said this is when the co-creation and production of the community art project will be completed. Phase Three will include a community celebration in October 2019 where the project is unveiled to the public.

Acting mayor Paul Jenkins shared his enthusiasm for the project, while reflecting on an encounter he had with an artist from the Madoc area at a recent opening of an exhibit at the Art Gallery of Bancroft.

“She made a comment about how fortunate we are to have the arts community we have here. She said where she came from that doesn’t exist. I think we take it for granted here. We’ve talked a lot about public art over the years with the BIA and we’ve just never really got around to being able to do it.”

Council supported the idea of a community engaged art installation, offering to provide a representative to work with the project partners during Phase One of the project. They also agreed to supply a letter of support to the NHCIA to assist with their funding application to the OAC.