

Mayor and Council Communication

DATE: 11/11/25

M&C FILE NUMBER: M&C 25-1021

LOG NAME: 84084 WRMC PLAQUES FWPA LEGACY COLLECTION

SUBJECT

(ALL) Authorize Accession of Fourteen Bronze Interpretive Plaques Located in the Plaza of Will Rogers Memorial Center into the Fort Worth Public Art Community Legacy Collection

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that City Council accession fourteen bronze interpretive plaques located in the plaza of Will Rogers Memorial Center into the Fort Worth Public Art Community Legacy Collection.

DISCUSSION:

On October 19, 2021, Fort Worth City Council approved a plan and funding for permanent interpretative plaques for two (2) 200-foot-long tile murals (M&C 21-0820) which are integrated into the Auditorium and Coliseum buildings at Will Rogers Memorial Center (WRMC). The 1936 buildings were constructed to celebrate the Texas Centennial, and they are listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Each mural includes twelve (12) vignettes, each illustrating the historic and cultural relationships that played important roles in the development of the State and are part of the Fort Worth Public Art (FWPA) Community Legacy Collection.

Interpretation was recommended following public hearings hosted by the Fort Worth Art Commission (FWAC) at the request of the Mayor's Office to respond to community concerns about a scene depicting African American field workers. Without context, the scene was misinterpreted as portraying slaves and publicly denounced. Community leaders recommended developing an approach that would provide historical context for visitors and as a teaching tool that would inspire future generations.

On May 19, 2025, the FWAC recommended accessioning the plaques into the FWPA Community Legacy Collection to be eligible for Collection Management oversight and maintenance funds.

This M&C authorizes the City to formally accession the plaques into the Community Legacy Collection.

FORT WORTH ART COMMISSION ACTION

In September 2019, the Mayor's office asked the Art Commission to gather community input and make recommendations in response to a citizen's concern about the portrayal of African Americans in the Auditorium mural. Historic Preservation Officer Murray Miller presented historical information about the Will Rogers Memorial Center on October 7, 2019, focusing on the Auditorium and Coliseum Buildings and the murals, and the FWAC called for a public hearing for citizen comment on November 11, 2019.

In a FWAC Special Called Art Commission meeting on November 21, 2019, community consensus refuted the call to remove the mural or the scene and instead encouraged the City to include permanent interpretation providing context and educational opportunities. A third public meeting on December 9, 2019 garnered further support and on January 22, 2020, the FWAC convened an Advisory Panel consisting of representatives from the community, the NAACP, City staff, and the FWAC to determine an approach and ultimately a design for permanent interpretation.

The FWAC endorsed the Advisory Panel's recommended approach on July 19, 2021, including Mr. Miller's proposal to inset large plaques with silhouettes of individual scenes and text into the plaza. Elements of Architecture designed the plaques and recommended scale, materials, and layout of the plaques while Arts Fort Worth conducted research and drafted preliminary text in partnership with local cultural experts and historians to accompany the vignettes on each plaque. Text was reviewed by historians from Texas Christian University and Tarleton State University for historic accuracy and perspective and a professional editor provided pro bono work for the final draft.

City Council approved the implementation plan, including funding from the Public Events Department and the American Rescue Plan Act (MC 21-0820) on October 19, 2021. Additional funds from FWPA Collection Management and the Fiscal Years 2022-2026 Public Events Capital Improvement Plan provided for design and project support.

The FWAC endorsed the final design and interpretation on May 15, 2023, and held a public hearing on June 12, 2023. Public Events Department staff presented the final design and interpretation in Informal Report 23-0734 to City Council on August 15, 2023. The plaques were fully installed in December 2024, and the City accepted the plaques in January 2025. All ARPA funds have been expended for this project.

Accessioning the plaques into the FWPA Community Legacy Collection provides for professional oversight and funding through the FWPA Collection Management Fund.

The Art Commission advises and makes recommendations to City Council regarding the Fort Worth Public Art program and oversees the implementation of the *Fort Worth Public Art Master Plan Update*, including project planning, artist selection, design review, and collection management.

No funds are required to accession the plaques into the FWPA Community Legacy Collection.

The Will Rogers Memorial Center is located in Council District 7 but serves ALL DISTRICTS.

A Form 1295 is not required because: This M&C does not request approval of a contract with a business entity.

FISCAL INFORMATION / CERTIFICATION:

The Director of Finance certifies that approval of this recommendation has no material effect on City funds.

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