



From THE DESK *of*

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Turning Property Developers into **ART CONNOISSEURS**

Did you know that there is a group of wild bronze horses running through a creek bed on Moore Road? Or an *amne* (a symbolic Tibetan structure made to protect people from harm) made from old car parts outside of Advance Auto Parts? What about a bear hunting salmon at Aldi?

If you didn't, I can almost guarantee that you'll notice now! And if you did, I bet you've wondered where the public art sprinkled throughout the city - in residential communities and on commercial sites - came from?

The City of Suwanee developed and implemented its public arts initiative in 2007. Part of that initiative included an ordinance designed to encourage and facilitate the creation and placement of art both in public spaces and within private developments. This program, Developer Percent for Art, encourages developers to voluntarily spend a suggested one percent of total construction costs to enhance their projects by creating and placing art within their own site. As an alternative, a donation may be made to fund future art projects or arts-related events within the city.

When a developer chooses to participate by including public art within his project, it's suggested that the art be installed outside of buildings and be visible or accessible from an adjacent public right-of-way, or in areas where the public will have access.

These developers don't have to become public art experts. As part of the formal planning and approval process for any private development project within the City of Suwanee, developers are required to meet with the Public Arts Commission (PAC). This city council-appointed commission of residents and business owners helps guide the developers through the options and can assist, if requested, with identifying appropriate sites, types of works, and artists.

The city defines public art broadly in order to encourage as much variety and participation as possible. Artwork may be functional, stand-alone, or integrated into the architecture of the buildings. For example, bike racks are *not* defined as public art; however, an original, artfully-designed bike rack *could* be. The same *could* be true of a plaza area - a unique paving pattern could turn it into public art. Most public art will fit into one of the following categories: architectural elements, murals, or sculpture.

The City of Suwanee has enjoyed an approximately 75 percent participation rate of developers who have chosen to either include public art on site or contribute to the public art fund - for a voluntary program, we call that a success! What we've learned is that if you communicate early enough in the process, most developers are willing to participate. We try to educate and remove barriers.

City projects are also included in the Developer Percent for Art initiative. The most recent example of city participation is the colorful three-story mural on the new addition of the municipal court building located on Buford Highway.

The Developer Percent for Art program underscores Suwanee's belief that inclusion of art in development projects serves the common good in a manner comparable to architectural standards, landscaping requirements, or zoning restrictions. Want to know something else that's really impressive? The city's overall public art program is funded by donations and sponsorships! (Hint, hint - please call me if you're interested in becoming an arts patron!)

Toni Hardy has spent the last 14 years working with the City of Suwanee. She serves as a special projects coordinator in the Economic & Community Development department. Of the many projects she works on, the city's public art initiatives are among her favorite.