THE NEED FOR VIBRANT SPACES

The public spaces, buildings, infrastructure, and institutions of the Commonwealth provide the backbone of its communities. These built environments physically shape how residents come together and interact with one another and their government. Boston’s City Hall Plaza has long stood as an example of design that can alienate people from one another and make municipal government seem foreboding. DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Lincoln; the 46-foot tall kinetic sculpture at Porter Square station in Cambridge; and Boston’s Frog Pond on the Common stand as examples of the ways functionality, accessibility, authenticity, and even whimsy can be incorporated into design so that our use of the outdoors, public transportation, and public space is enhanced.

INVESTING IN PUBLIC ART

Modeled on the nation’s oldest state public art program in Hawaii, the Massachusetts Public Art Program, or MPAP, would invest approximately $2 million a year in the creation and preservation of public art on Commonwealth-owned properties. In doing so, Massachusetts would join every other New England state, along with 23 others, that invest in public art programs. MPAP would direct one percent of new capital expenditures on public art projects. As shown by the joy evoked and discussion prompted by Brookline artist Janet Echelman’s aerial sculpture “As If It Were Already Here” mounted over the Boston Greenway in 2015, these projects hold the potential to invigorate and excite the communities in which they are located. And public art projects such as the mural on the Route 9 railroad bridge entering Northampton; the Chinatown Gate at the corner of Beach Street and Surface Road in Boston; and the massive, 60-square-foot mural outside Hanover Theatre in Worcester promote engagement with and use of the Commonwealth’s civic infrastructure.

MASSCreative supports the establishment of a Massachusetts Public Art Program (S.1608 and H.1171).

BUILDING ON A TRADITION OF SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC ART

Massachusetts has had similar public art programs, one which paid for public art on the MBTA Red and Orange Line Extension in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2014, Governor Deval Patrick issued Executive Order 553 creating a public art program, which became the basis for legislation that was passed as part of the 2016 budget. The legislation was vetoed, citing technical issues. The Massachusetts Public Art Program bill represents a renewed attempt to secure public art funding into Massachusetts statute.

MPAP proposes that one percent of the new capital budget for state buildings in any fiscal year be placed into a fund that would be available for the creation, purchase, and maintenance of public art on Commonwealth property. It is estimated that this program would generate $2 million annually.

MPAP also creates a Public Art Commission responsible for establishing which projects will be funded. The Commission would ensure that input is considered from community stakeholders, arts professionals, and government and capital funding expertise.

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Founded in 2012, MASSCreative works to build a more vibrant, healthy, and equitable Massachusetts. MASSCreative works with artists, leaders, supporters, and partners of the arts, cultural, and creative community to advocate for the resources and support necessary for the sector to thrive.